

Community Energy Plus 2005



'Home Health': bringing energy efficiency to communities in deprived areas of Cornwall

Summary

Community Energy Plus (CEP) set up the Home Health programme to provide free energy efficiency advice and efficiency measures to communities in deprived areas of Cornwall. It has installed efficiency measures in over 3,000 homes.

Cornwall is a favourite UK holiday and retirement destination but has a large areas of deprivation, both urban and rural. Many of the most needy people do not take up energy-improvement measures, even if these are free, because they are unaware of what is available, do not understand the information provided, or do not trust the organisations involved. Home Health has reached out to people in the most deprived areas of Cornwall by always working within a specific community and providing information in a range of different ways, most importantly through a local community and health service referral network. This collaboration with trusted people within the community has encouraged large numbers of households to have their efficiency needs surveyed. In some areas, 67% of households contacted in this way have been interested, compared with only about 1% response in a mail-shot approach.

The organisation

CEP is a registered charity and profit recycling company which was established in 1998. Its core purpose is to achieve a sustainable energy future for communities and businesses in Cornwall, through community outreach, public advice and engagement and education of different partners. The initial finance for CEP came from three bodies: Carrick District Council; Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Health Authority; and the Energy Saving Trust. This ability to link organisations with differing priorities has been a consistent theme of CEP, both in the work they undertake and the funding which they attract. CEP employs 15 staff and has an annual turnover of about £1 million.

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Technology and use

Most of the efficiency measures installed are familiar technologies, which are proven to be cost effective in reducing energy demand. Insulation is provided for lofts, cavity walls and hot water tanks, along with draught-proofing. Thermostatic valves are fitted on radiators, and incandescent bulbs replaced with compact fluorescent lamps. Some homes are fitted with condensing boilers, under the 'Warm front' programme.

Many homes do not have cavity walls, and some of these have been fitted with external insulation. This has been particularly effective in the refurbishment of 3-storey blocks of flats known as 'Cornish units'.

During the period 2002 to April 2005, 5036 homes were surveyed and of these 3023 had major energy efficiency measures installed. This is a very high rate of take-up, and shows the effectiveness of the referral network in identifying households who could benefit from the programme. All installations are carried out by experienced local firms.

How users pay

CEP have been effective in combining funds from different sources, so users do not have to pay for the measures installed.

Training, support and quality control

Energy efficiency and advice is given to all homes where surveys and installations are undertaken.

Benefits and replicability

A direct benefit to residents is a warmer, more comfortable home. This brings other advantages too. If children can study more comfortably then school performance improves. The incidence of respiratory diseases decreases when homes are warmer and less damp.

Quantification of the effect of efficiency measures on energy consumption and carbon emission requires long-term monitoring studies because consumption depends on many other factors such as weather. Research studies have therefore established national average figures, which can be assumed for each type of measure. Using national average figures from OFGEM, CEP estimate that the measures installed under the Home Health scheme between 2002 and 2005 are bringing savings of 324 tonnes of CO₂ per year.

These energy savings also bring substantial financial savings to households. Energy represents a much greater proportion of expenditure for poor households than for the better-off so these savings are of real benefit. The payback time for the energy efficiency measures used is typically only three years.

Management, finance and partnerships

The management and partnership approach of CEP has been crucial to the success of the programme. Collaboration from the start with Cornwall County Council brought energy efficiency into the Local Public Service Agreement established with central government.

One important partnership is with funders. A major source of funding is through the energy efficiency commitments (EECs) from British Gas and EDF- energy. EEC is a statutory obligation for energy supply companies with more than 50,000 customers to meet an energy savings target in the domestic sector, with particular emphasis on households receiving income-related benefits. CEP have combined EEC payments with match funding from local councils, South West regeneration budget, and the Innovations programme of the Energy Savings Trust (EST).

Another key group which has made the programme successful is the wide network of organisations who refer households to Home Health, and through whom Home Health establish the programme in a particular area. These include: GP surgeries; Primary Care Trusts; social services; health professionals; charities; churches; voluntary organisations; and many other organisations which are active in communities, including schools, Post offices, community police and local businesses. By building trust and commitment within this network, CEP has been able to contact many people who might otherwise have 'slipped through the net'. The network does not just provide a one-way transfer of information. Through the Home Health programme over 1,000 households have been referred on to other partners for help in other areas, for instance to Help the Aged or the National Debt Line.

The programme was initially managed by the Eaga partnerships, who coordinated the local installers and contractors to carry surveys and install the efficiency measures. CEP are now moving the project management within their own team.

Use of the Ashden Award

Since winning the Ashden Award, CEP has installed energy efficiency measures at a further 2,656 homes in Cornwall, and has advised 34 communities and 423 households on renewable energy projects. They have now extended the coverage of their services to all six district councils in Cornwall, and held eight awareness-raising events in 2006. Case studies of renewable energy projects the CEP have helped with are now available on their website to further raise interest in energy issues.

This report is based on information provided to the Ashden Awards judges by Ian Smith and CEP; and findings from a one-day visit by one of the Ashden judges to see their work in Cornwall.

Dr Anne Wheldon, Technical Director of the Ashden Awards, May 2006.

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