

Executive Summary

CIVA
Centre for Innovation
in Voluntary Action

Go carbon
neutral

Report of a Behaviour Change programme
with residents on two social housing estates

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This is the summary report of a programme which aimed to encourage behaviour change by residents of low-income communities in response to the threat of global warming. The programme was developed and undertaken by the **Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action (CIVA)**. The programme was evaluated by Dr Alina Cosgrove of the **University of Reading**, who produced an independent evaluation report for the programme. Funding was provided by the **Wates Foundation**, the **Department for Communities and Local Government**, the **Pontin Charitable Trust** and **CIVA**. The programme began in November 2007 and ran to the end of 2008, with the evaluation work continuing until March 2009. This report summarises the findings of this programme in the hope that it will provide some useful learning for those seeking to promote lower-carbon and more sustainable living, especially amongst lower income households and communities. Further copies of this executive summary are available at www.neighbourhoodmanagement.net/downloads/gocarbonneutralsummary.pdf. The full report is available at www.neighbourhoodmanagement.net/downloads/gocarbonneutral.pdf.

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Carbon reduction, behaviour change and lower income households and communities

The general discussion on climate change had been focussed more on those who were already believers and with a bias towards the lifestyles and concerns of more middle class people. Much of the discussion on housing policy and government initiatives had been towards stimulating zero-emissions new-build housing, rather than exploring retro-fitting existing housing stock or seeking ways of promoting behaviour change amongst the occupiers.

For these reasons in 2007 we decided to develop a programme which sought specifically to engage with lower income individuals, households and communities to explore ways in which they might become more engaged with the issues of climate change and living more sustainably, and what might be effective in helping change their attitudes and behaviour.

The two main issues that we wanted to address were energy use in the home and the transport choices that people were making – their use of cars, public transport, cycling, walking or not travelling, as well as their attitudes towards holidaying at home or abroad. We also wanted to include attitudes and behaviour relating to food, water, recycling and growing things in their gardens or on allotments.

How the programme was organised

We created two projects each of which was based in a community of social housing (the Knowle West estate in Bristol and the Cranberry Lane estate in Newham, East London). The Carbon Makeover Project in Bristol was implemented by the Knowle West Media Centre; and the Go Carbon Neutral project in Newham was implemented by East Thames Housing Association. Both of these appointed two members of staff to engage with local residents and to develop and implement their programmes of activities.

The projects worked at the household level by showing residents some of the options for reducing energy usage and encouraging them to keep carbon diaries so as to record their behaviour and to track the changes they were making. Both projects also offered some of their residents smart meters so that people could measure their energy use and be made aware of the costs. Another technique we used for some of the houses on each estate was thermal imaging, which very graphically showed the heat (and the money) being wasted. Both projects also worked at the community level by organising awareness-raising public events and activities which encouraged specific issues such as cycling, reducing water use and eating local food, as well as providing advice and organising “carbon surgeries”. Activities which sought to engage young people and schools were also organised. Small “community leadership grants” were offered to residents wishing to develop and run their own projects within the terms of reference of the programme. We also undertook a survey of a sample of joiners (people who signed up to the project with the aim of taking positive steps to reduce their carbon emissions) and of non-joiners as a control group, asking questions at the start and again at the end of the programme.

Our key findings

Both projects experienced challenges in trying to change people's behaviour, and some of these challenges can provide important learning for others seeking to effect behaviour change. The following are some of our key findings.

1. Trust in the people who are promoting climate action

One of the barriers to action on climate change is that people do not seem to trust the messengers – who are mainly politicians, scientists and environmental activists. We also found a significant resistance from the joiners, particularly in Knowle West where nearly 100 households agreed to take and use the Carbon Passbooks, but only 24 agreed to participate in the before-and-after survey despite our offer of incentives to do so.

There was a polarisation on this issue in both neighbourhoods. The majority of people had a very low level of trust towards institutions and people in power; but a significant minority indicated a surprisingly high level of trust. For example, at Cranberry Lane 62% stated that they had a very low level of trust in their landlord, East Thames, whilst 21% stated that they had a very high level of trust. Trust in the London Borough or Newham was similarly polarised with 52% of residents having a very low level and 24% a very high level.

