

# ENERGY FIT KITCHENS

COOKING UP AN INTEREST IN SAVING ENERGY AND MONEY



PROJECT DELIVERED BY



COMMUNITY  
ENERGY PLUS

PROJECT FUNDED BY



The ScottishPower  
Energy People Trust

Supporting Communities Since 2005

# FOREWORD BY SARAH NEWTON

MP FOR TRURO AND FALMOUTH



The Energy Fit Kitchens project has cooked up a great deal of interest in saving money and keeping warm and well. Like all the work Community Energy Plus does, it sprang from deep roots in our community, a community that has the highest levels of fuel poverty in the UK. I have worked with CEP in Cornwall for a number of years, supporting their work enabling people who are struggling to stay warm and well to access advice and support. While there is no shortage of advice, services and support available, it is challenging to engage people who would benefit the most. This is a difficult nut to crack, but Energy Fit Kitchens has cracked it!

I have seen first-hand that Community Energy Plus is a highly effective organisation that is trusted by its beneficiaries as well as a wide range of partners. Fuel poverty is a complex issue and needs to keep people at the centre of a joined up approach from energy companies to health and care services. CEP have worked with partners in Cornwall on a range of award winning projects including insulating park homes to the annual Winter Wellbeing Programme.



## OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

High energy bills hit poorest households the hardest. Underneath Cornwall's picture postcard facade is the grim reality that many low income families live in cold and damp homes as they cannot afford to heat their homes adequately.

While energy bills are one of a household's largest expenses, many people are disengaged with how much energy they use and how much it costs. This premise was the starting point for the innovative approach taken by Community Energy Plus's Energy Fit Kitchens project which set out to equip low income families with the life skills in home energy management to take control of their energy bills in order to enjoy warmer, healthier homes.

The kitchen accounts for a considerable part of a household's annual energy bill. Focusing on cooking as a major activity in the kitchen provided a stepping stone to encourage people who might not otherwise be interested in accessing energy advice to engage in a conversation about their wider energy use throughout the home.

Community Energy Plus's Energy Fit Kitchens project was funded by a grant of £47,333 from the ScottishPower Energy People Trust to deliver the workshops. Between April 2015 and May 2016 the charity worked with 611 families living in Cornwall to reduce fuel poverty through actions and interventions that will have long lasting impacts on reducing energy bills and developing life skills in household energy management.

# PROJECT DRIVERS

The concept of low income families needing to ration their heating in order to make ends meet may seem like a Dickensian tale, but is sadly commonplace amongst some of Cornwall's poorest households.

Cornwall is England's poorest region and is in the top 10 most deprived areas in Western Europe. Some parts of the county have extremely high levels of child poverty, for example in Camborne-Pengedon the level is 58%, compared to the average of 22% for England.

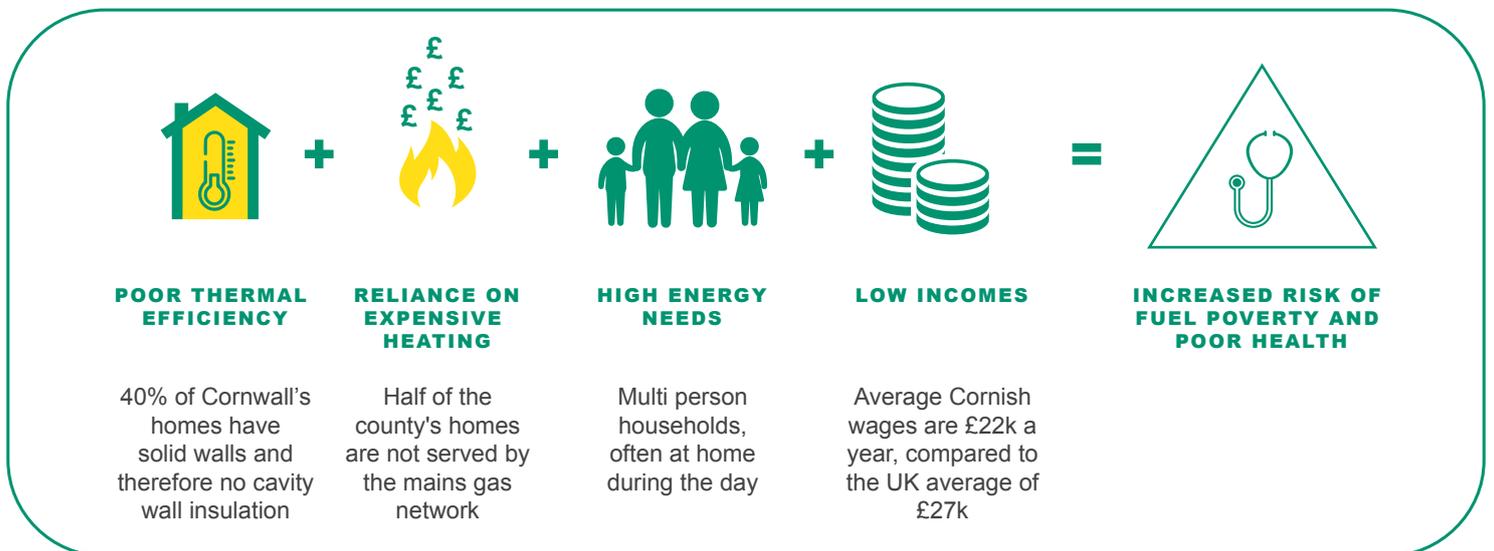
Children in lone parent households are more likely to be in poverty than those in two parent households, accounting for 61% of all child poverty households and around a fifth of all lone parents (20%) are classed as fuel poor. There are 8850 households comprised of a lone parent with at least one dependent child in Cornwall.

