



# INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATION OF SUNDERLAND: ENERGY SAVING SUPPORT AND ADVICE IN SUNDERLAND

## OVERVIEW

There is a significant need for targeted support and advice on energy issues for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in Sunderland. The target areas for the project are categorised as some of the most deprived in the UK, with 11 ranked within 10% of the most deprived in the country. 11.6% of local households were in fuel poverty in 2012. BME communities can be disadvantaged through economic exclusion and financial exclusion which makes the impact of fuel poverty on them even more profound. They can also find it harder to access help to lower their energy bills.

## SOLUTION

ICOS worked on a one to one basis with individuals and households. It also ran community events and sessions using relevant community languages in order to provide targeted energy support and advice to hard-to- reach individuals. This included help with changing energy supplier; dealing with energy debt; applying for a relief grant to relieve debt; general advice on energy efficiency; ways of reducing energy consumption and raising environmental awareness.

## OUTCOMES

The project directly supported 71 people between the ages of 20 and 71, mostly from a BME background and with English as a second language. Of these approximately 40 individuals accessed advice, the remaining agreed to a heat camera survey of their house to see the heat loss from their home, or took part in energy awareness workshops.

Eight volunteers were also recruited to encourage and support individuals within their community to tackle energy and wider environmental issues.

Issues that ICOS came across included: delays or administration errors by suppliers with regards to changing tariff or supplier when on prepayment card, resulting in problems for the clients and subsequent reluctance by individuals to change a supplier. ICOS found that at times suppliers held incorrect historic data / information which

resulted in delays, double billing, overpayments and connections issues. Communication barriers faced by individuals with limited English languages skills coupled with lack of interpreting and translation available for them was a key factor in this. ICOS has helped individuals to take steps to overcome these barriers. The project also helped to forge links between the Sustainable Sunderland Partnership and Community Energy England, with the aim of encouraging the development of energy generation projects in the Sunderland area (where there are currently no community energy generation schemes in operation).

## OBJECTIVES

To give local community members in 21 wards of Sunderland access energy advice targeted at reducing their energy consumption and fuel costs.

## MORE DETAILS

<b>Project title:</b>	Energy saving support and advice in Sunderland
<b>Group name:</b>	International Community Organisation Of Sunderland
<b>Theme:</b>	Reducing and managing energy use
<b>Area of benefit:</b>	Sunderland, Tyne & Wear
<b>Date:</b>	Dec 2014-Dec 2015
<b>Contact:</b>	<a href="http://www.icos.org.uk">www.icos.org.uk</a>

## A PIECE OF ADVICE

Good local links to the community and other support services, and flexibility in delivery were vital to the success of the project. As fuel poverty is often interlinked with wider issues such as poor housing or health, it is often impossible to offer energy advice in isolation. Where individuals share a flat or a house with a number of other tenants, they were often unable to make decisions about changing a supplier for instance and it was difficult to find a way around this.