

Case study 150

What Works in Tackling Poverty

Changeworks

What are case studies?

Case studies share what people and organisations have learned from delivering or developing a project or programme. They can help you to see what has worked on the ground and can give you ideas about how to tackle problems. They can also signpost you to people and organisations you may want to talk to.

Changeworks

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In a nutshell

Changeworks exists to improve quality of life and to protect the environment. They work with passion, integrity and in collaboration to deliver innovative projects, businesses and services to cut carbon, prevent waste, promote sustainable energy and transport and support people at risk of fuel poverty.

The specialist team of Energy and Affordable Warmth Advisors delivers Changeworks fuel poverty outreach projects. The primary objective is to alleviate fuel poverty across vulnerable households by addressing:

- Household energy efficiency
- Housing conditions
- Fuel costs
- Incomes.

This work contributes to Changeworks objectives to improve individuals' and communities' quality of life and to protect the environment. It directly impacts on targets to channel money into areas of deprivation.



Connecting you to evidence, expertise and excellence

The issues

Fuel poverty

A household is considered fuel poor if it spends 10% or more of its disposable income on household energy costs.¹ The organisation feel that fuel poverty can cause individuals and households 'misery, discomfort, ill health and debt' and is caused by three key factors:

- Hard to heat home and/or inefficient heating and/or inefficient insulation
- Low household income
- High fuel costs.

In order to effectively tackle fuel poverty, all three factors should be addressed.

Energy Action Scotland's (EAS) latest estimate suggests that about one in three Scottish households (800,000) experience fuel poverty. This figure has been on the increase (estimated 650,000 / 28% of households in 2007)² and further *increases* are anticipated.

Hard to heat homes and/or inefficient heating and/or inefficient insulation

National programmes, such as the Home Insulation Scheme and Energy Assistance Package, and programmes funded by fuel suppliers, such as Carbon Emission Reduction Target, address households' energy efficiency levels. However, these programmes do not reach the widest range of properties. Houses in off-gas areas, older, solid walled housing and non-traditional housing can be difficult or impossible to treat under these programmes.

Low household income

Many households are expecting cuts in incomes as living costs are expected to increase and employers are looking at pay-freezes and redundancies. Older people with pensions are on a fixed income and are unable to keep up with rising costs and may also be faced with cuts, and households who rely on benefits may be facing cuts in their incomes as a result of the Government's review on benefits.

High fuel costs

Fuel prices paid by consumers have been on the increase since 2001 with suppliers announcing further increases every couple of years. Ofgem's 'Project Discovery' reports that fuel prices will continue to rise in the next ten years, by as much as 60%.³

The approach to the issues

The Energy and Affordable Warmth Advisors in the Domestic Advice Team provide free, impartial and confidential home visits and surgeries; advice, advocacy and coaching on:

- Heating
- Insulation
- General energy efficiency
- Dampness
- Fuel billing
- Debt and disconnection
- Signposting for income maximisation (delivered by other local agencies).

All advisors are City and Guilds qualified Energy Advisors and the service as a whole is Scottish National Standards accredited Information and Advice Providers - Utility Billing - Type 1. The team also provides a service on the topic of Fuel Utility Debts, providing advocacy and liaising with fuel suppliers on clients' behalf regarding fuel debt.

Typical activities include:

- Providing advice on behavioural changes, which will reduce fuel use and costs
- Sourcing additional funding to remove debt and to enable housing repairs
- Identifying energy efficiency improvements, such as insulation measures or heating system upgrades
- Working with appropriate bodies to secure the funding and ensure that installation is carried out
- Liaising with suppliers to ensure that households are on the best possible payment method and tariff for their needs
- Engaging with suppliers to ensure that arrears are repaid at an affordable rate and using the best possible method of repayment

¹ The Scottish Government; The Scottish Fuel Poverty Statement, 2002

² <http://www.eas.org.uk/page.php?id=1664>

³ www.ofgem.gov.uk/Markets/WhlMkts/Discovery/Pages/ProjectDiscovery.aspx

- Liaising with suppliers to ensure complaints are resolved to the household's satisfaction
- Coaching and empowering households to take action themselves (e.g. supporting them to make a call to their fuel supplier)
- Co-ordinating multi-agency support and make referrals to ensure the household has appropriate and relevant support.

