

A LEARNING BASED APPROACH

CASE STUDY 3

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	2
SUMMARY	3
THE APPROACH	4
MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN	8
Lessons for success.....	11
REFLECTIONS	12
For more information	13
ENDNOTES	13

SUMMARY

What people know and think affects how they act. Information and knowledge about an activity is important, but not sufficient to activate most kinds of pro-environmental behaviour change.¹

A person's values, perceptions, motivations, habits, skills, social environment, and local context all influence their behaviour.

Over four case studies, we explore approaches adopted by projects funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) programme to support pro-environmental behaviour.

These case studies highlight practical lessons for success and reflect on what to consider if adopting the approach.

This third case study explores how the CLS project, L8 Living Sustainably in Liverpool, has used an experiential learning model of behaviour change (learning by doing) to drive the design and delivery of the project.

For community groups, organisations, and local authorities designing projects to influence pro-environmental behaviour in communities, three key design lessons have emerged from using a learning-based approach:

- Community-based organisations play an important role in initiating and supporting learning-based pro-environmental approaches, which by their nature are intensive and small scale.
- Social events with practical activities have been found to be a good way to engage people in the community and open up opportunities for conversations about food, energy, and living more sustainably.
- Social and economic deprivation place significant barriers to pro-environmental behaviour which need to be addressed through enabling infrastructure at the local level and through national government policy.

THE APPROACH

L8 Living Sustainably aimed to support a more aware, educated, empowered, and enabled community, capable of delivering its own responses to climate change over the five-year period of the project. The project approach was shaped by the day-to-day realities of people living in the area, and a learning approach adopted by the lead organisation Granby Toxteth Development Trust, which specialises in community development.

L8 Living Sustainably worked with residents in two wards of Liverpool (17,070 households) close to the city centre – Princes Park and Riverside – which have some of the highest levels of deprivation in Liverpool (93% of Princes Park and 38.6% of Riverside are in the 5% most deprived areas nationally).

Unemployment levels are high (27% Princes Park, 17% Riverside) and educational attainment levels are lower than the city average across the project area. Princes Park has the highest proportion of single occupancy households of all Liverpool wards (56.2% Princes Park, 46% Riverside). It is estimated that one in seven households² in the city live in fuel poverty, and 33% use pre-payment meters, which is one of the most expensive ways to pay for energy.

The project focused on two themes of activity:

- Promoting local sustainable food sources.
- Raising awareness of energy efficiency, the costs of energy, and the importance of sustainable energy sources.

The significant concentrations of socially rented properties in the area (54% Princes Park, 32% Riverside) meant that establishing good working relationships with social landlords was important to progress the project's work on energy efficiency.

The project team employed a hyper-local approach to delivery, working with volunteer champions and other local organisations³ to engage with residents, build capacity within the community, and scale out activities. Examples of the project activities are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of projects

Aimed to	Projects
<p>Raise awareness of sustainable food and increase growing activities.</p>	<p>Patchwork Urban Farm</p> <p>A total of 1.56 hectares (31 growing sites) was brought into cultivation through a mix of community gardens and <i>meanwhile</i> use space across the project area. Local food was promoted through a local food retailer (L8 Superstore), and a Veg Van. Over 300 people were engaged in growing activities.</p>

Table 1 cont.

Aimed to	Projects
<p>Raise awareness of sustainable food and increase growing activities.</p>	<p>Patchwork Urban Farm cont.</p> <p>The team supported the identification and assessment of meanwhile use sites across the wards, helped to secure agreement with the council, and supported the set-up of the site and the community group.</p> <p>Seed share</p> <p>The project team provided support and training to develop fruit and vegetable growing and encourage seed swapping between community gardens. Eighteen community gardens participated.</p> <p>Walk the ward</p> <p>People were encouraged to join walks led by volunteers to visit project sites (growing sites, energy, and recycling) and engage in activities.</p>
<p>Raising awareness of energy efficiency and living well.</p>	<p>Volunteer Champions</p> <p>Based on a community organising model, champions were trained in listening skills and on energy audits. They provided support to residents on how to reduce their energy use, and implement cost saving and pro-environmental measures such as insulation.</p> <p>Community Living Rooms</p> <p>Neighbours were brought together in community centres to spend time and share a meal. Information was shared about how to keep warm (thermal comfort, energy efficiency, help with switching) and eat well.</p> <p>Loving Lodge Lane Festival</p> <p>This three-day community festival celebrated the area and included activities to make a <i>cleaner and greener</i> environment. Fun activities were used to engage people in pro-environmental behaviour with a focus on local food (bee-keeping, community garden visits, cooking), and waste (furniture up-cycling, wheelie bin art, and providing skips to dispose of bulky items).</p>

Table 1 cont.