National fuel poverty figures consistently highlight that

Cornwall has higher than average percentages of households living in fuel poverty which in some areas of the county are close to a third of homes, compared to the average in England at 10.6% in 2014.

DECC's 2014 Annual Fuel Poverty Statistic Report found that larger household types, such as multi-person households and households with dependent children, are more likely to be fuel poor compared to smaller households. Also, fuel poverty is most prevalent in households where the oldest occupant is under 25 years old.

This project sought to address the heat and eat dilemma faced by many low income families in Cornwall by equipping parents with the skills to reduce their energy costs and learn to cook healthy meals for their family on a budget.



Damp and mould are a common sight in Cornish homes, posing a risk to the health and wellbeing of all occupants and particularly young children. The county's coastal geography and steep river valleys cause high humidity levels but householders are often not aware that the condensation and mould in their homes can be caused by inadequate heating, ventilation and their own behaviour.

A Cornwall Quality of Life Survey in 2004 found that people aged 18-34 are twice as likely to experience problems with damp, mould or condensation, than people aged 65+ (33% compared to 15%).

The Energy Fit Kitchens project set out to work with low income families with young children who are in, or at risk of, fuel poverty.

"This is a brilliant way of teaching people how to get the best out of cooking slowly and it's informative without being patronizing. For this I thank you. Being a single widowed parent of three boys, anything that helps to save money has got to be good news."

– Natalie Jane C, Callington



## SAMANTHA'S STORY



I went to an Energy Fit Kitchens event after a recommendation from the SUsie Project which supports survivors of domestic abuse. My daughter and I had just moved into a rented cottage in Helston after living for eight months in a women's refuge. It was a really difficult time in my life, I'd left an abusive relationship and was trying to start a new life and so rented the first place that I could afford and that would take me, although in hindsight it's not really suitable for us and I will be looking to find somewhere better soon.

The lady leading the session was talking about the causes of damp and mould in the home and I mentioned that I had really bad mould and thought that it could be the cause of my daughter's barking cough. Out of the blue one of the ladies at the event said that she had a dehumidifier that she wasn't using and I was welcome to have it, so, during the lunch break we popped over to her house to pick it up. I thought that it was wonderful how a complete stranger could be so kind.

Someone from Community Energy Plus filled in a form for the Winter Wellbeing Emergency Fund at the event and I got a £160 top-up for my key meter which was amazing. That help has made such a difference to us. Before, there were times when I didn't know how I was going to keep the electric on, as my meter would be down to the last couple of pounds, so we'd have to turn everything off. I've been much more careful with my energy use since the course so the

key-meter top up has lasted a really long time and meant that I had money to buy bags of coal for my stove so that we could stay warm during the winter. I've now got a job and have recently been promoted so our financial situation is much better now.

I'm so glad that I went to the session as I learnt lots of ways to save energy. I can think of several occasions before when I'd be leaving the house and noticed that the TV or lights were on and justified leaving them on to put burglars off, which is ridiculous as I don't have anything worth stealing! I'm in a much better place mentally now and have made the link between turning things off and spending less on electricity so I'm much more careful. I've been watching the credit on the key meter run down while using the oven and was horrified that it cost me £1 to cook a chicken. I've seen that using the slow cooker only costs a few pence, even though it's on for hours which is fantastic.

