

Bristol Community Energy Fund case study:

Ashley Community Housing



About the group

Ashley Community Housing is an award-winning specialist housing and training provider with offices in Bristol and the West Midlands. Their mission is to support the settlement and resettlement needs of refugees, vulnerable homeless and other displaced people, to develop their independence, promote their positive contribution to the community and ease their integration into UK life. In the most part, their work benefits people of a refugee background.

About the project

Ashley Community Housing received £4,934 in the first round of Bristol Community Energy Fund to employ a sessional tutor to work with their tenants on energy efficiency.

Workshops were organised to offer learners the chance to gain an accredited qualification in Energy Efficiency for Sustainability. Energy surveys were carried out in three of Ashley Community Housing's properties and one tenant was trained as an energy champion, carrying out house visits to support other tenants. Properties were also adapted to make them more energy efficient. To follow up from the project, Ashley Community Housing went on a bike ride to Growing Futures where they had a barbeque and discussed what has been done and learnt on the course.

Bringing people together

The project brought members of the same house together to think about how they live together in terms of energy behaviour. It brought people together to discuss the

wider impacts of energy consumption and our own carbon footprint. Tenants learned the differences between energy saving and traditional light bulbs and were given demonstrations of draught proofing, with the impact of draughts shown through thermal imaging surveys (via CHEESE - Cold Homes Energy Efficiency Survey Experts). Tenants also learned the importance of temperature control through thermostats rather than opening the window when it's too warm. One tenant helped with sealing gaps in the house to prevent cold draughts.

Twenty-seven people had direct contact with an adviser who gave them advice about energy, including how to save energy and the benefits of doing so. This number is expected to increase as tenant engagement on energy continues. The learners on the course have chosen 1-3 actions they will commit to taking in order to save energy in their own lives and also to be active in their community to promote energy efficiency and sustainability.



Learning from the project

Besides the environmental and social benefits of the project, challenges that came up during the project provided some important learning. Course attendance was unpredictable, which meant that many of the learners could not go through to accreditation, however, each session attended increased the tenant knowledge about energy. Behaviour change was hard to bring about at first, but was encouraged by informing tenants that a decrease in their energy bills would result in their household being rewarded. Also, staff at times found it difficult to keep up with a very capable and keen energy champion!



Naomi Gill, of Ashley Community Housing talked about Ahmed, their energy champion:

“Ahmed didn't have any particular knowledge about where energy comes from or about climate change. He has never paid energy bills. This was an opportunity for Ahmed to find out about how much energy bills cost, understand how to read and interpret bills and measurements of electricity and gas. He uses his Arabic to explain to other tenants. He has gained knowledge and also confidence as he has been given a position of responsibility. He has gained a position in the community which benefits others and will have a knock on effect”.

Next steps

Ashley Community Housing have now created the course materials for the NOCN (previously the National Open College Network) Energy Efficiency for Sustainability entry level course, which is an effective way to introduce new arrivals to the issue of energy in relation to UK life. They also have resources from Centre for Sustainable Energy. They are therefore able to run course again. This type of work can be included in their support work, which covers a range of issues and needs faced by refugees on arrival to the UK. Additionally, Ahmed is keen to keep volunteering and may be interested in taking further training via the Bristol Energy Network and recruiting another champion from among the tenants to help him deliver energy advice to other tenants and the wider community.

www.ashleyhousing.com

www.bristolcommunityenergy.co.uk