Aimed to	Projects
<p>Increase awareness and use of renewable energy.</p>	<p>Neighbourhood Power Station</p> <p>The project plans to develop an L8 Community Energy venture to generate renewable energy on two demonstration buildings and five schools. Energy generated will be used by the demonstration sites to reduce their operational costs.</p> <p>A Climate Change Point</p> <p>This community-based resource provided access to support and information on climate change, and the project's activities.</p>
<p>Reduce waste by increasing re-use of materials.</p>	<p>Bulky goods</p> <p>The project supports activities around recycling which contribute to <i>cleaning and greening</i> the area. This includes working with Bulk Bob's, a bulky goods removal and reuse service, to prevent fly tipping.</p> <p>Waste Not Want Not and Trash to Treasure events</p> <p>Creative projects using recycled materials such as broken tiles for mosaics, and refurbishing furniture for distribution to residents.</p>

Learning is a theme which runs through all the project activities. Underpinning the design of the project activities is Kolb's experiential learning cycle,⁴ which is based on the principle that a person learns through discovery and experience.

This informs both the practical focus of the project, and how the project team work intensively with volunteer champions, who are then expected to use their experience to influence their peers and deliver project activities.

"It's all about taking it right the way back to grass roots and finding out why people struggle. To change behaviour you have to understand behaviour and the reasons people do what they do. Sometimes it may be just practical – there is no room in the kitchen if people are living in multiple occupancy properties for a recycling bin."

Lindsey Guy, Executive Director, Granby Toxteth Development Trust

The project provided the opportunities and resources for residents to become involved in practical projects, which increased participants' confidence that they would be able to take action.

The learning approach was also applied to the way the project team worked together to review activities in weekly task groups with volunteer champions, and the way they reflected on and revised the project activities on a monthly basis (an adaptive cycle of practice, reflection, and adjustment).

Applying a learning approach required intensive work with residents in small groups. Volunteer Champions, individuals from the community who supported project activities, played an important role in mobilising people in the community. When asked what had motivated them to be involved with the project, a common response from volunteers was *to help people*.⁵

MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Climate change and energy efficiency were generally not high-priority concerns for residents that live in the area. Social events with practical activities were found to be a good way to engage people in the community, and open up opportunities for conversations about food, energy, and living more sustainably.

These group events ranged from *Trash to Treasure* events making mosaics for recycled tiles, to *Waste Not, Want Not* events refurbishing furniture and giving it to residents, to putting on roadshows in Climate Week (giving away free energy-saving light bulbs, energy monitors, indoor recycling bins, alongside holding advice sessions on reducing energy use and offers of energy audits). Box A describes the Community Living Rooms approach which has proven popular with residents.

"We have made a giant step, as we get people out of their houses. People come because it is fun and creative; it's not being told you need to recycle. A leaflet pushed through the door about recycling will not work."

Project Team Member talking about Trash to Treasure activities

L8 Living Sustainably framed the benefits of energy reduction in terms of cost savings. Importantly, advice focused on simple low-cost activities that people could take immediate action on such as not leaving electrical goods on standby, changing to energy-saving bulbs, and reducing draughts around letter boxes and windows.

After learning in an energy advice session that leaving a plug on standby could cost £19 per plug per year, Kathy, one of the community volunteers, took immediate action.

"I went home after the meeting and I actually turned off everything that was on standby, there were about 10 things, that's a lot of money."

Community volunteer

Ben, a local resident had been at the fuel debt advice session and mentioned to one of the project team that he had had the bailiffs around.

Ben was given an energy monitor and he reported he had spent the night switching things off:

"[...] particularly my kettle and Xbox as I could see how much it was costing me."

