

Sustainable Steps Wales – Action Grants and Egin Grants



**Case Study - The Community Impact Initiative:
Sustaining a Legacy
November 2025**



1. The Organisation

The Community Impact Initiative C.I.C. (known as the Cii) is an award-winning, not-for-profit social change organisation committed to the development, improvement, and sustainability of our communities.



Their Vision is "We believe in a future where our communities flourish and prosper."

Their Mission is "To improve our communities through innovative solutions, providing opportunities for individuals to make a meaningful contribution to society."

2. The Project

The Community Impact Initiative: Sustaining a Legacy project operates across South Wales.

Sustaining a Legacy is an innovative project that supports our local community members to engage in climate action. Through regenerating empty properties, the project helps volunteers better understand how individual and collective actions can have a positive environmental impact, and the proactive steps people can take to improve their energy efficiency.

Working with partners and stakeholders, "Sustaining a Legacy" helps volunteers understand how to effectively regenerate and insulate homes to reduce energy consumption, having a positive and sustained impact upon the climate and environment.

The project is eligible for anyone aged 16+ who has an interest in understanding more about climate action and what practical measures they can take to reduce their carbon footprint and improve their energy efficiency.

The Sustaining a Legacy project has the following outcomes.

Outcome 1 - 60 households reduce their energy usage and their risk of entering fuel poverty. Measured through volunteers' energy usage before and after engagement with project. Cost effective monitoring systems can be utilised.

Outcome 2 - 60 community members have an increased understanding of how to improve their own carbon footprint and pass learnings onto peers.

Measured through questionnaires before and after engagement with the project and through attendance at 'Toolbox Talks'

**Outcome 3 - 3 empty properties in disrepair are brought back into use in a sustainable, energy efficient way.**

Measured through count of properties brought back into use and through actions completed on Whole House Retrofit Plan.

Outcome 4 - 50 stakeholders have knowledge of how implementing energy efficiency measures during property regenerations can lead to a more sustainable future for Wales.

Measured through evaluation reports which evidence positive impact sent to various stakeholders and stakeholders' questionnaires.

3. Progress to Date

As of July 2025, Cii is 6 months into their renovation project in Alma Terrace, Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil. This is a substantial property that needed significant renovation works, before it can be brought back into use as a residential property. It had issues with water ingress and damp as well as requiring a full scheme of modernisation to ensure the property had good energy performance as well as being a pleasant place to live.

Each cohort of volunteers works with the project for six months and they are able to learn all the different trades that are required to renovate a house including:

- Brick laying
- Carpentry
- Electrician
- Plumbing
- Plastering
- Groundworks
- Decorating
- Kitchen/bathroom installations

The current cohort have taken climate action as part of the project, such as:

- learning climate action terminology
- discussing how to implement energy-efficient practices at home
- planning energy-efficient adaptations to the property
- carrying out energy-efficient works, including preparing floor and wall insulation, and recycling demolition materials.

Volunteers are recruited directly from the job centre, and the current cohort are all young men. Cii has developed a "Women Construct Wales" initiative, which explores the barriers to female participation, challenges perceptions and encourages engagement. This is not part of the Sustaining a Legacy project but worth noting as they are removing barriers to participation.



The following information demonstrates progress to July 2025 for the project.

Number of individuals and organisations engaged in the project.

- 57 participants
- 96 organisations (including referral partners, support organisations, community groups and employment partners)
- 98% of participants were new to climate conversations.

Changes as a result of the project.

Based on the data recorded so far:

- 72% of participants now actively engage in energy efficiency practices daily at home
- 95% of participants said that engaging with the project has helped them better understand how to reduce energy in homes. Participants have played an active role in implementing energy-efficient measures into the properties regenerated
- 13 participants have achieved qualifications relating to energy efficiency and are interested in progressing towards green careers.

4. The Language of Climate Conversations

Identifying language and communication barriers

Lack of knowledge has been recognised as one of the major barriers preventing people engaging with climate change conversations. Some of the participants came to the project with low levels of literacy and financial literacy. The first time Cii discussed energy efficiency with their volunteers it didn't work as well as they'd hoped. They set aside time away from practical building tasks to deliver classroom style sessions that would help volunteers understand more about the work they were doing.

A lot of the volunteers didn't like the more formal classroom style sessions and consequently didn't engage. They all liked learning practical skills "on the job" rather than learning that felt like being at school again, which for many had negative connotations. One of the sessions talked about energy efficiency and one of the volunteers said they didn't know what "efficiency" meant. At this point Cii decided to rethink how they deliver the sessions to make them easy to understand



and use simple language that would help people to engage. They also wanted to make them relevant to the people who were volunteering. One of the tutors on the project noted:

“There’s not many people using private jets round here, so reducing your air miles isn’t relevant. Everyone fills a kettle so only filling what you need is relevant.”

How the project addressed barriers

The new sessions Cii designed started with tea and doughnuts and were split into three parts.

Part one - participants sat round a table and took part in “matching names to definitions.” This helped participants gain a mutual understanding and was completed as a group, so people didn’t feel singled out if they didn’t know.

