

About the project

The Middleport Environment Centre project took part in Silverdale, an ex-mining village on the edge of the Stoke/Newcastle conurbation. The project sought to address rising levels of fuel poverty and reduce levels of GHG emissions from within the residential sector.

The aim of the project was to train and support residents to deliver energy efficiency (affordable warmth) advice to their peers in their own communities and to seek to establish a legacy of self-supporting energy groups in two culturally different communities:

Shrewsbury: a market town with a relatively middle class 'green' culture;

Silverdale: an ex-mining 'village' on the edge of the Stoke/Newcastle conurbation.

In Shrewsbury and Silverdale volunteer development and training sessions took place with a focus on increasing knowledge of energy efficiency and confidence in community engagement, this included participant led development of programme community based activities.

The training sessions included:

- Top tips for a warm home
- Fuel poverty and health: how to spot signs and offer help
- How to look online for information on fuel switching
- Fuel bills, Warm Homes Discount and Priority Services Register
- Different heating systems and controls. How to compare energy companies
- Pre-payment meters and event skills
- Renewable Energy
- Review and next steps

Energy Efficiency activities included:

- Stalls at community fairs
- Clinics at GP practices
- Thermal Imaging of homes
- Community education/support sessions
- Home visits
- Engagement with local football club

Participants in Silverdale reported a score of 74% for the level of increased knowledge and confidence resulting

from the project, while participants in Shrewsbury reported a score of 57%. The latter result likely reflects the levels of pre-existing capability within the group all of whom were educated to degree level and above and also with professional experience in renewable technology, architecture and broader sustainability.

Successes

Participants were asked for their feedback on what was successful about the project. The feedback comments included the following: Helping people change suppliers; Showing people how to set timers/programmers; Talking to neighbours and friends and family about ways to reduce energy bills; Success of home visits and GP surgery visits (Baby clinic and Walferin Clinic) in engaging those potentially applicable for the Warm Homes Discount; Applying thermal imaging technology on individual's homes to teach individuals where heat was being lost and retained.

The project engaged 577 members of the public - 77 more than projected.

It also exceeded expectations on the number of events delivered- 18 in total. The majority of additional events occurred in Silverdale with a key driver for this being an ongoing focus on promotion of the project and the desire to recruit a more stable core group of volunteers.

Challenges

It is evident that participants need a reason to engage and stay engaged in a project such as this whether to garner inputs to their existing voluntary commitments, to gain in confidence and skills, or to improve their conversational English. For this reason one of our biggest challenges was the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Involvement

This project was predicated on an assumption that sufficient volunteers would be recruited by March 2014. Although the project did in fact have 30 volunteer participants over the course of the year many more would have needed to be recruited to gain the critical mass necessary to develop sufficient committed core volunteers. An assumption of ongoing volunteer commitment was implicit in the rigid structuring of the

project with a four session preparation phase followed by an activity phase.

In Silverdale the Patients Participation Group, associated with the local GP practice, were an early interested party. They treated the project more as an opportunity to develop an 'affordable warmth' forum sending different representatives to each training meeting and not wishing to engage with the project as we had envisaged. The parish Council and local residents associations also sent representatives to gather information for their stakeholders but did not 'join' the group. With time a very small group emerged who were individuals who had benefitted personally from the work of the project and appeared to operate out of gratitude and respect for the project staff. Elements of social contact and friendship kept them involved.

In Shrewsbury, though slow to start, the volunteer group developed more as had been imagined with individuals approaching the Middleport centre to find out more about the project. Interestingly of the 8 people who attended, the 5 who stayed the course were all previously known personally by the project staff member.

Learnings

An overall observation from the project is that vibrant and successful community based groups demand considerable time, energy and knowledge to run, without which they will become unstable and dwindle away.

Funding

Information requested.

Legacy

In Shrewsbury the establishment of a new energy demand reduction group was not needed, but rather the bolstering and development of an existing one.

In Silverdale the project has identified the demand for winter briefings for existing groups and organisations.

Contact

Name:

Email:

Telephone:

Website