I tend to use my slow cooker a couple of times a month but the meals usually last a few days. My daughter sometimes helps me chop up the ingredients which encourages her to eat the finished meals which are healthy and tasty – especially the curries. I've told a few people about the course and how great slow cookers are. I've even been to dinner with one of the other ladies from the SUsie project who went to the same workshop and she cooked us a chicken dish in her slow cooker so I'm not alone in my new love for slow cooking.



## THE JOYS OF SLOW COOKING

One of the incidental drivers of the project was that several of Community Energy Plus's own staff were already converts to slow cooking. They appreciated the environmental, financial and lifestyle benefits of using slow cookers and felt that they could be of particular help to low income families.

Slow cookers are incredibly energy efficient, using only a fraction of the energy of a hob or oven. As they cook meals over a number of hours, busy parents can enjoy less time in the kitchen and more time with their children after school. Slow cookers promote the use of fresh and relatively inexpensive ingredients and are ideal for batch cooking to prepare healthy homemade ready meals for freezing and later use. The technique of preparing a meal in a slow cooker is also incredibly simple and therefore can be a gentle introduction into cookery for people with little confidence or limited skills in food preparation.

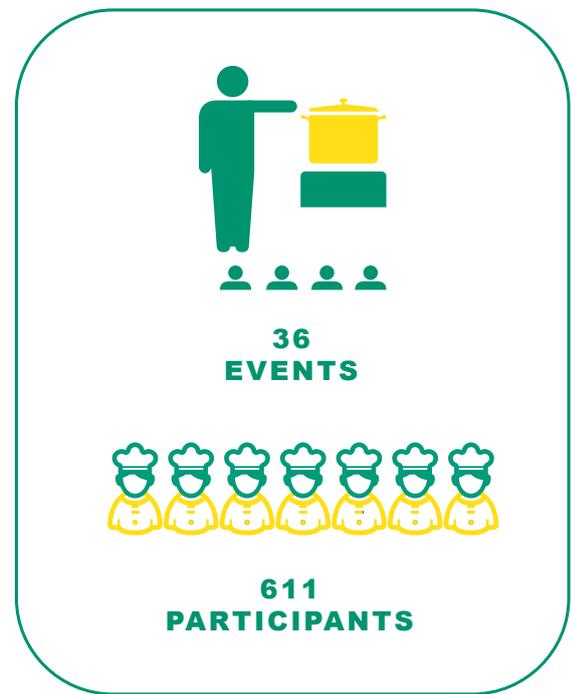
# DELIVERY OF PROJECT

One of this project's major challenges was the need for the events to appeal to the target audience of low income families with young children. This was achieved by presenting energy saving advice to people in a fun and interactive way through slow cooking demonstrations and the offer of a free slow cooker for use at the event and to help them continue saving energy at home.

Workshops were designed to be relaxed and informal and created the environment for people to feel comfortable

taking part in discussions about their own experiences of cooking, their energy bills and how they use energy in their own homes.

During the cooking demonstrations and presentations, Community Energy Plus's energy advisors provided an introduction to energy efficiency by talking about ways to save energy in the kitchen and the small behaviour changes that can be made elsewhere in the home to add up to big savings on energy bills.



Changing tariffs is an easy way of reducing energy costs but the disengagement that many people have with the way that they use energy in their homes is continued through the manner in which they buy their energy. Nationally 70% of householders are on standard variable tariffs despite cheaper fixed-rate deals being available which could save them up to £300 a year. Research has shown that while low income households have potentially much to gain from switching tariffs, they are less likely to do so than more affluent households.

The Energy Fit Kitchens project put a spotlight on energy tariff switching to equip those attending events with the confidence and skills to switch tariffs and payment methods in order to unlock significant potential savings on their energy bills. Information about the Warm Homes Discount Scheme, grants for

energy efficient home improvements and help available through Community Energy Plus and other local partners were also included in the workshops.

Where appropriate, Community Energy Plus utilised its position at the hub of Cornwall's Winter Wellbeing network to provide applications to the Winter Wellbeing Emergency Fund and provided referrals to other support agencies. This helped those facing the direst of financial situations to access funds to pay for key-meter top-ups, deliveries of heating oil and repairs to broken heating systems and the clearance of fuel debt.

