

# The Energy Café – Community Action on Fuel Poverty in the UK

## Research context

Households who have to spend over 10-15% of their income on fuel bills are considered fuel poor. This means they cannot afford to heat, or cool, their homes to a comfortable temperature. It affects how often they can wash clothes, cook meals and use other essential appliances.

Cold homes impact on people's health and wellbeing. Fuel poverty means increased hospital admissions and excess winter deaths. It costs the National Health Service in England £1.36 billion each year.

This research focuses on community groups who have organised Energy Cafés to address fuel poverty.

## 4 million UK households live in fuel poverty

### Research aims

- To document key features of energy café initiatives in the UK
- Find out what service is provided, what resources are needed, how funding is obtained, and how initiatives target those who need help.

### Key research question

Does advice through energy cafés work, with whom and under what circumstances?

### Methods

Data collected via semi-structured interviews with six community groups. Qualitative content analysis.

### The typical causes of fuel poverty



### The Energy Café

- Volunteer-led community action
- Rely on external funding and grants
- Advice on fuel bills, energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Open to everyone
- Varying locations, e.g. town centre shops, community cafés, city farms and village greens
- Some cafés are permanent, others pop up for a few weeks
- Range of publicity and marketing tools to attract clients
- Offers of tea and cake – ease of entry is important
- Cooperation with food banks, utilities, local authorities and other community groups

**“If you get to someone’s energy bill you are opening up their house.”**

### Community Matters



## Key findings

### ★ Specific skills are needed to address fuel poverty

- Ability to seek funding
- Be proactive in attracting clients
- Provide tailored help in even uncertain circumstances
- Provide a safe environment

### 📋 The energy cafés meet a need

- There is need for energy advice
- Service that used to be available through energy companies’ high street outlets
- Cater for the needs of many

### 🎯 Challenges that energy cafés face

- Run on volunteer effort
- Reliance on grant funding
- Identifying those who most need help
- Longitudinal research needed to establish impact

### 🤝 Cooperation and inter-agency working is key

- Cooperation by community organisations, health service and local authorities key
- Design services that provide context-specific fuel poverty alleviation

**Energy cafés could act as a triage service: assess the needs of the client and refer to other forms of help**

## Project Team



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