



INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATION OF SUNDERLAND: THE GREAT ENERGY MEET

OVERVIEW

Sunderland is home to high deprivation and high occurrence of fuel poverty. Ethnically diverse communities can find it hard to participate in energy schemes due to language barriers, even if they may need it the most: individuals from such community tend to be more transient and can unknowingly pay someone else's energy debt, face problems with customer account information, and be in poorly insulated homes. The best way to help them is through targeted, customized help, which International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS) proposes to do through a series of local, thematic workshops.

SOLUTION

ICOS utilised non-standard engagement methods, such as ESOL/English for Energy, which combined environmental knowledge with improving English. They also recruited volunteers from various ethnicity groups, including recent migrants, to engage the wider community through social media, showing examples of good practice in energy generation and savings abroad.

OUTCOMES

- Volunteers involved: 12
- Workshops delivered: 8
- Beneficiaries of project: 220
- Ca. 73% of those who took part reported energy savings and taking action to reduce their carbon footprint.

Workshops enabled people from a range of backgrounds to come together and think differently about energy, particularly its generation and saving. Sessions raised awareness of energy efficiency and underlined the links between issues such as recycling, upcycling, reducing waste and energy usage.

Activities inspired and supported the setup of two micro-businesses with an environmental focus: one was focused on community recycling, the other focused on arts and crafts and the environment; both incorporated energy saving initiatives into their work. During the project, one volunteer was the recipient of the 2016 Sunderland BME One Voice Award (environment).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

ICOS reported that more and more beneficiaries are being rejected for standard and non-prepayment deals due to poor, or lack of, credit history in the UK, despite the fact that they are not in any kind of energy debt. This raises some worthy questions relating to equality and fairness for people who have just entered the UK.

In some circumstances, other deeper problems have to be solved before an individual can take action against fuel poverty. This is the case for Asylum Seekers awaiting immigration decisions for instance.

Language barriers remain an important factor that multiplies disadvantage and prevents individuals from accessing appropriate support.

OBJECTIVES

To deliver eight energy-themed creative workshops, in a variety of languages, designed to encourage attendees to take action in their everyday lives.

MORE DETAILS

Project:	The great energy meet
Group:	International Community Organisation of Sunderland
Theme:	Reducing energy use, understanding energy bills
Area of benefit:	Sunderland, Tyne & Wear
Date:	Nov 2015-Nov 2016
Contact:	www.icos.org.uk  ICOS green

A PIECE OF ADVICE

A clearer marketing strategy from the outset would have helped create a stronger identity for the project: while their environmental and energy management work has been relatively well known and advertised, it was sometimes difficult for participants to distinguish between the different projects.