



KEY FINDINGS:

Community and shared learning events can:

- Engage wider range of audiences and increase participation in energy issues.
- Provide a range of contexts for participants to learn about new technologies, behaviours and how change can be achieved.
- Strengthen people's motivation, ability and conviction to act.
- Create a space, and permission, for conversations about energy, and provide an opportunity for individuals to develop a more publicly minded conversation about energy.
- Help create the social relationships and networks that enable and sustain community action.

LCCs need to consider the balance between enabling deeper learning through more resource intensive activities, and organising a variety of engagement opportunities which could reach more people.

1. Introduction

The aim of this summary is to share learning from the EVALOC research project about the role of community events in reducing local energy use and carbon emissions. It is for use by community practitioners and support organisations.

EVALOC has been a 4 year research project which seeks to assess and explain changes in energy use in six low carbon communities (LCCs) in England and Wales. The LCCs all ran residential carbon reduction projects, which typically included both technological improvements along with programmes aimed at helping people to rethink how they used energy from day to day. Each community had received some funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change Low Carbon Communities Challenge (LCCC) initiative.

2. Context

In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the role of community based social learning activities in stimulate pro-environmental behaviours e.g. by provoking greater participation, fostering networks, relationships and capacities for future action, and reducing carbon emissions as a result. (e.g. Barr, 2008).

EVALOC sought to contribute to this body of knowledge by investigating how and why an specific community based social

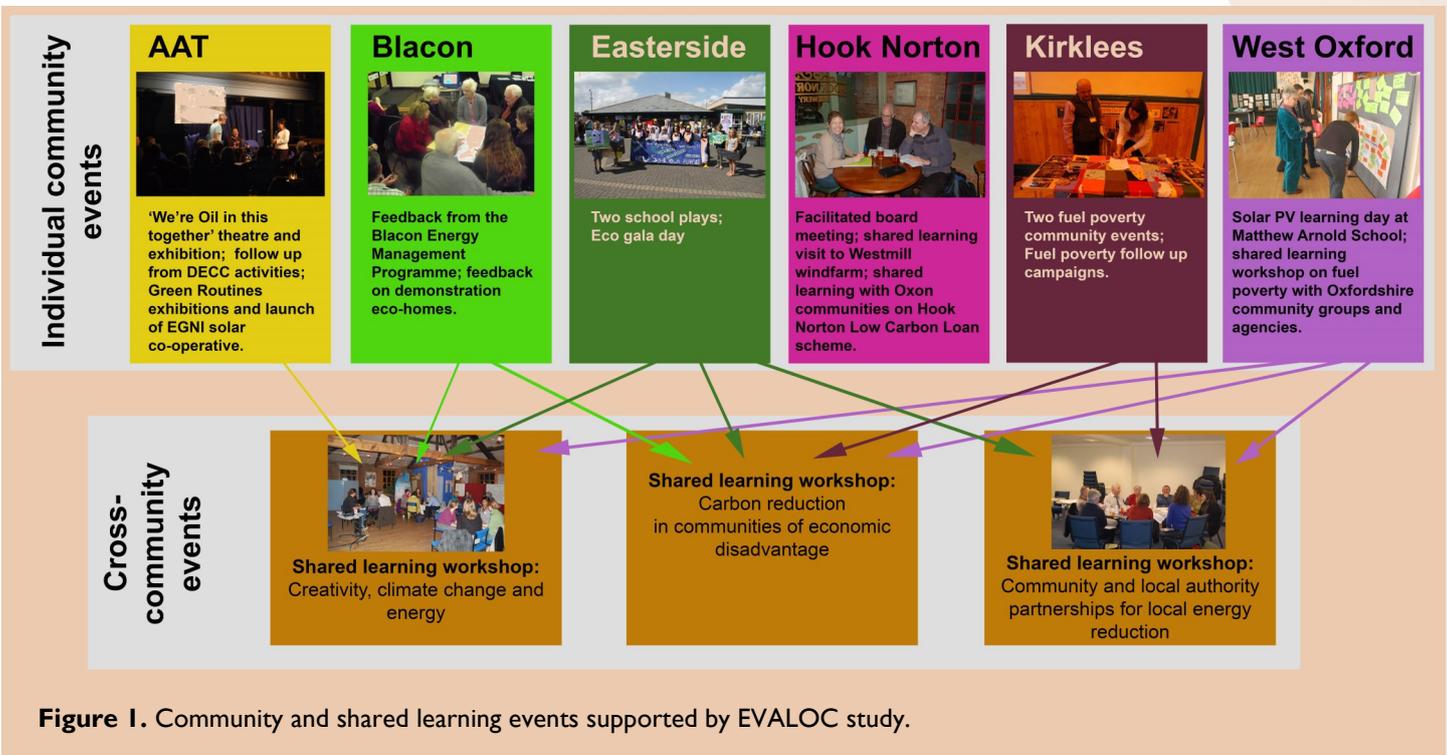
learning activities - community or shared learning events - can contribute to local energy and carbon reduction.

