

EBICO TRUST PROJECT REPORT Q1 (2015)

Background

DHA (Direct Help and Advice) is a registered charity who offer free, independent and confidential services that offer support to the most vulnerable people in our communities. Direct help is given via specialist advice, advocacy and representation for families and individuals facing crisis, homelessness, debt and housing difficulties.

It was against this background and history that the management of DHA and the Board of Trustees decided to grow the services on offer to include Energy Efficiency Advice. Issues surrounding fuel poverty and fuel debt are interlinked with many of the issues DHA clients face.

Under the government's new fuel poverty definition (low income, high cost) there are 10.4% of households in the Erewash area who are living in fuel poverty. Using the previous 10% indicator there are 15.7% of household living in fuel poverty. The Keeping Erewash Warm project aims to address some of the factors that contribute to these figures.

The granting of funding from the EBICO Trust, for which DHA are extremely grateful, has enabled the employment of a part time Energy Efficiency Coordinator to take this project forward.

Project Start

Mid April saw the Coordinator in post, on a part time basis of 20 hours per week, City and Guilds 6281-01 Energy Awareness qualified and experienced in working in a number of sectors delivering energy efficiency programmes.

The Coordinator believes a holistic service will enable the project to succeed. Home visits are vital when combining debt, fuel debt and energy efficiency advice as it enables the advisor to check directly what improvements can be made to the thermal efficiency of the building, check if central heating systems and appliances are being used correctly, and help with bill and tariff checking.

Residents visited at home will be offered:-

- Energy efficiency advice, including behavioural change advice where necessary, to help reduce future bills.
- Advice on making energy efficiency improvements to the home (insulation, boiler upgrades, draught proofing etc) and help with sourcing funding for improvements if appropriate.
- Checking energy bills are correct and meter readings are up to date.
- Help with understanding energy bills

- Help with understanding how to read gas and electricity meters.
- Tariff checking and supporting residents to choose the most appropriate tariff/supplier for their needs.
- Checking residents are receiving the financial help towards their bills they are entitled to ie Winter Fuel Payment and Warm Home Discount.
- Fuel debt advice
- Help with applications to trust funds for relief of fuel debt and help with purchasing energy efficient household equipment.
- Referral and signposting to agencies.

The first month of the project was very heavily focused on building working relationships and forging new partnerships and understanding DHA operations.

Activities

The first 3 months has seen the Energy Efficiency Coordinator support Erewash Citizens Advice Bureau at 3 Health, Wealth and Wellbeing events. The events are in partnership with Derbyshire Public Health, targeting specific areas which have pockets of deprivation where residents are known not to readily access services. Both a drop in service and pre booked home visits are offered:

- 3 events attended resulting in ;
- 6 pre booked home visits plus;
- 11 residents 'dropped in'

Totalling

- 17 households being given advice and 24 residents benefiting from that advice.

Networking with local organisations is bringing in referrals. Activity undertaken in Q1 (April – June 2015)

- 12 households visited
- 17 residents benefiting from the advice given.

DHA Energy Efficiency Co ordinator delivered presentations to 2 community groups, both relatively small but engaged with residents who are at risk of social exclusion and fuel poverty. 26 residents in total attended the 2 community events.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

For the project to be a success good partnerships with other organisations are going to be essential. With that in mind the Co ordinator has met with;

- Derbyshire NHS Home from Hospital Volunteer Co ordinator – assists in getting discharged patients settled back at home and ensuring measures are

in place to prevent re admission. Cold homes exacerbate numerous health conditions. The project is now providing volunteers with a referral pathway to DHA if they are concerned by a residents ability to keep warm or pay energy bills.

- Derbyshire County Council's Libraries Access and Inclusion Manager: Health and Communities. 3 libraries in Erewash have Health and Wellbeing Zones which carry information on various topics. It was agreed that energy efficiency advice drop in sessions and a pilot workshop would be held.
- Derbyshire Public Health Development Co ordinator, Health and Housing. Public Health is moving to a preventative agenda rather than a cure agenda. There is scope for the project and Public Health to work in partnership, especially moving into the winter period.
- Dates have been arranged with Community Concern Erewash to give presentations in the coming months.

Other organisations DHA is currently working with on referring residents to the project include;

- Erewash CAB
- Erewash Credit Union
- Derbyshire Children's Centre's

MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

As well as marketing the project with partners the project was launched on social media and volunteers at DHA have delivered 500 flyers to targeted households.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study A

Mr A was struggling with household finances including his energy bills. He had not looked at checking his tariff as he had been told he was on the cheapest tariff available but after investigation it became clear that was 3 years ago. The Energy Efficiency Co ordinator discussed energy usage and conducted a tariff check. This resulted in Mr A switching supplier and tariff and saving £300 per year. This saving put an extra 7.5% into the household income. Mr A had taken early retirement in the past 12 months and had used a small pension lump sum to pay off debts. However, the lump sum is counted as income for tax purposes and resulted in a loss of tax credits leaving the household £4000 a year to live off. Mr A was advised to get a 'real time' reassessment of the households tax credits. A good illustration of a bigger outcome than the initial enquiry.

Case Study B

Mrs B lives alone with a cleaner/carer visiting once a week. Mrs B has mild memory loss and couldn't remember if a change of supplier request had been made. She was also confused about who her current supplier was and her billing situation. The Energy Efficiency Co ordinator made a home visit. Retained bills indicated her supplier as Eon, no recent bills were available. A call to Eon by the Co ordinator was able to establish Mrs B was still their customer and no request to move supplier had been received. Meter readings were taken and given to Eon and up to date bills were requested. These details were also explained to the cleaner, who has the confidence of Mrs B. When the up to date bills arrived the Energy Efficiency Co ordinator revisited. It was obvious her electricity use was higher than expected for her circumstances. Talking to Mrs B she explained there was a storage radiator in the second bedroom which was permanently on because she didn't know how to use it or turn it off. After discussion with the resident it was decided to turn it off, saving Mrs B £298 per year. It also became clear that Mrs B was involved with other agencies but she couldn't remember 'who was doing what'. Further investigation clarified the situation – SSAFA are trying to organise a rewire and Care & Repair are trying to source funding to upgrade the central heating boiler and extend the central heating system into the upstairs rooms. Both the cleaner and Mrs B have a firmer grasp on the current situation. A tariff check was put on hold at the customers request due 'information overload'. This will be revisited by the Energy Efficiency Co ordinator.

CONCLUSION

DHA would like to thank Ebico Trust for supporting DHA's energy efficiency project in an area of need. It has enabled us to offer a fully inclusive project to the residents of Erewash, especially those unable to get into advice centres.