The project also carried out kitchen lighting assessments and LED upgrades for participants on the lowest incomes in order to help them further reduce their energy bills.

# PROFILE OF THE 611 FAMILIES HELPED BY THIS PROJECT



**379**

Households with income under £12k



**130**

Were single parent households



**166**

Had children under the age of five



**196**

Live in social housing



**365**

Live in a home with solid walls



**267**

Receive child tax credit

**171**

Rent privately

“

“So glad I went along! Even cheap meat is so tender and the smells from the kitchen these days make even my young children hungry and curious. I'd never thought of using a slow cooker before this, now 3 people I know have bought one as a result of me cooking meals for them in it and 2 others have started using theirs again!”

- Allison C, Newquay

“Everything about the event was excellent. I'm now getting further help and advice with my bills as I'm in debt with my electric.”

- Tracie R, St Austell

“Anyone who gets a chance should attend a course like this as it helps a lot.”

– Robert B, Helston

The people leading the session were friendly and were happy to share their own experiences so it was great to get advice from people that I could relate to and who seemed to genuinely want to help people save money on their energy bills.”

- Rebecca G, Redruth

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# REACHING INTO COMMUNITIES

Community Energy Plus worked closely with local charities and public sector organisations to provide slow cooking workshops as part of each group's programme of regular meetings and events. This helped the project to reach individuals who might not have the confidence or motivation to attend the workshop on their own but could benefit from attending alongside people with whom they shared common experiences and interests.

We were pleased to work with a diverse network of partners to deliver workshops for their clients and group members including:



- ▶ **Active Plus** (Military veterans delivering programs that help build confidence, motivation and self-belief).



- ▶ **The Lizard Child Trust**



- ▶ **Cornwall Council** - Children's Early Help, Psychology & Social Care Services
- ▶ **Cornwall One Parent Support Group**
- ▶ **Eat Well Spend Less Group** – Redruth & Helston



- ▶ **RJ Working** (a Community Interest Company with the aim of strengthening the resilience and flexibility of individuals, families and communities, in response to harmful experiences)



- ▶ **The SUsie Project** (supporting survivors of domestic abuse)



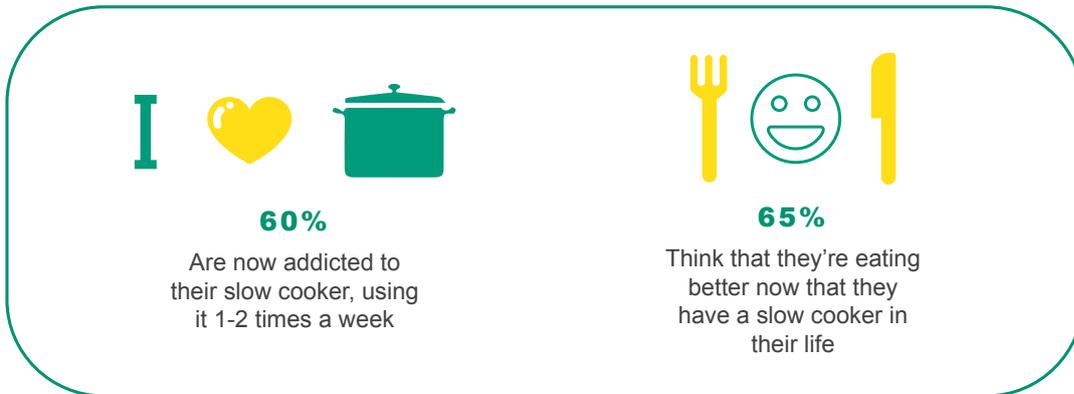
- ▶ **Young Mums Will Achieve**—groups in Launceston, Liskeard, Marazion & St Blazey



In addition to holding workshops in partnership with existing groups, Community Energy Plus also held several one-off events across the length and breadth of the county. Facebook advertising, local media coverage, promotional posters and flyers helped to spread the word about the project and encourage people from low income families who were struggling with their energy bills to reach out for help.

# THE IMPACT OF ENERGY FIT KITCHENS

On the completion of the Energy Fit Kitchens project in May 2016, participants were encouraged to complete an evaluation survey in order to help Community Energy Plus assess how well the slow cookers and advice were being used and the benefits that the project's participants were attributing to the changes made. 75 people responded to the survey and a summary of the feedback provided is presented below.



