

Self-disconnections led to people succumbing to hypothermia, one of whom required hospitalisation.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's (CnES) Western Isles Poverty and Social Inclusion Challenge Fund project, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), and successfully bid for by Tighean Inne Gall has supported a significant number of vulnerable clients throughout the Western Isles. The majority contacted the service due to high fuel bills and debt. Therefore through this project we have seen the success which can be achieved through tailored face-to-face advice and the positive outcomes which can be achieved by building relationships with these householders in order to make them feel comfortable and, in doing so, engage fully with the officers to help achieve a satisfactory resolution for them. Having received this support the householder then develops a greater knowledge and understanding of their bills and energy use as well as increased confidence, which in turn has social benefits and encourages them to positively promote our service within their individual communities.

Over the course of the project we saw a sizeable increase in the number of enquiries and support being requested, by the public, from the energy advice service. This would appear to be the result of several increases in utility company prices, a particularly cold winter and spring which increased usage substantially for some clients as well as the launch of the Hebrides Energy white label. We have unfortunately come across several heating self-disconnections with two of these clients succumbing to hypothermia, one of whom required hospitalisation. This is an indication of the choices some clients are facing on a daily basis and is one reason for clients requiring multiple home visits.

From engaging with 71 people 53 referrals were generated with the majority of these being to utility companies and for insulation surveys. A total of 213 LED bulbs were installed with a saving of 8,427.50w, substantially reducing the lighting element of electricity bills. Clients were assisted in their applications for white goods schemes resulting in 5 new energy efficient appliances being received, at no charge to the individual. Another 6 clients were encouraged and assisted to apply for the Warm Home Discount scheme which ensured an additional £140 being credited to their electricity accounts.

In total, our engagement has realised a financial gain, to the above households, of £68,885.77 with a percentage of this saving continuing annually for these households. This highlights the importance of the extension of the project in order to allow us to continue to effectively target and alleviate fuel poverty.

This project ended in December 2018.