

ShowCase

Seeding Sustainable Communities

Topic:

Sustainability

Organisation:

Peterborough Environment City Trust

Location:

Peterborough (East of England)

Dates:

March 2005 to March 2008

Budget:

£300,000

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Overview

Seeding Sustainable Communities was a three-year project that sought to introduce environmentally friendly behaviours to new home owners, using the move to a new house as a catalyst for further behavioural changes.

Run by Peterborough Environment City Trust, the project's staff visited new residents to conduct a short Community Survey, before presenting them with a free Sustainable Living Welcome Bag. This bag contained information about environmental issues, information about the local community and free environmental goods, such as energy efficient light bulbs and Ecover products.

The project also arranged environmental events and activities within the communities, in response to the interests expressed by the residents.

Results:

950 Community Surveys were conducted on the Hampton and the Sugar Way Estates. Evaluation surveys conducted six months later showed:

- 100 per cent of residents had made lifestyle changes
- 70 per cent had implemented 5 changes or more
- 75 per cent used their car less frequently for short journeys



Peterborough was granted Environment City status in 1992, alongside Leicester, Middleborough and Leeds. The aim of Environment Cities is to demonstrate ways of managing cities and large towns in more sustainable ways – promoting the environment alongside economic regeneration and social needs. Since then partners from business, the third sector, local government and communities across Peterborough have worked to embed the environment as a priority for the city and deliver green initiatives to improve the local environment.

In the same year the Environmental Action Fund (EAF) was founded. EAF is a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) funding scheme that helps voluntary and community sector groups to further the Government's sustainable development objectives in England.

Between 2005 and 2008, the EAF programme focused on community-based approaches to design, test and establish innovative behaviour change projects aiming to further the Government's sustainable development objectives. Thirty-five projects were supported which aimed to:

- Contribute to the sustainable consumption agenda identified in the Government's Sustainable Consumption and Production Framework
- Influence more sustainable patterns of consumption within communities
- Shift beyond raising awareness of sustainable consumption challenges to achieving more sustainable consumption behaviours
- Go beyond single issues and look at consumption issues across the board

Seeding Sustainable Communities was funded by the EAF (75 per cent) and cash and in-kind funding from partner organisations, including Anglian Water, O&H Hampton and the Caterpillar Foundation (25 per cent). Managed by independent charity Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT), the project aimed to build community spirit and encourage more environmentally friendly behaviour in new housing developments in Peterborough.

“With all of the key partners it was a really symbiotic relationship, in that Anglian Water wanted to get their information and promote water efficiency to residents in general, and as part of what we were doing we were promoting water efficiency. The same with Peterborough City Council's waste and recycling services team and others. So it was kind of a case of getting together with people and saying 'right, how best can we help you achieve what you want to, and you help us achieve what we want to?'” (Rachel Huxley, Operations Manager)



Behavioural goals

The project aimed to increase pro-environmental behaviours amongst residents in new housing estates over a three-year period. Measured behaviours included:

- Energy and water efficiency
- Waste prevention
- Sustainable travel
- Eco-purchasing
- Use of local wildlife reserves

Household surveys were used to establish behavioural baselines, allowing clear measurement of impact by comparison with follow-up data. In addition, the project aimed to build community spirit and cohesion in new housing developments in Peterborough.



Learning from previous experience

The original project concept was developed based on PECT's previous experience of successful approaches that had been positively received by local communities.

Motivators

- Having a clear example to follow (role models)
- Developing an increased awareness
- Gaining knowledge about and access to resources
- Having personally tailored information provided face-to-face
- Having continued support and engagement
- The opportunity for immediate changes through providing free goods

- Having easy or fun options for change

Barriers

- Perceived expense
- Lack of appropriate facilities or space
- Inconvenience
- Restricted access to resources

Competition

- Residents not wanting to give up their time to complete surveys
- Low prioritisation of environmental issues for those in social housing
- Traditional consumer-driven industries and retailers, which generally encourage people to buy, spend and consume, making these activities the social norm for residents

In particular, previous experience had identified that residents value face-to-face visits and personally-tailored support and information, and that providing products allows for immediate behaviour change.

Primary research

Learning about residents' needs and interests was crucial for continual improvement of the project.

The project used face-to-face interviews with residents, visiting individual households in the Hampton estate (3000 households) and Riverside/Sugar Way estates (800 households). At each contact, a short face-to-face interview (Community Survey) was conducted with the homeowner. The Community Survey was designed to identify residents':

- Current behavioural patterns
- Existing environmental interests
- Community needs

As well as collecting demographic information, the surveys covered a range of questions on: sustainability; water usage and metering; energy use and supply; transport patterns;

purchasing priorities; waste disposal; and attendance at local services and events.