We decided to focus our investigation on one common way LCCs seek to engage and involve their wider community in energy action - namely community and shared learning events.

Our research was informed by social learning research, which posit that individuals learn new behaviours through observation of, and informal interactions with, other people in social settings (Bandura, 1977, Miller and Dollard, 1941), and that participative learning experiences can encourage innovative and collaborative ways of thinking to address complex problems (Thomsen 2008, Garmendia and Stagl, 2010). We also referred to the Communities of Practice literature which explores the processes by which groups of people with shared interests build knowledge (intentionally or unintentionally) through regular interactions with each other (Franklin et al., 2011)

The aims of the research were to:

- Support and enhance LCC's existing technical and behavioural activities by supporting them to hold a series of:
 - Community events within their communities, and;
 - Shared learning events between communities.
- Conduct research into whether and how such activities contribute to social learning about energy and carbon reduction.



- Develop and test a community engagement toolkit to help communicate the impact, benefit and limits of their projects to relevant stakeholders.

The events (Figure 1) were devised by members of the LCCs in collaboration with EVALOC researchers in collaboration with other local organisations such as schools.

The research methods included collecting feedback forms and observation from:

- 17 EVALOC supported events, plus survey data from participants in two DECC funded LCC energy activity streams.
- Total of 2,155 participants in the EVALOC community events.
- 486 survey responses.

The events were designed to cover different styles of learning including:

- *Knowledge building*: presentations, talks, information displays and handouts, training courses.
- *Show and Tell*: learning through observation of others; practical 'how to' demonstrations; presentations; practical training course; a play; video; poetry.
- *Participatory or interactive learning*: workshops, visits to other LCCs.

The events were categorised either as 'community events', aimed 'downstream' at the local community, and 'shared learning events', aimed at exchanging and developing ideas and strategies. The latter primarily occurred between LCCs and other organisations, although shared learning could also take place within a LCC, with group development, reflection, and development of an action plan or strategy. Some events were small (e.g. Hook Norton's visit to a local windfarm with 10 people) whilst some were larger, and aimed at the

wider community (e.g. Eco Easterside's Eco gala, Kirklees' fuel poverty events and Awel Aman Tawe's Green Routines exhibition)

3. Findings

3.1 Motivations for attending the events

The LCCs were creative in framing their events: very few put on events framed as an energy or carbon reduction per se – rather they were called a gala (Figure 2), a play, a celebration event – of which energy or carbon reduction only formed one part. When asked why they attended the event most people said came to the event for personal reasons e.g. to meet neighbours, see what was going on, to see their children in play, curiosity, entertainment, day out, fun, save money – rather than to learn about energy or climate change per se.

3.2 What was learnt at the events

Most respondents said that the most useful thing they learnt (Figure 3) was about energy issues, perhaps not surprisingly as this was an objective of many of the CEs even though the events were not necessarily framed as such. More surprisingly a relatively high proportion of people also said they learnt about the **process of change** e.g. that they are part of a wider movement, that change is possible and/or that they were not alone, or that their actions matter - this was not an issue explicitly built into the design of many events. There was also other incidental learning e.g. 'That X is a good community' and 'how kind people are'.

Overall very few people mentioned that saving money was the most important thing they learnt - saving money did feature more prominently as a learning in some of the events in disadvantaged communities but not all - whether or not it was cited as an important learning appeared to depend more on the focus and framing of the event by the LCC rather than whether or not people were disadvantaged.

3.3 How people learnt

The most common way participants learnt was, as we might expect from social learning theory, through participative activities and discussions, followed by visual demonstrations. However other forms of communications such as exhibitions, posters and leaflets also provided useful forms of communication.

The research also suggested that direct involvement in activity can help deepen engagement e.g. AAT performances and in Easterside school plays or activities at other events. Plus a small number of people said they learnt from reflecting on the issues at the event, the feelings arising during or after the event.

3.4 Impacts of events

The majority of respondents to post-event surveys said that the events had strengthened their know-how, motivation and ability to take action on energy, and that they intended to make changes to their energy usage (Figure 5).