Part two - was a “fill in the blanks” exercise where participants discussed statements about saving energy. The were statements that were designed to be relevant to participants who may not own their own home or engage in bill paying or have control over their energy supply. These were group activities to help people explore the potential to save energy in their lives and make it relevant to them.

Example questions included:

How much money do you think performing the following activities could save you each year?

Turning the thermostat down by 1°C £_____

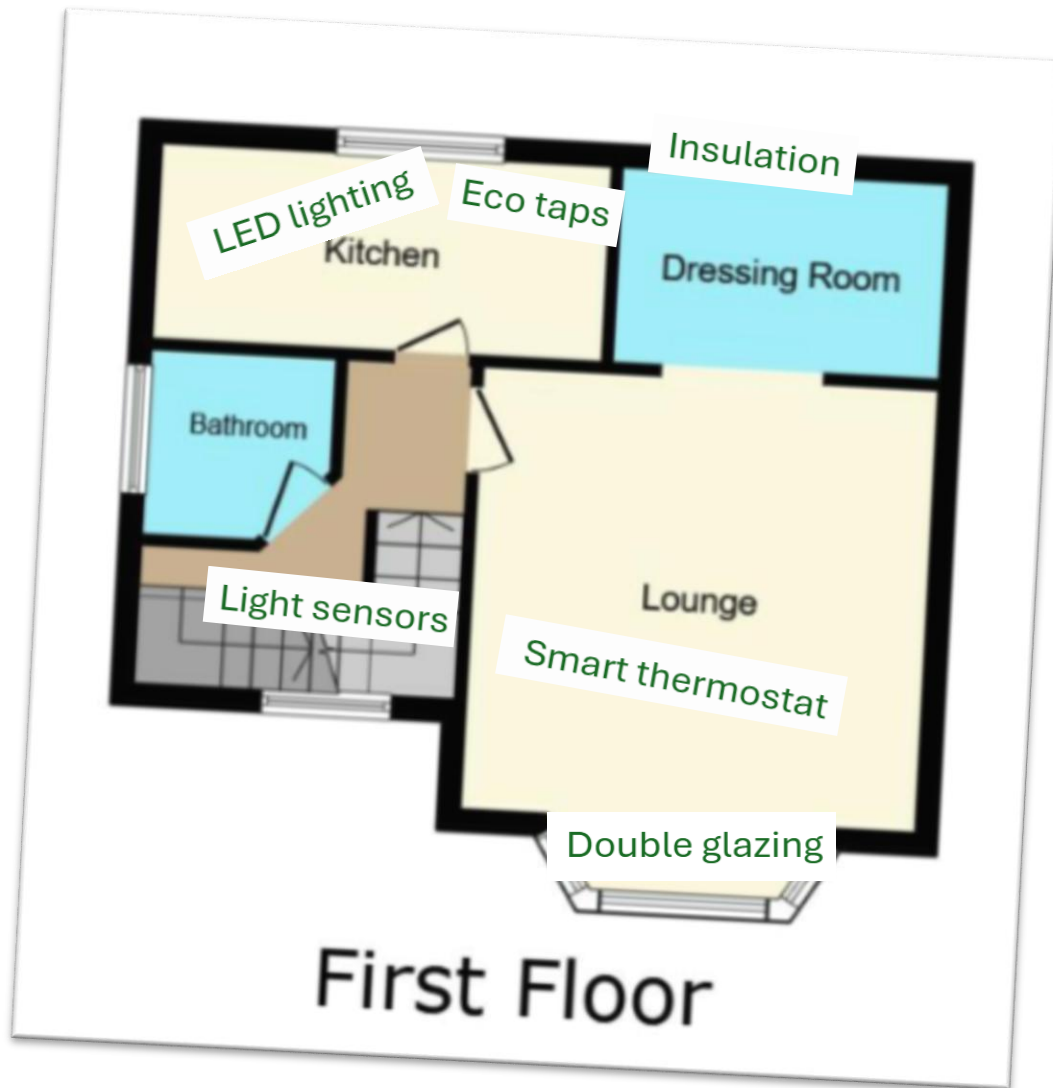
Fill the kettle up with only the amount of water you need £_____

Spend 1 minute less in the shower every day £_____

Switch off appliances rather than leave them on standby £_____

Use a washing-up bowl instead of filling the whole sink £_____

Part three - The third activity was about improving the energy efficiency of the property participants were working on. They had a floor plan of the property and participants were given a list of potential energy efficiency upgrades and asked to match them to the correct place on the plan. Again, this was done as a team exercise with lots of discussion, so everyone was engaged.



Example of the “improve the energy efficiency of the property” exercise

Cii developed a questionnaire titled “Understanding of climate action and energy efficiency generally” This survey is completed by participants before, during and after their placement and will allow Cii to assess if the placement has increased the understanding of climate action and energy efficiency.

The survey has a series of statements about climate action and energy efficiency. Participants are asked to note if they strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree to strongly disagree with 10 statements. The detail of these is in appendix 1. Because the project is still active the data hasn’t



been collected to understand if participants views have changed. This will be covered in future annual reports.