Local resident

Residents were unlikely to travel to events so the project team played an important brokering role bringing other organisations into the community to deliver their advice sessions, and organising residents' attendance.

Box A: Community Living Rooms

Community Living Rooms is a project inspired by the Urban Sociologist Ray Oldenburg's concept of 'third places' where people can gather on neutral ground and interact simply for the pleasure of good company. Oldenburg emphasises the importance of these informal public gathering places to support a community's social vitality and the grassroots of democracy.

Adapting this idea, the project hosted a range of pop-up living rooms where people gathered from across the area to raise awareness of low-cost ways to save energy, and low-cost ways to eat well.

Locations were selected where people already gathered together in the community, preferably within walking distance of their home, such as community centres, churches, events, and sheltered accommodation. The project delivered these events in partnership with a wide range of community-based organisations to increase its reach.

Emphasis was placed on creating a convivial space which was warm and welcoming where people could spend time together and share a meal. Conversation was the main activity, alongside practical activities themed around food, saving energy, and recycling. Example activities include making draught excluders from old tights, and making hot-water-bottle covers from old jumpers.

Volunteer chefs made soup for the events with ingredients sourced from the local affordable supermarket (L8 Superstore). Participants were given a recipe for the soup, as well as seeds and an advice sheet on how to grow their own herbs and vegetables.

The project area has the highest proportion of single-occupancy households in Liverpool. In addition to creating a social space to talk about energy saving and food, the project has reported that these events reduced social isolation in the community. This approach was particularly popular with elderly people.

One of the largest areas of activity for the project was supporting the development of community-led food projects on derelict and existing (but unused) sites in the project area.

A wide range of residents were engaged through this project including a Somali women's group, residents from the Roma community, and where possible the project partnered with a local school (Box B).

The project provided practical support to initiate the gardens by identifying 25 potential sites, and identifying priority sites for development using a set of selection criteria which included enhancement of the local area, community interest to use the site, and political support.⁶

Ten priority sites were identified to progress in the first year of the project and 12 as priority sites for year two. The total amount of land brought into cultivation of 1.56 hectares created a *patch work farm* across the two wards.

“We recognised that if we encouraged people to do that [grow food] it was not because it would reduce CO₂; we recognised it was about cheap, healthy food, meeting your neighbours, having fun, somewhere for the kids to go.”

Project Team member

Box B: Growing with Kingsley

Growing with Kingsley brought together a range of partners to encouraging families around the Kingsley Road School to come together and grow vegetables using the school’s growing site.

Over a period of six weeks during the 2015 summer holidays, volunteers from the community cleared the existing raised beds, planted vegetables and herbs, watered the plants, and weeded the beds.

A healthy halal lunch was provided at each session, with a chef on site to answer any questions about cooking. The project reported that the number of families grew steadily over the summer as word got around, with over 40 people on site in the final two weeks.

A summer party with a children’s entertainer was held in the final week to celebrate achievements. The school has employed a gardener who will continue to work with children on growing projects.

The project put in place the legal permissions to use the growing site either from the council (the main landowner in the area) for meanwhile use, or other owners.

Other practical support is provided to help mobilise volunteers, and provide resources such as seed-share kits (a variety of seeds, potatoes, onions, pots, and trays).

The project held open days inviting people to get involved, and learn how to grow vegetables and herbs. Recipe cards and growing cards were made available through the project website. Establishing a good working relationship with the local authority was important to securing meanwhile use agreements for the sites.

Each of the plots evolved its own characteristics, reflecting the diversity of the community, and groups began to request different seeds (chillies, coriander). One of the groups is now working to become legally constituted. Fern Grove, the first garden developed, grew from one keyholder for the plot to 20 keyholders who regularly use the garden.

The project introduced the experiment of bee-keeping and activities around honey harvests after deciding to broaden the appeal of the garden for residents. This led to

discussions about planting wild flowers and increasing biodiversity. Eighteen gardens also participated in sharing seeds.

The aim was to develop this network of gardens to form the basis of a swap-and-exchange mechanism to support cooking and local produce selling in subsequent years.