A large majority of people said they felt more motivated to save energy in their homes (or communities) as a result of the event. Again, the most common reason people gave for their increased motivation was related to their understanding of the change process – as mentioned above - and their sense that their actions would be meaningful. Saving money and a desire to help the planet/environment were given as the next most common reasons

Peoples' motivations appeared to be affected by the content and framing of the event's messages. For example at three



Figure 2. Community event in Easterside; an Eco-Gala Day, 'What on EARTH are we doing?'

community events in disadvantaged communities' saving money' figured relatively strongly as a reason for increased motivation reflecting the events communities messages. But at another event in a disadvantaged community environmental responsibilities and awareness that individual actions can make a difference figured more highly – this reflected the event's framing of messages which focused on 'the environmental challenges that sharing our planet poses and the important role we all have to play in protecting planet Earth and becoming global citizens'.

3.5 Capabilities and intentions

A large majority of respondents said that the event increased their ability to reduce household or community energy use; and 90% said that they intended to make changes to their energy use as a result of coming to the event. Some of the reasons people gave included statements such as:

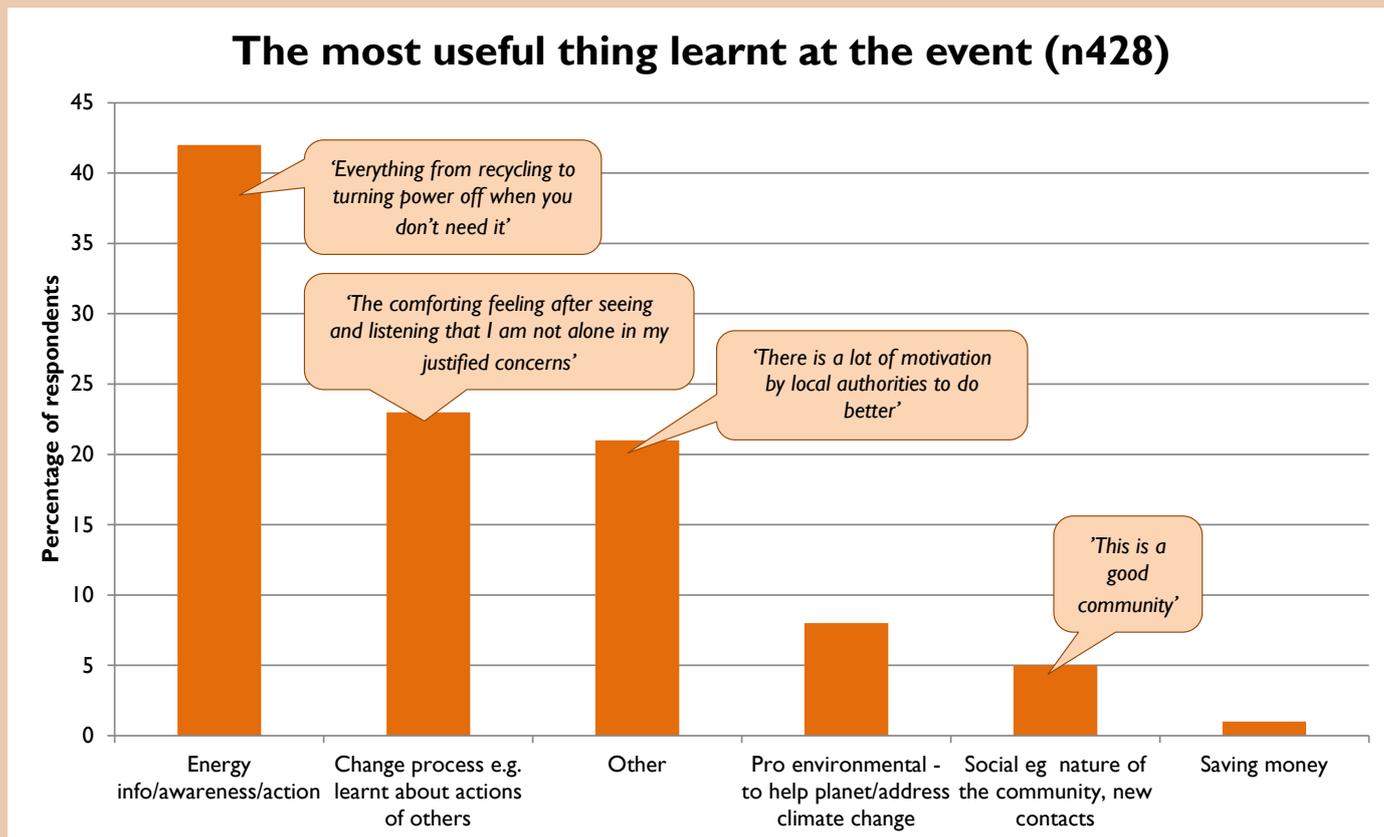


Figure 3. Responses from survey indicating what the most useful things learnt at the community events were.