## JULIA'S STORY

Julia was left disabled and unable to work following an accident. She lives with her partner and four children including one who has complex medical needs. She suffers with a bad memory due to her illness. She said it was dangerous for her to cook as she would often forget that she had something on the hob or in the oven, so her immediate thoughts were a slow cooker would be a safer way of cooking. After the workshop, we were able to help with an application to the Winter Wellbeing Emergency Fund to help her family keep warm during the winter months as well as making an application for a grant to install a new heating system.

"I'm amazed about the amount of potential funding available, if I didn't attend this course then I probably would be unaware to the degree of such funding and grants available for various energy related products. These should be made more available or issued to known vulnerable households."

– Jules P, Redruth

# TOP ENERGY SAVING ACTIONS



**92%**

Said they had changed their behaviour and reduced their energy use



**83%**

Always switch off lights and devices when not needed now



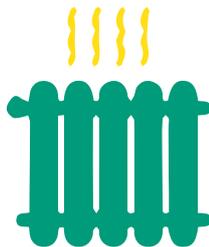
**72%**

Always measure the water in the kettle needed for a cuppa (13% increase)



**71%**

Always dry clothes outside when possible (14% increase)



**82%**

Control their heating system better now



**81%**

Have installed low energy light bulbs

## TERESA'S STORY



Looking after six children under the age of 11 means that there are simply not enough hours in the day to cook from scratch every night. Busy mum Teresa confessed that she often relied on the convenience of frozen foods to prepare her family's evening meals but the arrival of a slow cooker has provided some unexpected benefits to the family of eight in Bodmin.

I decided to take part in an Energy Fit Kitchens event as I thought that it might encourage me to cook more while freeing up time to spend with my children. The session wasn't at all what I expected, I enjoyed learning new things and talking to other parents and was really pleased to be able to take a slow cooker home with me.

My husband used to enjoy cooking but his job means that he leaves the house before 5 in the morning and doesn't get home until 7 at night but now we have a slow cooker he's really enjoying cooking for us all and is steadily working his way through the recipe booklet. The types of meals that we're eating now are more interesting and healthy as it's an easy way to cram lots of veg into the

kids. We're using the slow cooker at least twice a week and it's especially helpful when we travel to Birmingham once a month for my son's specialist hospital appointments. We travel up and back in the same day but regardless of what time we get home, there's a tasty hot meal ready for us.

We're making good use of the energy monitor we were given and doing the changes recommended in the workshop has meant that our energy bills have come down – I think that we'll probably save about £150 over the year, not to mention the savings on our food shopping now that we're cooking from scratch more! We used to have a lot of mould on the walls in our home but I picked up some really useful tips at the workshop and putting them into practice has really helped.

I'm really glad that I found out about the project and took part. It's really helped my family and this type of thing should be available more widely as it's a great way to encourage families to eat better and save energy as well as money.



# MANAGING ENERGY BILLS BETTER

In addition to helping people save energy throughout their homes, the project also set out to encourage participants to actively manage their energy bills. In mid-October 2015, Community Energy Plus secured several hundred free energy monitors for use across the charity's activities.

Mid-way through the delivery of the project, all participants were offered a free energy monitor and were shown how to install and use it on a custom-built interactive demonstration rig. This equipped the householders with the skills to set up and use their monitors to understand how much energy they are using in their homes in real time. Armed with this insight it is possible to see how changes in behaviour can translate

into financial savings. The Energy Saving Trust estimates that energy usage drops by 5-15% in the first year of using an energy monitor, which could be a saving of £25 to £75 on a £500 bill. Our evaluation survey shows that 39% of respondents are currently using the energy monitors, with a further 26% planning to do so in the future.

The importance of taking regular meter readings was highlighted at the workshops as it is an important safeguard to prevent householders receiving unexpectedly large bills. Almost half of our respondents are taking regular meter readings and will therefore be less likely to find themselves in fuel debt in the future.



**45%**

Now submit regular meter readings



**30%**

Applied to receive £140 off their energy bill through the Warm Home Discount Scheme



**26%**

Have changed their energy tariff



**68%**

Of households now have less damp and mould

## DAMP & MOULD 101

Damp housing can lead to the growth of mould (and mould feeding mites) on walls and furniture. This not only looks unpleasant but can also damage health as people, and particularly children, living in homes with damp and mould are more likely to have respiratory problems, respiratory infections, allergies or asthma.