Successes in climate conversations

As part of the Insight Report research, the evaluators interviewed two project participants. They were both teenage white males and had been with the project for two and five months respectively.

They stated they liked learning carpentry and the teamwork. When asked what climate action they had taken as part of the project, they weren't able to answer, but after further discussion they highlighted that they had put insulation in the building which would help.

Neither of them had taken any climate action before being part of the project, but they did think they would take climate action in the future.

One of the greatest successes Cii has had with participants is changing the language they use whilst providing learning sessions on energy efficiency. Taking things back to basics and exploring issues as a group made it far more inclusive, consequently people participating in the sessions got a lot more out of them and maintained their engagement.

At the start of each project staff have initial conversations with participants - to get people to talk and help to understand where people were at with knowledge. This allows the project to tailor future sessions to match the base knowledge of participants and help them learn without overwhelming them.

Challenges in climate conversations

Lots of the participants are young so don't think about costs and energy efficiency as they don't own their home or pay the bills. Many participants had a low base knowledge of energy efficiency, some barely anything at all.

A lot of house renovation isn't specifically about energy efficiency, so whilst they are putting on a new roof or remodelling the building the only thing they can discuss is insulation. It's only once they fit heating, lighting and appliances etc can they have more detailed conversations about saving energy. Most of this happens at the end of a renovation project so participants only get to this at the end of their placement and it's harder to make it relevant at the start of a project.

At the end of the placement the participant gets a folder with a certificate, reference and a list of what they learnt on the project. This is useful for applicants looking for work but also reinforces what they have learnt and is something they can refer back to.



Cii worked with a training provider who had "React" funding – 30 hours paid placements for 17-18-year-olds. Some people joined up because they got paid but didn't want to learn or work. Cii has decided not to do this moving forward.

5. Key Learning

The key learning about language and communication from The Community Impact Initiative: Sustaining a Legacy project can be summarised as follows.

- **Start from participant knowledge.** Some young people have a very low base knowledge of energy efficiency and climate action and nearly all participants in this project were new to climate action.
- **Keep things simple** in order to engage with these groups, to help build knowledge and confidence to talk about climate action.
- **Working together in groups informally** helped participants engage more with classroom style learning sessions.
- **Simplify the language**, taking terminology back to basics and exploring issues as a group, made it far more inclusive.
- **Discuss whilst doing.** Practical work (renovating houses) allows tutors to discuss climate action concepts whilst participants were working which for some people was their preferred learning environment.
- **Make things relevant.** Making things relevant to people's situation makes it easier for them to understand and then take action (for example cutting down air miles vs only filling what you need in a kettle).
- **Create a baseline.** Surveying participants at three stages during the project allows projects to create a baseline and see if the intervention had its intended effect.



Appendix: Participant Survey

Cii developed a questionnaire titled "Understanding of climate action and energy efficiency generally" This survey is completed by participants before, during and after their placement and will allow Cii to assess if the placement has increased the understanding of climate action and energy efficiency. They used a Likert scale to measure opinions by asking respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements. It presented a series of options ranging from "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral," "disagree," and "strongly disagree".

Understanding of climate action and energy efficiency generally survey

1. I know a lot about energy efficiency
2. My individual actions have an impact on my energy usage.
3. My individual actions can have an impact on the environment.
4. Being energy efficient saves me money
5. I have a good understanding of how to reduce energy at home to save money.
6. I never really think about my household energy usage
7. I don't know how to control my house heating efficiently.
8. When I buy an appliance, I check the energy ratings.
9. I have the confidence to discuss energy efficiency measures with friends and family
10. I actively engage with energy efficiency by turning off lights, turning down the thermostat or other actions



About Sustainable Steps Wales - Action and Egin Grants

Sustainable Steps Wales is delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund and supported with money from the Dormant Assets Scheme. Action Grants and Egin Grants are two of the four Sustainable Steps Wales programmes. They support The National Lottery Community Fund's commitment in Wales to:

- create a sustainable future
- reach new audiences who want to take action on climate change.

Egin Grants (2023–2030) aim to help community groups to take action on climate change and live in a more sustainable way. Funding is available for up to £15,000. It is open to groups that receive support from the [Sustainable Steps Wales – Egin Mentoring Service](#).

Action Grants (2022–2028) aim to address climate change in communities and help people live in a more sustainable way. Funding has been awarded to 14 projects, ranging from £10,001 to £350,000. You can find out more about [Egin Grants](#) and [Action Grants](#) on the Fund's website.

About the evaluation

Severn Wye Energy Agency, with Liz Bickerton Consulting, was appointed by The National Lottery Community Fund in 2022 to evaluate the Sustainable Steps Wales - Action Grants and Egin Grants programmes. The evaluation team aims to generate programme-wide learning and evidence of impact, focusing on how the grants engage new people and groups in climate action, motivate behaviour change, and reduce carbon emissions. The evaluation will run until 2027.

About this case study

This is one of three project case studies from research that explored language and communication barriers when engaging communities on climate change, and how projects have worked to overcome them. The methods and findings are summarised in the Insight Report #2 "*Net Zero – Net What?*".