Before people will readily accept green advice from a local authority or their landlord, more work needs to be done to build levels of trust. An alternative messenger would be a community champion – someone living in the community who is known and has already created trust within the community, who can become a focal point for disseminating information and encouraging greener living.

These are some other related issues which are worth considering:

- **There needs to be a sufficient level of community cohesion.** A residents association could be used as a focal point for disseminating information and organising events in the community. Neither estate had a well-functioning and well-led residents association. Knowle West is a large estate dating from the 1950s. The Knowle West Media Centre, a successful and

much-respected local community organisation, was used by and reached out to only a minority of residents on the Knowle West estate. Cranberry Lane is very much smaller community in an area isolated from its surrounding neighbourhood with only one point of ingress and quite distant from any local shops, and which has two different social landlords plus an enclave of privately-rented housing. We encouraged East Thames to revive what had once been a functioning residents association, but they were unable to make this happen successfully within the timescale of our programme.

- **There is a need for competence and creativity in community outreach and development.** In Knowle West, the Knowle West Media Centre was able to engage well with those residents who wanted to use their services and benefit from their programmes, and amongst their client base there was an active and committed core group of people who believed in and wanted to participate in the project. But in Cranberry Lane, East Thames, whilst subscribing to the idea of community mobilisation, seemed more adept at organising things for the community than at engaging with the community. Previous programmes, such as Community Champions had come and gone, as our Go Carbon Neutral project will have done. If promotion of behaviour change is to become an important part of action on climate change, as opposed to the use of legislation, pricing or technology solutions, then much more expertise by many landlords in community mobilisation will be needed; this is an issue that might be relevant for many social landlords.
- **Providing information in newsletters and leaflets will not have sufficient impact.** This is often a first step that people take to disseminate information, as it is something that is both easy and relatively cheap to do. Both projects put time and effort into disseminating information in this way. But effective communication involves not only providing people with information, but that they also read it and respond to it. Our recommendation is that any attempt to effect behaviour change needs better and more effective processes for disseminating information in the community, and appropriate structures

need to be created within communities for communication and encouraging action.

- **Any community campaign needs to have sufficient local visibility.** People are more likely to do something if they see others doing it... and a “tipping point” can soon be reached if enough people start to do it. This seems to have been what happened with kerbside recycling. The fact that once a week everybody leaves their bottles, cans and paper in the street to be collected, makes those who are not doing it feel that they should be. On both estates there was an attempt to create some sort of visibility for their projects, through organising regular events and publishing newsletters. In Knowle West, joiners were given “plaques” to put in their windows, but perhaps greater visibility could have been achieved if the project had had a tighter geographical focus (on just a part of the estate, such as one ward or a distinct area) rather than have sought to operate across the whole estate. And more could have been done on both estates to show everyone that a campaign was taking place, and to create a momentum for people’s involvement. Perhaps like a Low Emission Zone, signs could have been put up to brand the neighborhood and to indicate to people that they were entering or living in a “Low Carbon Zone”.
- **Children can be a good point of entry for changing adult behaviour.** Research done in Canada has shown that persuading primary-age children at school is an effective way of creating household behaviour change, as they then will use their “pester power” to get their parents to do things differently – such as turn off the lights when leaving the room or air dry clothes in the summer. The Knowle West Media Centre works extensively with young people using the media to promote environmental awareness, and young people produced some persuasive videos on these issues which were used in their project. The Cranberry Lane estate abuts both a primary and a secondary school, and some projects were agreed with the school and run with the children in term time and the school holidays.

2. Knowledge of the issues and seeing them as important

Despite the headlines in the newspapers and the

emphasis that government and environmental activists have been giving to climate change and encouraging people to do things to reduce their carbon emissions (Prime Minister Blair referred to it as the most important issue facing the planet), these messages may not be translating into a society that is sufficiently well informed about the issue or sufficiently motivated to do what is required to address it.

Our survey found that amongst the non-joiners at Knowle West only 35% claimed to know a lot or a fair amount about climate change, and just 18% claimed to be knowledgeable enough to be able to explain the issue to someone else. At Cranberry Lane, 35% thought that being green is an alternative lifestyle and not something that is really relevant for the majority of people.