Consultation was also carried out with partner organisations who supply or promote environmental services to the target communities (such as Anglian Water, Peterborough City Council, and TravelChoice), as well as a meeting with the local Residents' Associations to gain a deeper understanding of the target area, prior to the surveying.

Target audience

Moving house represents a natural breakpoint, at which residents can be more susceptible to changing their lifestyles. New housing developments within the postcodes PE7 and PE2 were targeted on this basis, with the original intention of approaching only those residents who were new homeowners.

However, this proved problematic on a practical level as it was difficult to identify which residents had just moved into their home. Attempts were made to identify this target audience by working with the local council and housing developers, but neither proved possible.

Instead, the target audience was broadened to include people living in houses that were no more than 10 years old (23 per cent of residents who were surveyed had lived in the area for one year or less).

Contrary to expectations, longer-established residents responded just as well as those who were new to their home, suggesting that the effectiveness of the project might have been due to the personalised nature of the intervention, rather than exclusively to the fact that moving to a new house can lead to new behaviours.

Within the targeted postcode areas, 75 per cent of residents owned their own home; 58 per cent were full-time employed and only 2 per cent were unemployed; 84 per cent

were white British; and 38 per cent were aged 25 to 40.



Based on previous project experience and consultations with partners and stakeholders, PECT developed a methods mix based around the use of Community Surveys.

Home visits

Doorstep surveys were the primary engagement method for the project. Project officers visited residents at their doorstep, carrying out a survey and offering a free Sustainable Living Welcome Bag.

The Community Surveys acted as a tool to facilitate conversation with residents, about their own interests and needs, while collecting baseline and follow-up information on sustainable behaviours. Thirty-four volunteers helped to conduct these surveys throughout the project's three-year lifespan. To try and ensure that surveys were conducted with a broad range of residents, the surveying was carried out at various times, including days, evenings and weekends.

Based on insights gained through the survey about a resident's particular interests and motivations, the volunteer could tailor the conversation – for instance emphasising saving money or the aspiration of 'going green', focusing on water efficiency or recycling – dependent on the resident. By emphasising areas residents showed the most interest in, the hope was that they would be more likely to make the desired changes.

"The survey was to collect baseline data, but it was also the framework within which you could have a conversation with a householder. That was very important. You can't just turn up on somebody's doorstep, knock on their door and

ask to talk about sustainable living. People would feel uncomfortable. Once you tell them you're going to do a survey, they know exactly what a survey is, they feel comfortable, and so suddenly you can use that survey to initiate discussions with people in a very accessible, friendly way for them." (Rachel Huxley, Operations Manager)



Sustainable Living Welcome Bag

Residents visited were offered a reusable jute Welcome Bag that contained:

- Information about the topics discussed in the Community Survey (like energy, water and waste)
- Hampton community directory
- Two energy saving light bulbs
- Environmentally friendly washing up liquid and washing powder
- Fat trap
- Bird seed
- Recycled mouse mat
- Cloth shopping bag
- Bookmark showing the website address
- Vegetable seeds
- Vouchers for Notcutts Garden Centre, River Nene Organic Vegetables and Bettaland Organic Compost
- (If the resident had children) kid's pack with a water CD-ROM, sustainable living wrist bands and colouring pencils

This bag minimised barriers to change by providing information, incentives and products, to help residents make several easy behaviour changes immediately.

Based on the information collected from the doorstep surveys, and as another way to engage and educate residents, the project team also organised a series of local events and workshops, including one-off events (including the first ever Apple Day, celebrating the Great British apple, which was held in Peterborough and attracted over 2,000 residents, farmers markets, and the Woodston Ponds nature reserve family fun day), along with a variety of smaller workshops on topics such as growing your own vegetables and composting. These workshops educated residents further about issues they wanted to learn more about, and were also an excellent way to develop community spirit.

Community champions

Residents were further involved in the project through recruitment of Sustainable Living Champions within the community. The role of these Sustainable Living Champions was varied, depending on the individual's interests. Essentially they were used as role models within the community, to act as motivators and promoters of sustainable living and community cohesion.

In particular a water champions programme was explored (with the support of Anglian Water) because the housing estates were newly built, water-metered and with high water pressure. Residents who wished to know more about water efficiency (and specifically those who wanted to become sustainable living champions) were invited to a meeting to discuss the water champions programme. From this, eight residents were recruited as water champions. In all, a total of 20 champions were recruited through a series of schemes.



150 surveys were carried out in the first year of the project, followed by 500 surveys in year two and 304 surveys in the third and final year.

During implementation of the project, some challenges emerged in engaging those from social housing in the Hampton area, both during the visit and at events. One main obstacle with social housing tenants was their lack of interest in taking part in the survey at all – the proportion of social housing residents that said ‘no they would not like to take part in the survey’ was higher than for non-social housing residents. On average approximately 29 per cent said ‘no’ in non-social housing; whereas 37 per cent said ‘no’ in social housing.

