
€ENERGY PROFIT

UTRECHT

Objectives

€energy Profit in Utrecht teaches Turkish and Moroccan women (and other women of non-Western origin) how to save energy and water as well as recycle. This eco-community of women was created not only to raise awareness of environmental issues but as a way of overcoming the cultural differences and linguistic problems that the municipality faces in communicating with these residents. This project fitted into a larger and more mass campaign constructed project which provided energy saving boxes and advice to all low income households in Utrecht.

Background

The energy costs for a large part of residents with a low income are high compared to other living costs. Financial incentives for insulation are only available for house owners, thus it was important to create an energy saving project for low incomes in rental houses. Beside a general project for the low incomes, Utrecht decided to target the Turkish and Moroccan communities. About 20% of Utrecht's population originate from Turkey or Morocco or have an immigrant background.

Responsible institution

The project is coordinated by:

- City of Utrecht
- a small energy consultancy (SME) who developed and provided the communication and training materials
- two neighbourhood based environmental information services in Utrecht.

Activities

Local NGOs in two neighbourhoods recruited 70 Turkish and Moroccan women and trained them to be an 'eco-coach'. These coaches are responsible for training a group of approximately eight friends and neighbours about how to save energy, water and recycle. Women from Somalia, Ethiopia, the Dutch Antilles and the Netherlands also participated in the project.

Participants exchange ideas on how they can best contribute to improve their environment. The local NGO provides learning materials and support in delivering the courses. After completing the four-course programme, all participants receive an 'energy saving box'. The energy saving box contains, among other objects, energy-efficient light bulbs.



Results

In one year, 7,909 low-income households participated in the project. The estimated reduction of CO₂ is approximately 6,400 ton a year. Fifty unemployed people worked as energy advisors and the majority of households (8 out of 10) were content with the quality of the consultations they received. Twelve of the energy advisors that worked for the project have now found jobs in the energy field. Beside this about 800 women participated in the 'eco-coach' project.

Evaluation and follow-up

The evaluation of the project showed that the project worked very well. Participants were satisfied with the services provided and stated they saved approximately 10% on their energy bills. However, in the future, using smart metering (a tool to measure energy consumption) will be a part of the project. Utrecht is now testing the combination of smart metering and the use of social media (blogs) for both rental and privately owned houses. In this way Utrecht hopes to involve more people into energy saving. Neighbours, friends or relatives have more effect than any marketing concept imaginable.

Lessons learned

Drafting the project outline is much easier than executing it. Plan for each step in the project implementation and do not underestimate time constraints, particularly for large-scale projects. Above all, find reliable partner(s) and make sure they have the skills to execute the project. Take time to plan the project with these partners.

Be creative in recruiting households. Utrecht started with sending a letter to these households (response approximately 30%), but ended recruiting participants from low-income households at open-air markets (response of 45%). Utrecht did not achieve the initial objective but most communication tools did reach the desired target group.

Measure energy consumption with a smart meter: the women were unable to read a standard energy meter so the results are based on estimates from other pilot projects.

Find a person in your municipality who can mobilise the desired target group. In this case, it was a Turkish woman who had a broad network of friends. By ringing door bells and actively encouraging residents to join the eco-community, the project's reach expanded.

Budget and resources

The project is funded by financial incentives from the national government and incentives from the municipality for reducing unemployment. The total costs were approximately €2 million. In total about 60 people worked on this project for a year.

Timeline

October 2006 - December 2007.

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If you have an example of a good practice that you would like to include in the database, please send an email to caroline.greene@eurocities.eu.