



Working Herts

Energy efficiency training scheme

Working Herts recruits and trains unemployed people in Hertfordshire and South Bedfordshire to install energy-saving and water-saving measures in private homes and local authority and social housing.

When did the project begin?

The scheme was launched in 1997 and is ongoing.

Who's involved?

The charity Working Herts Ltd is the coordinator of the project. Support is given by the areas' local authorities, specifically their Local Agenda 21, housing, economic development, environmental health, planning, regeneration and community Safety departments. It also involves the Learning and Skills Councils, Hertfordshire Careers Service, local colleges and local housing associations. Several hundred other organisations, ranging from homeless units and local employers to health providers and the police, support the project by providing pastoral support to trainees. Working Herts is managed by a board of representatives from the various agencies whose interests are served by the scheme.

How is it funded?

Hertsmere Borough Council won a £50,000 HECAAction grant to develop the initiative. In its initial phase, a further capital fund grant from the Housing Corporation was obtained, along with sponsorship from two large local housing associations. Ongoing sponsorship comes from the local authorities, Three Valleys Water plc and London Electricity (as part of the Energy Efficiency Commitment). Training fees are met by the Learning and Skills Councils, the Employment Service (under New Deal) and the European Social Fund. Single Regeneration Budget funding also meets costs in some areas, as does Health Action Zone funding.

What are the targets and aims?

The training targets the long-term unemployed under New Deal (the Government's Welfare to Work strategy) and unemployed 16–18 year olds under the Lifeskills programme

run by Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Learning and Skills Councils. The project aims to:

- Make housing in these regions more energy efficient
- Equip the long-term and young unemployed with practical, transferable skills
- Promote social inclusion via training and employment
- Help trainees find permanent jobs
- Close the gap between the richest and the poorest people in the area.

How was it implemented?

With the funding in place, a New Deal Environmental Task Force contract was negotiated in order to take on unemployed people from job centres throughout Hertfordshire. A list of properties was scheduled, offices were acquired, the first minibus was bought, and recruitment and training began. Subsequent agreements extended the scheme beyond housing association properties to local authorities and private householders.

The energy-saving measures chosen for the scheme were loft insulation, hot and cold tank lagging, pipe insulation and draught-proofing – all thought to be good tasks for small groups of trainees to handle and varied enough to provide a range of skills to master. Water-saving measures include installing devices in cisterns to reduce water usage, inspecting pipework for leaks and arranging for repairs to dripping taps.

Trainees, in teams of up to six, learn the skills on the job, under the direction of a supervisor and in conformance with industry best practice. All the tasks involve skills that could be transferred to future jobs, such as record keeping, health and safety and problem solving.

“**The training gave me valuable experience for finding a full-time job, like going to work every day, working in a team and learning customer care skills. I'm now hoping to find work in a field where I can use my energy advice training**

Scott Irvin (Trainee)

In addition, Working Herts buys in day-release training from local colleges for any course that trainees may want to follow to benefit their future job prospects, such as IT or mechanics. Team leaders are trained in customer care to ensure that service is second to none in terms of quality. After spending 3–6 months on the scheme, Working Herts helps trainees to find permanent jobs.

Householders hear about the scheme in various ways: through health workers, flyers sent out with by the local authorities, social services, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Energy Efficiency Advice Centres, by word of mouth or through the local press. It is also promoted via the energy efficiency grant schemes that operate in the area and that pay for some or all of the cost of the installation. In other areas, the work is carried out under a systematic maintenance programme of the housing stock.

Anyone is eligible for the scheme, although levels of grant funding vary depending on circumstances. The scheme is managed by a chief executive, but is also very responsive to community needs in that every viable suggestion or comment received from the large number of customer satisfaction forms completed is incorporated into the training manuals and adopted in practice.

Achievements

- More than 1000 properties a year are being insulated under the scheme
- More than 3000 properties have been fitted with water-saving devices and had leaks treated
- Up to 80 trainees are recruited and trained each year - often people who have had difficulty in finding work
- Over 70% of trainees have been helped to find full-time jobs on leaving the project
- Working Herts won the Environment Agency's Water Award 2000 for water conservation activities
- The scheme has expanded into new locations, establishing off-shoots in Three Rivers, Luton and South Beds districts

Five key success factors

- 1) Ensuring that sufficient start-up funding was in place to avoid cash flow constraints
- 2) Making customer satisfaction the absolute priority
- 3) Working with a very wide range of partner organisations and individuals from both
- 4) Commercial and local authority backgrounds
- 5) Having an active customer satisfaction feedback mechanism to ensure constant improvement and act as a training tool.

Next steps

The project's ethos is that young people learn best by doing. For this reason Working Herts is actively helping some other organisations and local authorities to establish energy-saving schemes which also address the needs for social inclusion, training and employment.

LESSONS LEARNT

- 1) When you have multiple objectives – achieving large environmental gains, making a profit, training large numbers of unemployed people and finding them jobs – it is important to prioritise these objectives in order to give consistent support to their achievement
- 2) Prioritising customer satisfaction will ensure that trainees work to high standards and thus find the work more rewarding and the transition to subsequent employment much easier
- 3) Recruits with the most difficult barriers – health, housing, financial, personal or motivational problems – need the highest levels of support
- 4) Good staff and good working conditions are vital and give the right message to trainees, customers and sponsors
- 5) There is a tension in a scheme of this sort between, wanting to keep the best trainees (and so giving the best service and achieving the best environmental gains) and wanting to help them into full-time employment elsewhere
- 6) Providing fulfilling work experience to trainees requires long-term programmes rather than ad hoc projects where nobody knows what they will be doing next week, next month or next year
- 6) Driving lessons and licences, a good attitude to work, punctuality and reliability rank higher in employers' minds than NVQs.



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Community Action for Energy (CAfE) is an initiative of the Energy Saving Trust that promotes and facilitates local community based energy projects. This case study is one of a series showcasing the most exciting and innovative of the 2500 projects that are part of the CAfE network.

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