

## **Community Benefit Fund Investment – 12 Month Report from South Yorkshire Energy Centre**

In February 2018, Sheffield Renewables donated £2,800 to South Yorkshire Energy Centre to work with households in Sheffield who are in fuel poverty.

Over the 12 month investment period up to February 2019, we have worked with 101 households in some of the city's most hard to reach neighbourhoods providing peer-to-peer support around energy efficiency, affordable warmth and fuel poverty.

### Key achievements:

- 101 households received in-depth, supported advice on energy efficiency ranging from saving and switching on energy bills to how to make their homes warmer.
- 23 households switched to new, cheaper suppliers and tariffs saving a collective total of £4,848 a year.
- 18 households were identified as eligible for unclaimed Warm Home Discount totalling £2,520 a year.
- 7 households were new registrations to the Priority Services Register enabling them to access extra support from their energy suppliers.
- 28 households received energy efficiency small measures. We installed 89 measures in total including door brushes, insulating tape, draught excluders, radiator foil and issuing free energy saving light bulbs. Some households needed advice on managing damp and condensation and we also gave them mould spray. 4 households needed emergency heating; we were able to supply them with oil-filled radiators as a temporary measure. The potential savings for the draught-proofing measures is £1,344 a year in total.
- 3 households were supported with fuel debt advice. For 2 of these cases, we agreed and set up instalment plans to pay back the debt owed in manageable amounts. 1 household was referred to Sheffield CAB for help with a Trust Fund application for a fuel debt of £1,120.
- 4 households were given emergency top-up money of £40 so that they could get their energy supply back on.
- 5 households were referred to other support services including benefit checks and debt advice with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB); housing support with Shelter and, for 1 household, we worked with the Private Landlords Team at Sheffield City Council on the condition of the rented property and lack of heating. 1 household had been the victim of vandalism and had windows broken; they also had no carpets or cooking facilities in the property. We rang the Council repair team to escalate the window repairs and referred them to Besom, a local charity that supports those in need of furnishings and white goods.
- Worked with 3 households on the installation of smart meters and showed them how to make the most of the display monitor information to help them budget.

- Received £500 compensation for 1 household whose supplier had been using the wrong calculations on their gas bills – using imperial not metric and therefore over calculating bills over a period of time. Also received a credit refund of £151 for 1 client who had been having trouble getting money owed from their previous supplier.
- Supported 3 households with free boiler applications.
- This year, with 10 energy companies ceasing to trade, we have worked with 4 households on transfers to new suppliers and ensuring they are on the best deal.

### Project Summary

Since February 2018 the donation from Sheffield Renewables has enabled us to support an extra 101 vulnerable households across the city and especially in the most disadvantaged communities.

We have provided outreach support in 12 disadvantaged areas of Sheffield. Our venues have included those where the most help is needed such as Foodbanks and those that are the hubs of local communities such as Libraries, Voluntary Sector Organisations and Community Centres. We have also provided a regular, weekly drop-in day at the Energy Centre. This work has enabled us to reach those who struggle the most with fuel poverty.

Our network of health and community partnerships refer in to our services and clients can also self-refer. Primarily we have encouraged people to look at their energy costs and switch tariffs but the ability to enhance our support through installing draught-proofing measures has potentially added to the savings made and helped to keep Sheffield people warm and well.

The colder months see a peak in our referral numbers when people start to put heating systems on and the high winter bills appear. In November, we attended a 'Beat the Winter Blues' community event to help people prepare for the approaching colder months. This is also a key promotional message for our publicity material. However, due to the increase in the number of those struggling financially, especially since the introduction of Universal Credit, saving money and cutting costs is a key priority and means that our energy advice is needed all year round.

Our work on tackling fuel poverty continues to reaffirm and highlight that energy is an important engagement tool for addressing a greater range of support needs. People feel comfortable talking about their need for help to reduce energy costs and once that trust relationship has been established, will reveal much more in terms of the further help they, sometimes desperately, need. It has meant that as well as helping people to save money on their energy costs and make their homes warmer, we have also been able to signpost clients to other services so that they receive the holistic advice and support that will help to improve their circumstances.

The added value of our approach to energy advice is that whilst the key motivator in reducing energy usage is saving money for the households that we support, better education in the use of heating systems – setting the right thermostat temperature, using programmers - installing draught-proofing measures and providing top energy saving tips, all lead to a reduction in energy consumption and therefore a reduction in carbon.

We are very grateful to Sheffield Renewables for their investment as this work would not have been possible without your support.