- 'I have more knowledge & ways'
- 'The children will now agree to turn off lights when told and know the reason'
- 'I realise I can'
- 'Reinforced awareness and commitment'

A high proportion of respondents said they intended to take some form of household or community energy action as a result of attending the event. But a relatively large proportion also indicated that they intended to take various forms of (a) pro-environmental action i.e. to help address climate change or protect the planet, or (b) to help bring about change - these categories high in some of the community events regardless of demography.

3.6 Creative events

The findings from some of the more creative events (e.g. creative performances, poetry) provided an opportunity for;

- Deeper reflection and learning about issues, anxieties, doubt and solutions by participants involved in the creative process.
- Deeper emotional engagement by audiences, through being stimulated by the events (e.g. poetry or theatre, listening to people's experiences) and through having opportunities to reflect on new information.

As one respondent said, 'It gave me time to consider my actions'. Another said,



Figure 4. Community event; a local primary school play in an EVALOC case study LCC.

'I realise that there are lots of contradictions in the beliefs I hold and my behaviour in practice. Involvement with others exploring the dilemmas and challenges helps me feel I'm not alone and gives a feeling of creative solidarity.'

3.7 Shared learning events

The shared learning events helped strengthen know-how within a wider 'low carbon community of practice'. For many LCCs, the events were an important opportunity to discuss and reflect on their change strategies or their involvement in the Low Carbon Communities Challenge. They learnt about *what* needs to change and *how* to achieve change, as well as identifying ideas for future activities and projects. The events also helped to validate LCC experiences, for example;

