

Project type: **Community energy efficiency project in partnership with a housing association**

Name of example: **Thornhill Community Energy Project**

The organisation

In April 2001, the Government awarded £48.7 million through the New Deal for Communities programme to regenerate the Thornhill area of Southampton. The 10-year programme was managed by a partnership of the local community, city council, business, police and health service known as Thornhill Plus You (TPY). At the end of this period, TPY became Plus You Limited, a registered charity with a mission to continue the regeneration of Thornhill.

The project

Thornhill Community Energy Project was conceived by a group of residents as a response to local experiences of fuel poverty and wider concerns about climate change. The 12 month project was funded by TPY and managed by Radian (www.radian.co.uk), a local housing association, under the umbrella of the New Deal programme. Its aims were to:

- reduce the community's carbon footprint and energy bills; and
- provide support and education for those at risk of fuel poverty

Radian was selected as a delivery partner for the project because of its experience in energy efficiency and community development on its own estate, and its willingness to share this for the benefit of the wider community. Other partners that provided training and support for the project included the Environment Centre (tEC), Energy Saving Trust, Southampton City Council, Scottish & Southern Energy, Southern Electric, Dimplex and Thornhill schools and other local community groups.

The funding provided by TPY funded a dedicated Energy Efficiency Advisor for the area, with the aim of engaging and educating the local community. Specific project activities included:

- Holding a formal launch and attending monthly networking meetings
- Producing and distributing project leaflets
- Getting articles published in local newspapers and newsletters
- Updating the community website
- Attending established community events and setting up new ones
- Attending parent and baby/toddler groups
- Setting up energy workshops and holding a competition at the local primary schools
- Lending energy monitors to residents
- Establishing the network of resident volunteer Community Energy Champions (CECs)

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The project also targeted specific households at risk of fuel poverty, improving access to energy-saving products and services to help reduce household running costs. This was achieved by:

- Giving energy efficiency advice
- Providing energy monitors and power down plug strips to residents
- Providing residents with the advice to access cheaper energy tariffs

The project was also able to identify properties where further savings and energy efficiency improvements could be made, for example by improving insulation levels and providing advice on energy-related behaviour and mould treatment and information on grants.

Achievements

The distribution of energy monitors provided the opportunity to measure changes in attitudes and behaviour among participating households. At the end of the 12 month project period:

- a total of 135 OWL Energy Monitors had been distributed to households to provide detailed analysis of their electricity use; and
- more than 80% of people who responded to a feedback survey said having an energy monitor in their home had permanently changed their behaviour towards energy use

Lessons learned

Much of the learning from the project arose from its limited 12 month lifespan, notably:

- A workable exit strategy should be developed early on, if the project's achievements were to be sustained and further developed after completion.
- In particular the work of the volunteer CECs, which formed an essential part of the project's legacy, required continued funding (e.g. to pay for training, phone and internet costs etc).
- Alternative monitoring strategies were required in cases where time constraints meant that baseline data on residents' energy consumption (to allow year-on-year comparisons) were not available.

In addition, the group found that working with partner agencies and companies it was able to lever in additional in-kind support for the project which helped deliver greater value for money.

Next steps

A year and a half after the original project's funding ended, the Environment Centre (tEC) (www.environmentcentre.com), a local charity, came forward with a new project funded by Thornhill Community Health Group to re-grow and support the volunteers for two years. The energy champion work is still ongoing and has proven to be a particularly strong aspect of the project's legacy. A small additional fund from the NEA Community Footprint Award helped promote the continuation of this work across the community through the re-branded: 'Thornhill Community Energy Champions'.

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Current activities include home visits, community events and public energy awareness training sessions. The current project is also developing a set of resources on energy efficiency and sustainability to be loaned out via the new Thornhill Community Library using funding provided by Southampton City Council for community energy champion work. These books, CDs, DVDs, leaflets, periodicals and the display stand purchased to house them will be branded with the Thornhill Community Energy Champions logo to provide both a community information point and a permanent reminder of the volunteers' ongoing work. The resources will include twenty energy monitors available for public loan.

Resources

People  

One full-time energy advisor and a network of local volunteers.

Technical skills  

Some technical knowledge needed to train community workers

Finances   

Secured from a collaboration of Thornhill Plus You community group and Radian Housing Association

Project partners    

A wide range of local and national partners to support training and outreach activities

Green Deal potential

Housing associations are developing their strategies for responding to the Green Deal and many will be looking to form local partnerships, e.g. with installers, to help achieve economies of scale and consistent quality standards. Some may be open to working with local community groups to support their engagement with tenants and/or promoting the Green Deal to the wider community.