With almost 20 years' experience of talking to householders about the problems associated with living in cold and damp homes, the charity is aware that many people do not understand that their behaviour can be contributing to mould being an unwanted squatter in their home.

Activities such as bathing, cooking, drying clothes and breathing all produce moisture which in an under-heated home without adequate ventilation, can easily condense on cold surfaces and lead to the growth of mould.

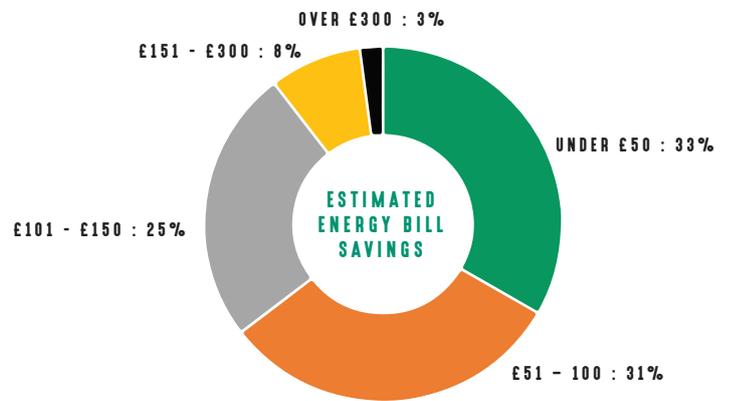
Information about the steps that householders can take to help reduce condensation and mould in their homes were included in the workshops and have clearly had a big impact on the lives of the project's participants.



# FINANCIAL SAVINGS

One of the key objectives of the Energy Fit Kitchens Project was to tackle fuel poverty in Cornwall. Evidence that we have helped project participants reduce their energy costs, thereby reducing their risk of being in fuel poverty, is shown by the savings estimated by our respondents. 36% believe they have saved over £100 on their energy bills. For low income families, this level of savings can provide much needed relief to limited household budgets.

As a result of enjoying lower energy bills, our respondents have told us about what they have been doing with the money saved. Not unexpectedly, most of our survey respondents are finding it easier to pay for household bills, others have reported that they are now enjoying warmer homes as a consequence of using their



heating more and some also reported that they are paying off debts. It's likely that the full extent of the savings may not be seen by participants until several months after their participation in a workshop, however the initial feedback is highly encouraging.

## THE BENEFITS OF LOWER ENERGY BILLS



**44%**

Are now finding it easier to cope with household bills



**14%**

Are paying off debts



**11%**

Are able to use their heating more

"There was a lot of information and saving tips I hadn't thought of. Very helpful and the energy monitor is great, I can see in real time what energy I'm using so can change when I do things to save money."

– anonymous, Camborne

## HOW ENERGY BILL SAVINGS ARE BEING USED

Perhaps some of the most inspirational outcomes of this project are connected to the improved quality of family life that have been brought about by lower energy bills.



**14%**

Paying for children's activities



**11%**

Enjoying family outings



**6%**

Spending more on food and now eating better



**COMMUNITY  
ENERGY PLUS**



**The ScottishPower  
Energy People Trust**

Supporting Communities Since 2005

## COMMUNITY ENERGY PLUS

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Community Energy Plus is an award-winning charity and social enterprise that provides complete energy answers to help householders in Cornwall enjoy warmer, energy efficient homes as part of a more sustainable future.

Since 1998 the charity have worked in partnership with a wide range of public, private and third sector organisations to support a variety of innovative projects relating to energy efficiency and renewable energy including community ownership models.

To date the charity has advised over 167,000 households and delivered over £11m worth of energy saving and heating improvements to over 26,000 homes in Cornwall. Community Energy Plus programmes have helped over 60,000 people to save over £2.9m per annum on domestic energy bills and over 543,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.



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**Registered charity number  
1068990.**

## SCOTTISHPOWER ENERGY PEOPLE TRUST

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The ScottishPower Energy People Trust is an independent charity that provides funding to front line charities who help vulnerable, disadvantaged people out of fuel poverty.

Since its formation in 2005, the Trust has provided funding to organisations across Britain who work with people suffering from fuel poverty and are well-placed to identify those most in need.

As part of its commitment to addressing fuel poverty, ScottishPower has provided over £14 million in funding to the Trust to date, including funds for distribution and administrative costs.