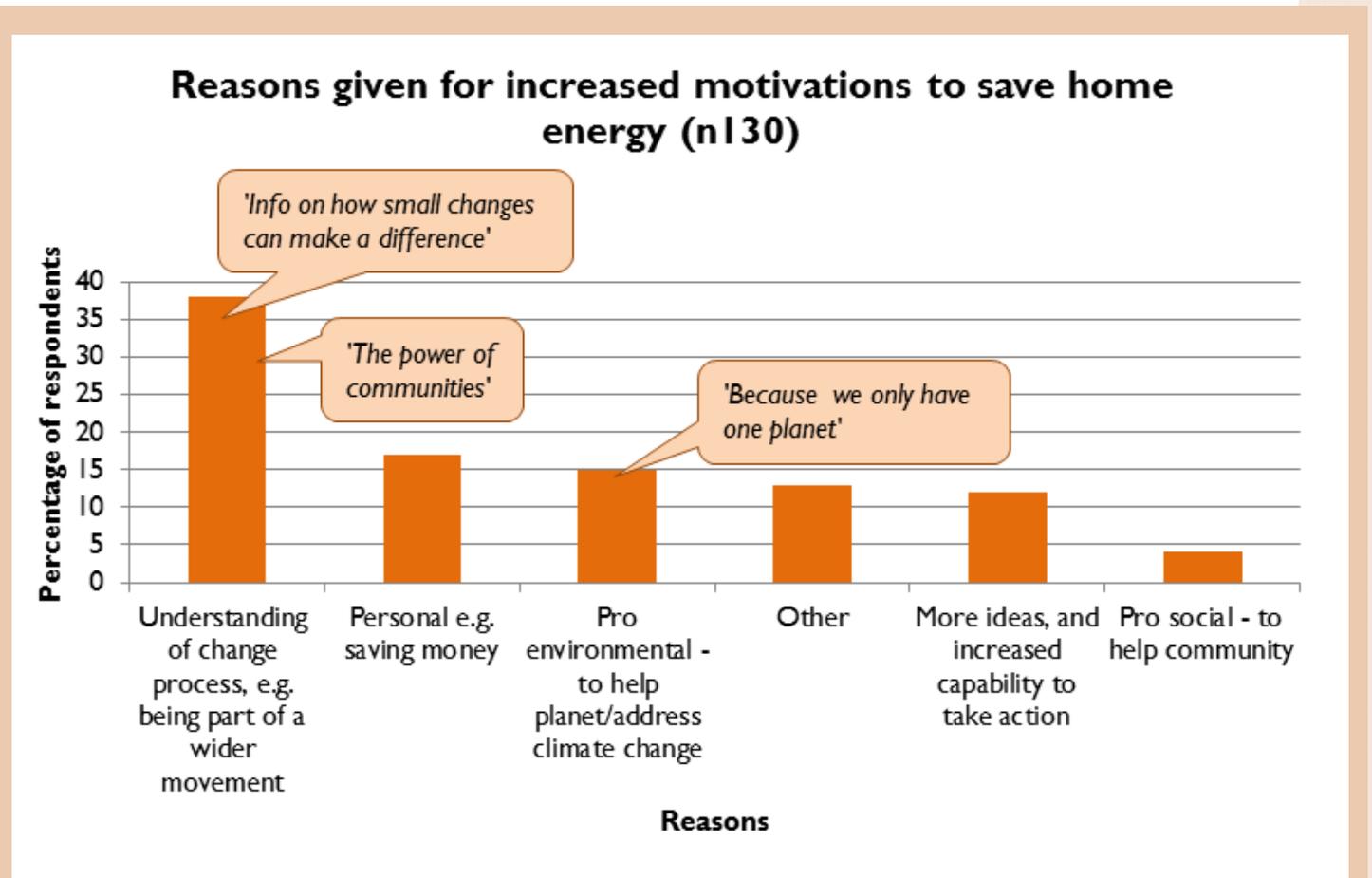


Figure 5. Reasons given for increased motivations to save energy use in the home (n|30).

'It was a privilege to come to the event and share our thoughts ... and to feel I was valued and had something to contribute'.

While feedback from the shared learning events demonstrated the value of learning from each other, though, it also revealed frustration among LCCs about their lack of capacity, time and resources to devote to these types of activities.

4. Summary of key learning

Overall our research suggests that community and shared learning events play an important role in stimulating participants to reduce energy and carbon. They:

- Engage wider range of audiences and increase participation in energy issues
- Provide a range of contexts for participants to learn about new technologies, behaviours and how change can be achieved.
- Strengthen people's motivation, ability and conviction to act – e.g. through demonstrating that they are part of a wider movement and that their actions matter. This is important for both those who have pre-existing pro-environmental concerns and attitudes, and those who don't.
- Create a space, and permission, for conversations about energy, and provide an opportunity for individuals to develop a more publicly minded conversation about energy.
- Help create the social relationships and networks that enable and sustain community action e.g. *'I saw friends and talked'*; *'I am new to this country so this was useful'*; *'Good to get people together and children to play'*; *It was 'a really great way of bringing the local community together'*.

The EVALOC research literature review (Mayne et al, 2012) suggests that increased motivations, ability and intention to take action will not necessarily translate into actual action, because many other factors and processes intervene. However, events such as those studied by EVALOC can help lay the foundations for behaviour change; help build and sustain community action; and can act as a gateway to encourage participation in the LCC's ongoing carbon and energy reduction activities.

LCCs need to consider the balance between enabling deeper learning through more resource intensive activities, and organising a variety of engagement opportunities which could reach more people.

4.1 Policy implications

Community events require time and commitment to organise, and need to form part of a wider local energy and carbon reduction strategy if the pro-environmental intentions of participants are to be turned into action. The EVALOC research demonstrated that the financial resource

to organise such events is often difficult to obtain outside of funded projects, thus primarily relies upon voluntary efforts.

Further resources

The online EVALOC ENACT toolkit provides summaries of different community events, summaries and reports, and is available via the EVALOC website.

LCCs may wish to refer to the Community Action Group Oxfordshire tool kit for practical advice about putting on eventsL <http://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/low-carbon-communities-handbook>

The main Monitoring and Evaluation conducted at the community events was a simple feedback form, which could be tailored by the LCC. This can be found online via the EVALOC ENACT toolkit.

LCCs may wish to use other tools, such as the Community Impact Monitoring Tool (CIMT) developed by Resource Futures, which aims to quantify the actions/behaviour changes that participants intend to take as a result of attending community food and energy events and then uses modelled data to estimate the impacts. Further information: <http://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/data-portal>

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The **EVALOC** project seeks to assess, explain and communicate the changes in energy use due to community activities within six selected case study projects under the Department of Energy and Climate Change's (DECC) Low Carbon Communities Challenge (LCCC) initiative, a government-supported initiative to transform the way communities use and produce energy, and build new ways of supporting more sustainable living.



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