

Case Study 3: Energy Resources for Tenants



This case study forms part of **Community Action for Energy**, a major programme designed to promote and facilitate local community-based energy projects. The programme is an initiative for the Environment, Education & Community group of the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes.

Energy Resources for Tenants

Introduction

This case study provides an overview of a national initiative to train tenants to deliver energy efficiency advice via residents. The programme is made up of free residential training events and a system of support thereafter which includes a telephone helpline, a website (www.thetenantline.org.uk) and follow-up visits.

When?

The scheme was launched in April 2000 and ends on 31 March 2003. The website scheme will end on 31 March 2004.

Who's involved?

Energy Resources for Tenants is managed by the Energy Conservation and Solar Centre (ecsc), who work with tenant and resident groups from across England.

How is it funded?

The Community Fund pays for Energy Resources for Tenants and the Chartered Institute of Housing (DTLR-financed) Innovation into Action fund pays for the website.

What are the targets and aims?

The target is to train 120 people a year who will then go on to set up their own local projects, which are supported by the project manager.

The course aims to:

- capture enthusiasm for cutting bills and saving energy by providing practical and simple energy training
- provide the opportunity for anyone to become skilled in offering basic energy saving advice to friends and neighbours, housebound pensioners, other tenants and residents, and many others in the community
- ensure that participants gain a strong understanding of strategic action on the environment and community involvement.

Delegates' comments on residential training:

"I learnt about tenants' needs and expectations, new partners and ways of working."

"I learnt that, while we should be concerned about our environment, a lot of people feel that whatever they do they will have little impact, and we need to change this attitude."

"I liked the opportunity I had to meet and discuss the subject with people with different experiences."

Using IT for the first time



Energy Resources for Tenants

How was it implemented?

The project draws from tenants groups across England and uses the active tenant networks to promote the courses. Most of the administration is done via email and once ecsc had built up a large database of tenant participation officers, it was simple to email them about the next available course. Bookings are also carried out via email. This cuts the cost of the project and also reduces environmental impact.

The training takes place at residential centres across the country although most courses are held at Trafford Hall, the home of the National Tenants Resource Centre in Chester.

Groups of two or three people from local areas come on the training courses. In addition to the 120 people trained each year, many more receive the benefit of the training as groups organise their own local briefing sessions for other tenants. These lay briefings are supported by materials distributed during the training, such as the Energy Efficiency Guide for Community Projects and others produced by the Energy Saving Trust. The scheme now benefits from the support of an energy and community action-based website, www.thetenantline.org.uk, overseen by a tenants steering group based in the North Cornwall District Council area.

The project has not needed much active promotion as the courses have essentially promoted themselves, and ecsc found that when people came on the training from one part of the country, others from that region soon followed.

Achievements

- 240 tenant groups have been trained so far and have worked as a catalyst for change in their areas
- Andy, a Lambeth tenant who completed the course, secured 500 low-energy light bulbs from London Electricity for local tenants
- Doug and Daryl from Carr Gomm Housing Society have set up an energy policy team with their Chief Executive as its Chair, driving at the highest level for change within their organisation
- Oxford City Council shifted its energy policies to reflect tenant action
- tenants from North Cornwall, with ecsc, secured a £75,000 grant from the Chartered Institute of Housing for its website, www.thetenantline.org.uk.



Course 'graduates' at Trafford Hall

Key success factors

- the tenants who take part have the imagination to change their environments
- dedicated ecsc staff are available to support the tenants
- excellent tenant-friendly venues are used
- ecsc has had the flexibility to try new ideas and work to community group agendas.

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Lessons learnt

- people will trust information provided by other residents and tenants more than that given by utilities companies or government
- the enthusiasm created by projects of this sort works to best effect when supported with small amounts of grants to 'do things'
- although council officers don't attend meetings in August, volunteers do, so it is feasible to schedule training during the summer
- networking is extremely useful for tenants. Many found out how to solve problems by sharing experience and advice over dinner!
- tenants and volunteers *will* travel to events. Many officers in councils don't expect this to be the case, but in fact most tenants are enthusiastic about the opportunity
- tenants and other volunteers will want to act quickly. It is not always helpful to advise applying for grants that may take six months to materialise
- when people are enthused about energy and the environment, they really do spread the message, particularly about saving money
- 90-year-old tenants are interested in using the internet!

Next steps

ecsc is working to secure funding to continue the programme beyond March 2003. A new tenant training programme is planned for year three of the project and will be promoted to tenants across the country. Contact networks are to be reviewed to ensure that the scheme has the continuing support of the individuals and groups trained previously.

Further information

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