Who the service is for

The service is currently available to households across East Lothian, Edinburgh and Midlothian who are experiencing, or who are at risk of, fuel poverty – people who are vulnerable due to cold damp and draughty homes. Those most at risk include:

- Single person households, especially single female pensioners
- Single parent households
- Households affected by long-term illness
- Households affected by a disability
- Households living on low income (especially households whose income is made up solely of benefit(s), such as Job Seekers Allowance or Employment Support Allowance)
- Households in rural and off-gas areas.

Equality of access

The Energy and Affordable Warmth Advisors recognise that some individuals can experience difficulties in accessing support and services, ie:

- People with sensory impairments
- People with learning difficulties
- Those whose first language is not English
- People with mobility issues.

The team will access suitable interpreters and/or provide information in formats that suit individual client needs. They will also work with carers, support workers and other third parties to help facilitate support.

Outreach and community partnerships

Work is closely carried out with a wide range of community groups, housing associations, local authorities, health visitors and carers groups, citizens advice groups, fuel suppliers and with many specialist voluntary organisations and public sector bodies.

Changeworks delivers in-depth training and consultancy, as well as shorter workshops and briefings for key community organisations, client facing intermediaries, and other service providers. They have a cross-referral arrangement with the Energy Saving Scotland advice centre South East and many partner agencies, using their understanding of client's complex needs to signpost people to a range of specialist community support.

Range of projects:

Cosy Kids provides energy advice, support and coaching to vulnerable families with young children across East Lothian, Edinburgh and Midlothian. It works one to one with families as well as providing fuel billing and energy efficiency workshops to groups of parents. Its goal is to improve knowledge and understanding of how to access affordable warmth and to manage fuel bills more effectively, therefore providing children with a better start in life. The project is funded by The Scottish Power Energy People Trust.

East Lothian Energy Advice Service ties in closely with the East Lothian Fuel Poverty Strategy, providing advice and support to any fuel poor household in East Lothian. The project is funded by the East Lothian Council..

Switched On's goal is to improve the skills and confidence of people, in particular those with learning difficulties, in or near fuel debt, through one to one advice and coaching. This is to enable them to overcome crisis and develop the knowledge and skills to manage their fuel consumption and/or debt in order to avoid future problems. The service also offers training and coaching to carers, support workers, social workers and others who work with vulnerable people, such as those with learning difficulties, so that they can assist the householder to manage their fuel costs and bills. The project is funded by the Big Lottery Fund until November 2014.



Fuel Poverty Prevention Project is delivered in collaboration with the Haddington Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in East Lothian. It provides an holistic approach to fuel debt/poverty. The Changeworks advisor offers support to households to improve energy efficiency and access affordable fuel payment options whilst the CAB provides money and welfare rights advice and debt management support. The emphasis of the project is on coaching the householder to be able to manage their fuel consumption and costs more effectively in the long term.

Warm and Well helps anyone in East Lothian, Edinburgh and Midlothian, whose health may be affected by a cold, damp or draughty home. The team works closely with health and social work professionals, and others who come in contact with individuals whose health may be at risk. The work is funded by NHS Lothian, East Lothian Council and Midlothian Council.

Warmburgh Advice Team provides a long established service, working with fuel poor households in the City of Edinburgh. Most of the work is carried out with private sector households, but it also provides advice and support to the City of Edinburgh Council and Housing Association tenants. The work is funded by the City of Edinburgh Council.

Evidence of success

Deliverables for the Changeworks Energy and Affordable Warmth Advisors for 2010/2011 will be confirmed following end March 2011. Forecasted annual figures, based on completed work during the first three quarters of the year to December 2010, are:

- Fuel Billing Savings made by clients this year due to direct fuel billing interventions made by advisors (including correcting billing errors, wrongly billed debt or incorrect tariffs): £42,500
- Lifetime Savings to Clients based on energy efficiency advice and income maximisation measures: £58,000
- CO2 lifetime savings: 773 tonnes
- Cases closed: 833

Summary of outcomes 2010/2011

- Clients are living in warmer/drier homes
- Clients are able to affordably heat their homes
- Clients are confident about using their heating systems efficiently
- Clients have greater control of their fuel use and fuel costs
- Clients are empowered to manage their fuel bills

Service evaluation – feedback

The annual Domestic Advice Team service evaluation got some very positive feedback from people they have helped:

- The survey found that after talking to an advisor, **62%** of respondents said that they were happy about feeling warm and comfortable in their home – as opposed to 24% prior to intervention
- **86%** of respondents also said they felt happy that things were explained simply, that the advisor took their concerns seriously and that they received help with things they wanted help with.