In addition, environmental issues were not a main concern for these residents and were perceived to be expensive. However, this provided some leverage for tailoring the advice and support that was given – if residents were interested in saving money, this was made the focus for the intervention and advice was provided on energy saving measures and water saving (all houses were metered so residents paid for what they used).

Despite some difficulty, there were residents from this group who benefited immensely from the visit and tried hard to live more sustainably following the home visit (for example one resident started recycling and really tried to get her children enthusiastic about it).

Implementation of the project also provided learning about the types of events to run. Initial events were specifically about energy or water efficiency and aimed broadly at all residents, but had poor turnouts. Based on insights gained from the surveys, events were adapted in favour of smaller workshops tailored to

specific interests, such as vegetable growing or recycling workshops in the schools. Larger events were later found to be successful when they were more distinctively family friendly.

“I think one of the problems were the first few events were really badly attended. So we changed the approach to make them smaller and more specific to what people wanted and asked for. So we did smaller events like a visit to the materials recycling facility for 10 or so people, and allotment training for 10 or so people. We did have some larger successful events, we had an Apple Day event, so the events we then did were family friendly, and that was just through feedback we got from the survey by asking people what they were interested in.” (Rachel Huxley, Operations Manager)

During year three, the project developed a partnership with Sustrans to encourage sustainable travel. Sustrans made visits to those requesting the service, offering a personalised travel guide. The project also partnered with the Energy Saving Trust, sending Home Energy Checks to all participants who had shown an interest in knowing more about energy saving. Residents received a tailored report advising them on a series of options that would help them make their homes more energy efficient.



An unexpected outcome was the role that the follow-up surveys had in reinforcing behaviour change. These surveys were intended for evaluation purposes, but the very act of calling up residents who had taken part in an original survey further encouraged them to maintain behaviours they had adopted and acted as a reminder to make the changes many had contemplated, but had not yet made.

“Three to six months after we’d spoken with people we did a follow-up survey (done by telephone) and that was largely supposed to be evaluation, but it turned out to be a fairly effective intervention. It reinforces the behaviour with the people you talk to. It was a nice little reminder of the things people meant to do. They’d say I hadn’t got round to that, I’ll do it now.” (Rachel Huxley, Operations Manager)



954 residents were visited and completed the baseline survey throughout the 3 years of the project. Of all households visited where a resident was home, 74 per cent agreed to participate in the project.

The aim was initially to survey people who had moved house within the last 12 months. However 77 per cent of residents had been living in their house for over a year. After analysing the first year of data, it was concluded that this factor did not affect results and the project therefore decided to continue surveying both newly moved and more established residents.

The baseline survey included questions on all areas of environmental issues: water; energy; transport; wildlife; purchasing and consumption; waste; and local community.

Follow-up surveys were carried out with a random sample of 30 per cent of the residents visited: a total of 288 follow-up surveys for the three years. Seven in-depth interviews were also undertaken, involving a sample of 'non-green' and 'green' residents.

Results

Headline results from the 288 follow-up surveys were as follows:

- 100 per cent of residents had adopted at least 1 new sustainable behaviour
- 70 per cent had implemented 5 changes or more
- 87 per cent had used the free energy efficient light bulbs provided
- 25 per cent had continued using Ecover products
- 32 per cent had started using the car less for short journeys
- 47 per cent more residents were using reusable bags than at baseline

More detailed results from the follow-up surveys include:

Water: A substantial increase in all behaviours. The highest increase was the number of residents using a bowl to wash the dishes and vegetables (+19 per cent), followed by the number of people who started using the economy setting for the washing machine and/or dishwasher (+17 per cent). Some residents achieved outstanding savings of as much as 39 per cent.

Energy: There was an increase of 14 per cent of residents who switched the lights and appliances off more often. There was also an important 35 per cent decrease in residents leaving appliances on standby. This was very positive considering the high number of residents that found it difficult to do this.

Transport behaviours: 32 per cent of participants had started using their car less for short journeys, by walking, cycling or using

public transport more often. Taking into account the high reliance residents have on their cars and their reluctance to change this habit, it was surprising to see such a substantial reduction.

Purchasing and healthy living: An increase of 14 per cent of residents buying more environmentally friendly products and 17 per cent buying fewer disposable products. Residents were less willing to try a vegetable box scheme – most were put off by the idea of not being able to choose what they can buy, instead preferring to buy organic vegetables from a supermarket. Nevertheless, the percentage of people who joined an organic box scheme as a result of visits was 9 per cent.