There was also a view that being environmentally friendly would take too much time (36%) and too much effort (30%), and a degree of unhealthy scepticism characterised by views such as: *“Environmental problems have been exaggerated”*; *“My contribution to pollution is minimal”*; *“Let others contribute to solving the problem; they have more opportunity to do so”*; *“It is too much effort for me to make”*; *“I’ve already done my share”*; *“I’m too busy to make changes”*.

There are a number of other related issues:

- **There is some confusion about what actions can realistically impact on climate change.** The main contributors to people’s carbon emissions are home energy use, transport and meat eating/food waste. But these were not necessarily the same issues that residents identified as important. For example, 71% of joiners at Knowle West and 69% of residents at Cranberry Lane thought that recycling would have a major impact on reducing global warming, and not using plastic bags when shopping was one of the more popular community campaigns run at Knowle West. These “popular” issues may be a good entry point for effecting change, but they need to lead on to people taking action on those issues that really matter.
- **Even where people feel well informed about the issues of climate change, this does not seem to translate into actual or sustained behaviour change.** On electricity use in the home, for example, 81% of Cranberry Lane residents claimed that they were trying to limit

their electricity use and 83% claimed to be monitoring their energy bills, but only half of households at Cranberry Lane regularly used the low temperature or economy setting on their washing machine. As a society we “know” much more than we “do”, and this resistance to changing what we do will always act as a drag on any attempt to modify people’s behaviour. This calls into question the way in which media campaigns are being used to promote lower-carbon living, such as the campaign in 2010 which asked people to “Drive 5 Miles Less”. People already know that driving is both expensive and that it generates carbon emissions, and that for either or both of these reasons they ought to be driving less, walking more and using public transport more. But they aren’t doing this. Telling them won’t make them.

- **Most people will say that they are doing more than they actually are** – either because they believe this to be the case, or because they want to respond positively to the questions they are being asked. This will reflect over-optimistically on how people’s behaviour is changing unless steps are taken to validate the information that is obtained from surveys.

3. Behaviour change means more than just telling people

If people are to change how they live, alternative courses of action need to be made convenient, affordable and readily available. So unless these issues of convenience, price and availability are addressed, simply exhorting behaviour change will probably not do much to change people’s actual behaviour on any sustained basis.

There are already very simple and relatively effortless actions which cumulatively could reduce household energy use. One list produced by Cardiff City Council allows a household to reduce by as much as 2.4 tonnes per annum. Just telling people about these will not make them take the suggested actions.

There is a real challenge in finding ways of making people do some of the really simple things that could contribute significantly towards carbon reduction. One technique that we used was the Carbon Passbook or Carbon Diary, which set out some simple steps people could take so that they

could do them and record their actions. These were given to joiners – the people who agreed to sign up to the project – who did undertake many of these suggestions; but our survey was not able to identify whether their changes in behaviour were sustained over a period of time.

One possible way forward is to take the solutions to people and to become much more hands on than simply providing information and encouragement. Household Energy Service, a recent winner of the NESTA Big Green Challenge, adopts this strategy and claims to be creating a substantial level of household carbon reduction. Their starting point is to offer a free energy audit, which then leads to their providing actual assistance in implementing energy reductions. They claim that over 1,000 households in Shropshire were saving an average of 29% of their carbon emissions and £380 of their fuel bills per year (www.h-e-s.org). We had hoped to trial a similar scheme in Knowle West, using a door-to-door approach for installing low energy lighting and providing general energy advice organised as a social enterprise; but this fell through when the person identified found full-time paid work. However, his initial efforts prompted the development of www.green-homes.org.uk. If such schemes could be developed and perhaps funded through carbon credits or micro-loans from energy suppliers paid off through the savings generated, then they could be scaled up quite easily.

There was a consensus amongst the people we talked to that any initiative should concentrate its efforts first on the women in the household – and mostly it was women who got involved in our behaviour change programme. Obviously it is then important to help the women find a way of getting the whole family involved.