Ideas explored by the project to extend engagement in pro-environmental behaviour included developing a green prescriptions model with the Clinical Commissioning Group⁷ to encourage involvement in growing and cooking healthy local food activities.

Lessons for success

The project team offered the following lessons for success:

- **Relevance.** To change behaviour you have to understand why people behave the way they do. The first step towards behaviour change is engaging residents through their interests, and relating these to sustainable living. Review and reflect on the experience and continually refine and adjust project activities.
- **Encouragement.** A patient and encouraging ethos is needed to create a positive experience for all of those involved. Projects need to create a supported environment where people can experiment and learn. Encourage group action and use peer pressure to support behaviour change.
- **Partnership.** The most successful community gardens are those delivered in partnership with a public, community, or private sector partner. A strong partnership with the council is also essential to secure the meanwhile use of the growing sites. (By working closely on the project, the team influenced the council's approach to community engagement.)

REFLECTIONS

The findings of L8 Living Sustainably and research into pro-environmental behaviour change highlight two areas for consideration when thinking about supporting pro-environmental behaviour in communities with high levels of deprivation:

- **Community-based organisations.** Lewin's Change Theory suggests that lasting change requires a process of engagement where the target group is considered a partner in the process. The engagement process is one of learning by doing, which Darnton's review of behaviour change models concluded to be the most effective way for people to undergo change.⁸ There are implications regarding the expected scale of change that can be achieved, the time period to support that change, and the resources required to support activities within communities. Using this model of change, community-based organisations become part of the essential infrastructure to catalyse and support learning-based activities. L8 Living Sustainably's approach of training other community-based organisations and community volunteers is one way to scale out this learning approach. The role of community-based organisations is also recognised in the 2014 review of research evidence on the behaviours and attitudes of households in fuel poverty.⁹ The review notes that information about energy issues is better received if it is contextualised and from a trusted source (local organisations, colleagues, friends, relatives, neighbours). The high levels of mistrust of energy companies increases the importance of building community support for vulnerable groups.
- **Context.** Many of the theories of pro-environmental behaviour focus on understanding an individual's motivations (attitudes, social norms, habits). A person's behaviour, however, does not depend on motivations alone. There are many contextual factors, such as the provision of infrastructure in an area (the availability of public transport, recycling facilities), the availability of products and their affordability, and the levels of social and economic deprivation which constrain pro-environmental behaviour. Many of these issues lie outside of the control of individuals and community-based projects. In the L8 Living Sustainably project area, the external barriers to promoting a range of pro-environmental behaviour are significant and find their root causes in the scale of the social and economic deprivation in the area. To scale out behaviour change requires a supportive local policy environment which provides pro-environmental enabling infrastructure (access to growing sites, public transport, good quality housing); and action at national level to address persistent levels of social and economic deprivation.

For more information

Further information about the approach described in this case study can be found at:

L8 Sustainability Projects <http://www.l8ls.co.uk/>

ENDNOTES

¹ For example, Fliegenschnee and Shelakovsy in a 1998 meta-analysis of pro-environmental behaviours study found that 80% of factors influencing behaviour did not come directly from knowledge and awareness [in Darnton, A. (2008). *GSR Behaviour Change Knowledge Review Reference Report: An overview of behaviour change models and their uses*. Government Social Research, London.]

² DECC. (2015). *2013 Sub regional fuel poverty data: low income high cost indication*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2013-sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-low-income-high-costs-indicator>

³ The project partnership includes Granby Toxteth Development Trust, community growing project Growing Granby, local business L8 Superstore, Liverpool City Council, and social housing providers in the area.

⁴ Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs.

⁵ Focus group discussion conducted during research for this case study.

⁶ Groundwork UK Learning Partnership. (2105). *Communities Living Sustainable Learning Report: Growing and Green Spaces*. Groundwork UK, Birmingham.

⁷ In 2013, Clinical Commissioning Groups replaced primary care trusts as the commissioners of most services funded by the NHS in England.

⁸ Darnton, A. (2008). *GSR Behaviour Change Knowledge Review Reference Report: An overview of behaviour change models and their uses*. Government Social Research, London.

⁹ Barnes, M. et al. (2014). *Understanding the behaviours of Households in fuel poverty: A review of research evidence*. DECC, London.