Evaluation for 2010–11 will be available following the year end.

Fuel Poverty Case Study

Summary: A single mother and kinship carer, with a complex combination of health, housing and energy issues, is lifted out of fuel poverty with help and support from Changeworks' Energy and Affordable Warmth Advisor.

Background leading client to Changeworks

The client, a single mother with two older children living at home recently became a kinship carer for her 23 month old granddaughter. She was diagnosed with cancer five years ago and has undergone chemotherapy. At the same time she lost her



mother to cancer and nursed her father who also had cancer. The client was previously a nurse, but has since had to leave the profession due to her illness and caring responsibilities and is now reliant on benefits to support her family. As a result of the chemotherapy, she is riddled with arthritis in her fingers and has prolapsed discs in her spine. One of the daughters living with her has an overactive immune system, gastro-intestinal issues and hypersensitivity syndrome. For nutrition, she relies on a battery charged feeding tube, resulting in increased electricity consumption.

What the Changeworks advisor found

The client lives in an all electric, hard to heat, local authority house. Her home is due to be demolished and the client is waiting to be re-housed. Having paid over £7,000 to heat her home in the past three years, she cannot afford to eat and pay her electricity bills – 37% of her annual income was going to her electricity supplier.

What the Changeworks advisor did next

It was clear the client's fuel spend was beyond extreme fuel poverty and her family were suffering as a result. The advisor's three key aims were to:

- Keep the house warm at an affordable cost
- Increase the household income
- Increase the energy efficiency of the housing if possible.

The advisor referred the client to the Social Work Department for kinship care allowance and child benefit. The client was awarded these and, as a result, her annual income has increased by £5,900. Social Work is now working with the client to claim child tax credit for her granddaughter, which will further increase her income. The advisor also referred the client to the charity Kinship Carers in Edinburgh for advice, support and a respite caravan holiday. The client will receive a family holiday at Haven's Seton Sands for one week free of charge.

What the client was coached and supported to do for themselves

Together, the advisor and client contacted her energy supplier to access the priority service register and social tariff. The social tariff was

backdated by three months. A payment plan for fuel was also set up.

What was the result?

After receiving the advice and support from Changeworks, the client is now spending 9.2% of her income on fuel costs, a considerable reduction from the original 37%. However the client is still struggling to pay the bills. She is about to be re-homed in a more energy efficient property with gas central heating and is looking forward to even more affordable fuel bills. The advisor continues to work with the client to reduce poor health and health inequalities by promoting joined up working with many different organisations including housing, social work and health. They both hope the planned house move will improve the client's health and finances further.

Lessons learnt

One of the recurring challenges the advisors face is assisting people that live in hard to treat homes. An example of this is solid walled properties where conventional insulation measures such as cavity wall insulation are not applicable, particularly those in off gas areas that are reliant on electrical heating. Often, despite all the energy efficiency advice, income maximisation, fuel billing advice or advocacy and installation of applicable energy efficiency measures, the property itself still remains too expensive to heat. Solutions can be prohibitively expensive with limited grant support and in many cases, particularly for internal solid wall insulation, householders are reluctant or are unable to move out to allow the works to be conducted.

One good thing

In-depth, bespoke advice, coaching and mentoring, delivered face to face can ensure that clients experience tangible, longer-term and sustainable benefits and a reduced risk of fuel poverty. Once a client gains the in-depth understanding of energy consumption, fuel billing and how to communicate with suppliers they will take that knowledge with them for life.



Why this approach would work elsewhere in Scotland

Delivering a joined-up response, combining advocacy, advice and coaching, through key service delivery organisations, in order to meet individual client's needs is an approach which can be adopted in all environments and one which is most likely to succeed.

What next

From April 2011 the Energy and Affordable Warmth Advisors will deliver a pilot project in Midlothian, funded by the former Fairer Scotland Fund, to further improve their income maximisation advice by carrying out benefits checks themselves. While Changeworks currently delivers this service through the Energy Saving Scotland advice centre South East, or by signposting through partnerships such as Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), the energy advisors have found the demand for this service far outweighs supply, with waiting lists for CAS advice growing longer. By delivering this service themselves, the aim is to build in greater flexibility that will allow the team to meet more of their clients needs.



Scottish Centre for Regeneration

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- regenerating communities and tackling poverty
- developing more successful town centres and local high streets
- creating and managing mixed and sustainable communities
- making housing more energy efficient
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