4. Price and financial incentives may not be an effective driver of behaviour change

Whilst our programme was being run, energy prices skyrocketed, but this did not translate into any significant drop in household energy use during the timescale of the project. This was despite the fact that we were working with lower income people. Fuel poverty in the UK affects an estimated 4 million households, and the poorest 10% of UK households

are spending at least eight times more of their gross income on energy as the wealthiest 10% are. People, at least in the short term, will continue to use energy at levels they are comfortable with, and then make savings in other areas of their lives – just as they continue to use their cars when petrol prices rise.

People also appeared to have a surprisingly high level of resistance to availing themselves of free energy improvements in the home. Most households were very resistant to the idea of having improved home insulation or having home energy monitors (smart meters). At Cranberry Lane, 67% did not want the insulation in their home improved, whilst only 23% did want this. The non-joiners and worryingly many joiners as well at Knowle West were also strongly against insulation. Unless this resistance is addressed, wealthier households will be the ones who will benefit most from any improvement grants on offer.

5. Lower carbon living will need more than just behaviour change

Our survey showed that project participants had little confidence that promoting behaviour change in order to seek a reduction in people's carbon emissions would be effective. They prefer to put their faith in either technology or the Government to sort out the problem (either through the provision of services or by legislation).

The one thing that residents of Cranberry Lane thought would make the most difference was lower-emission cars (77% of respondents). This compared with the much smaller number (57%) who thought that reducing their gas and electricity consumption would make a major difference.

During the past two or three years, the term "behaviour change" has become much more widely used when discussing carbon reduction. Perhaps our most important finding is that it is far easier to talk about behaviour change than to effect it. The implications of this are that technological solutions (for reducing energy use and generating green energy) are likely to play a really important part in creating the very substantial carbon reductions that the government has signed up to. Encouraging attitude and behaviour change could still remain an important way of creating and maintaining a consensus amongst the population that something

needs to be done, but without there being any expectation that any substantial behaviour change will be a direct outcome of doing this.

6. The role of social landlords

One factor we noted and discussed was the potential for encouraging landlords to assume much greater responsibility for the energy efficiency of the homes in their ownership. The idea of a socially responsible housing provider should become as current as that of a socially (and more recently, environmentally) responsible company, both in the private rented sector and also for social landlords. Whilst companies now are encouraged towards carbon disclosure and to set targets for their energy use as well as being subject to "cap and trade" under the European Emissions Trading Scheme, there is no similar approach or framework for the owners of rented housing (and especially for social landlords who are renting to lower income people).

This is an area where more could usefully be done. One positive step would be to reward those tenants who commit to behaviour change with improvements that increase the thermal efficiency of their housing, and thereby reduce their energy consumption. Many social renters are also more than capable of physically making small improvements to their homes, which could cut the costs of work for the landlord or government. But some measures would need to be put in place to make sure elderly and disabled households who could not physically make improvements did not lose out. Agreements between landlords and tenants about saving energy and what each party is going to do are becoming common in the retail and office sectors. If this approach is adopted, tenants would start to see the financial benefits in lower energy bills, so might be further persuaded to take more steps to reduce their carbon footprint. A partnership of residents, landlords and government (through the grants and incentives that it can offer) all working together in a concerted way to reduce carbon emissions should be a more successful approach than simply urging tenants to live greener or providing grants on a take-it or leave-it basis.

Lessons we learned

Although our programme did yield useful results and learning, it did not fully fulfil the very high hopes that we had for it at the outset. There were several reasons for this:

1. The absence of sufficient community cohesion in our two project areas

With hindsight, we should have factored both this and the need for expertise in facilitating community development into our partner and site selection for what was a demonstration programme of just one-year's duration.

2. A failure by one partner to deliver the programme adequately

We had to terminate our support to East Thames (with the agreement of our main funder) six months after they launched their project in Cranberry Lane. Their failure included a seven-month delay in getting started, poor management, and personality issues amongst project staff and volunteers.

3. Problems with the community surveys

We used a survey as a starting point for engaging with residents as well as for the evaluation. The initial survey at the outset was followed by a survey at the end of the programme a year later. This provided an opportunity to ask "Are you doing....?" and then "Are you still doing....?". We had hoped to be able to measure before and after behaviour through undertaking a sample survey of both "joiners" and "non-joiners" on each estate, which would have given us a picture of how behaviour had changed and what changes could be attributed directly to our programme.