Waste: Householders already had very high awareness levels regarding recycling, but tended to be unaware of the reuse and reduce options to minimise waste. Overall, 27 per cent of residents reduced the amount of waste in their general waste bins. All waste minimisation behaviours increased after the project visit. The most outstanding was the 47 per cent increase in the number of residents now using reusable bags. Home composting increased by 9 per cent, doubling the number of households participating in this activity. 22 per cent of residents joined the Mail Preference Service and 71 per cent of them felt this considerably reduced the amount of junk mail they received.

Wildlife Nature Reserves: After the visit, 35 per cent had been to a nature reserve and 36 per cent of these said it was as a result of the information provided in the bag.

The follow-on surveys also identified the main elements of the project that helped residents to achieve behavioural changes:

- 'Providing practical advice on what I can do to reduce my impact' (61 per cent)

- 'Providing new products or services so I can take action to reduce my environmental impact' (56 per cent)
- 'Making me feel more strongly that environmental action is my personal responsibility, not someone else's' (54 per cent)

"The project makes you think and be more aware about the environment in general. It was a nice way to approach people, so they are more open to try new things. It makes people look at how they live their lives." (Riverside participant)



A conference was held at the end of the third year to share the project's results and lessons learned. Invites went out to local and regional partners who may be interested, including developers, housing associations, councillors and others.

Building on the successes of Seeding Sustainable Communities and the effectiveness of personal visits, a dedicated Green Team has continued to visit residents in five different wards within Peterborough, to help them reduce their environmental impact. Between January and September 2010 the Green Team visited 2,500 homes.

The team of 8 are all aged between 18 and 24 and have been employed through the government's Future Jobs Fund scheme. Peterborough was one of the areas awarded Future Jobs funding, which helps unemployed young people aged 18 to 24 who have been on Jobseeker Allowance for between 26 and 50 weeks. Through the scheme young people are offered six-month work placements, allowing them to contribute to the community and also

providing them with essential skills needed to continue to work.

By visiting people in their homes and providing green help and advice, the team is helping locals live in an environmentally friendly way. The team is also raising the profile of local environmental initiatives and collecting data to help establish what kinds of things local people are already doing to reduce their environmental impact.

The Green Team project, which is being managed by PECT in partnership with Peterborough City Council, aims to bring the city's aspiration of becoming the UK's Environment Capital a step closer. 87 per cent of people surveyed believe the city's ambition to become the UK's Environment Capital is beneficial for Peterborough, its residents and visitors.



Peterborough
HOME OF ENVIRONMENT CAPITAL

PECT is using experience from the Seeding Sustainable Communities and the Green Team projects to work with the University of Surrey's Sustainable Lifestyle Research Group to develop greater understanding of the processes that lead to changes in people's behaviours and practices, with the aim of encouraging more sustainable lifestyles.

Lessons learned

What contributed most to this project's success was the direct contact with residents. Seeding

Sustainable Communities used a high quality approach that ensured support was personally tailored to each resident, achieving higher percentages of behaviour change than broader, less personalised methods. The continued level of engagement with residents also leads to long-term, rather than one-off, behaviour changes. Additionally this is a flexible project that can easily be adapted to the needs of the community and that of the partners.

“I think having a conversation with someone on your doorstep and they say ‘have you tried this?’, it becomes real as opposed to when you see it on the TV or whatever. It does help having people who are local and who have local knowledge doing the work. Take time to get to know the area you're working in, because residents will start asking you all sorts of stuff, and if you've never been there, you won't know the answer. But often those questions can lead to change, whether it's ‘where's the local green space?’ or ‘where's the local cycle track to get to the supermarket?’” (Rachel Huxley, Operations Manager)

Community engagement is another essential factor for success. It generated immediate feedback direct from residents about what does and what does not work when trying to change behaviour and create community spirit. It also makes residents feel empowered to make a difference and make their neighbourhood a place they enjoy and feel proud of, which is key to every sustainable community.

The easiest and most widely adopted changes were those relating to the goods provided in the Welcome Bags, which enabled residents to implement immediate lifestyle changes.

“The Welcome Bag is really useful to get people to agree to do the survey. It's also a very effective tool for achieving behaviour change because if you give someone a

sample, then they use it and see what it's like, and you've taken the environmental product to them. You get self-efficacy happening because people are using these things, and think 'yep that's ok, I can carry on using this as I've tried it once'. The Welcome Bag allows people to trial these things and makes them more familiar so it's not just some weird thing that hippies do." (Rachel Huxley, Operations Manager)

In general, those changes that were perceived as easy or fun were the most popular. Residents were more reticent to implement changes that had perceived additional cost, such as purchasing Ecover products or organic food. Also, changes that initially seemed to be more complicated or time consuming, such as composting or obtaining a water butt, were undertaken less.