Several factors mitigated against more useful results from our survey work – difficulties with training and supervising the surveyors (who were local residents); small sample size (which was partly for budget reasons); different household members

being interviewed before and after; and those who were interviewed at the outset being unavailable for interview at the end. In Cranberry Lane, the small size of the estate made it hard to differentiate between joiners and non-joiners as most of the activities that were organised were targeted at the estate as a whole.

Although we were able to extract some useful data from the survey work, it was nowhere near what we had hoped for. Further survey work perhaps building on our experience, better resourced and on a wider scale could usefully be undertaken.

4. Project design

We were happy with the broad structure of our programme and the types of activities that were included – the survey, which was also a means of interesting local people in the programme; carbon diaries; activities and events to highlight specific issues and get people involved; advice and surgeries; and community leadership awards to encourage locally-led projects.

We wanted the two local projects to be fully under the control of our local partners who were running them. We made them responsible for developing their programme of activities as well as for the actual delivery, rather than ourselves developing a detailed plan of action and then asking our partners to implement this. We feel that developing plans locally in response to local circumstances, local needs and local opportunities was the right approach. But with hindsight, both projects probably included too many activities and events on too wide a range of issues. Perhaps it would have been better if the programme had concentrated on fewer things and done each of them more intensively.

Many residents bought into the arguments on the global warming issue when these were clearly explained to them. Some already understood them, and were already doing quite a lot in their lives to address the issue. Others just needed encouragement. But many people need more than this. A community-level campaign can be a good starting point for effecting behaviour change, so long as this is not done in isolation and other steps are taken alongside.

There are two other issues worth noting:

- **Too short a timescale:** We wanted to create a short sharp programme the learning from which would contribute towards policy and practice. At the time we launched the programme, there was great emphasis on the urgency of responding to the challenge of climate change, that time was running out (for example, the 100 Months Campaign, which gave 100 months to save the planet: www.onehundredmonths.org). People were also looking to the 2009 Copenhagen Summit where targets would be set. We decided on a one-year programme with a six-month period prior to its starting for planning and preparation. Although we feel that we were right in wanting to do things quickly, we probably could have done things better if the programme had been run over a six-month longer period.
- **Too small a budget. We tried to do too much with too little:** A bigger budget for the project would have enabled us to work more intensively to engage with a greater proportion of the community, to undertake the survey work more effectively, and to have money available which we could have used as incentives or to put towards the cost of people making improvements in their homes. But it is also true that the resources that were available would have had more impact if they had been focused on a smaller number of issues or in the case of Knowle West in a smaller geographical area. In actual practice, at Cranberry Lane the resources were underspent and opportunities to lever in further funding from regeneration projects were not followed through. The balance of funding might not have been quite right – how much was spent on staff and how much then left for the programme of activities. Both projects would have benefited from capital expenditure for improving people's homes alongside the community development work. We would recommend a better-resourced programme for anyone wanting to do something similar.

Summary of outcomes

There were quite a lot of positives that emerged from our programme. People on both estates did change their behaviour as a result of the intervention. Useful learning did emerge from the project for how to address the issue of behaviour change especially regarding home energy use and transport in lower income communities, which we hope will be helpful and encourage others to develop further initiatives targeted at this sector.

Knowle West Media Centre used the programme to develop their environmental work. In particular, they were able to:

- Successfully influence local government policy and planning.
- Create partnerships and collaboration for addressing the issue of climate change locally.
- Develop ideas for promoting behaviour change, which they then were able to disseminate and get adopted more widely.
- Create a mechanism for peer advocacy for action on climate change, plus accompanying resources. They have developed their **Carbon Passbook** as an on-line resource and obtained a further grant from the **Wates Foundation** to share their experience and provide consultancy to other social housing providers and residents.

All of those who were involved in the programme were also able to contribute to many discussions and conferences on climate change. Project organisers and community representatives from both projects, the programme organiser and the evaluator all made presentations and participated in consultations and discussions, sharing their experience and highlighting the importance of attitude and behaviour change as part of the strategy for achieving the ambitious targets that government has set for reducing the UK's carbon emissions.

