

Stepping Up in Sustainability 2011-12

Redbridge Institute Community Learning and Skills case study



Title of project	Greener Future	
Lead partner organisation name and address	Redbridge Institute for Adult Education Gaysham Avenue Gants Hill Essex IG2 6TD	
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1. Aims of the project	<p>We aimed to provide recycling bins for paper, metals and plastic and other waste in all public spaces and teaching rooms. Also, to carry out a major Switch Off and Recycling campaign using student champions to change behaviour. Students were encouraged to sort their waste making use of the new recycling bins to sort this into paper, plastic/cans and other waste ready for collection by the recycling company. The Switch Off campaign aimed to get students to turn off computers and printers when they leave their classroom and for tutors to turn off interactive whiteboards and lights.</p>	
2. Situation: Identify the situation or issue that faced you	<p>At Redbridge Institute we wanted to build on the successful HE/FE Carbon Reduction project completed with Winchester University. The changeover to virtual servers and installing energy efficient light fittings in our teaching rooms completed in the previous project is expected to save 8.7 tonnes of carbon over 3 years. We learnt much from our HE partner, in particular the use of an energy calculator to measure our own energy consumption and changes that can be made to infrastructure such as lighting which will make a big difference to our energy use. We also saw the successful strategies that they had in place for engaging students in sustainable development.</p> <p>On completion of the Reaching Forward Index last year, we found we were at the establishing level for organisational capacity, improving level for leadership but still at the beginning level in learning. We felt that this was our priority and challenge. Thus, the project intended to build on what had already been achieved and focus on learners and learning and getting learners engaged.</p>	

<p>3. Task: Define the outcomes you needed to achieve</p>	<p>We expected to achieve the following :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of paper to be disposed of through blue bins and recycled by end of February 2012 • Reduction in number of printers, computers, interactive boards left switched on each day when classrooms are empty • Deployment of student envirochampions in each curriculum department to champion and campaign on energy reduction and recycling • Reduction of our direct carbon emissions by 11,500 kg of CO₂ a year making a saving of just over £1,500 annually
<p>4. Actions that you took in order to achieve your plan, and your approach</p>	<p>A whole range of actions was taken to raise awareness of the Greener Futures project and to achieve its aims.</p> <p>The project was planned by the Sustainable Development Task Force, a team of interested members of staff, lead by the Institute's Principal. A project coordinator was appointed for the duration of the project who operated with the support of the Task Force.</p> <p>To raise awareness of the project and to engage both learners and tutors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A poster campaign was launched. Three posters were designed; one citing the general aims of the Greener Future project, one advertising a class competition and the third inviting volunteers to become envirochampions. The posters were placed in all classrooms, in registers, in staff rooms and even on the backs of toilet doors. • Tutors of key classes were approached individually to encourage involvement and classes were visited by the project coordinator to raise awareness and invite volunteers. A greener futures email address and pigeon hole was also set up to ensure that people could get in touch about the project. A new folder containing project materials was also set up on the shared drive of the Institute for tutors to access. • Regular articles were also produced in 'Insight' the fortnightly staff newsletter promoting the Learner competition, asking staff to encourage students to become Envirochampions and providing general information about the Greener Future project as a whole,

- Information inviting envirochampion volunteers (posters and emails to tutors) highlighted the benefits of participating, which included extra training and the opportunity to build up experience which could be added to CVs. Training sessions were held in classes and with individuals to provide people with the materials needed to carry out their role as envirochampions.
- Sessions were held in the main lobby area that allowed learners and tutors to find out more about the Greener Futures programme - it was this that was the most successful in engaging learners into the Envirochampions programme.
- The student competition challenged whole classes to 'green' their curriculum area. Students were invited to submit a list of ways to make their courses more environmentally friendly. This was very successful in initiating discussions amongst learners and there were some excellent entries. A tip sheet on how to be more environmentally friendly within the Institute has been produced from student recommendations submitted for the Greener Futures competition.
- Recycling bins were bought and installed in all classrooms and the lobby areas. The bins were clearly and simply labelled with what could and could not be put in them. All tutors were notified via email and the staff magazine. New signage was bought for the recycling bins in the car park to highlight their position and utility.
- During the course of the project, the project coordinator received an increasing number of suggestions from staff and learners about improvements that could be made. In each case, the coordinator made sure people's suggestions were acknowledged. In some cases it was possible to say that something had been or was already being put in place, in other cases we have actually been able to adopt and act on suggestions. For example, one member of staff suggested installing movement sensitive lighting and push taps in the toilets – she was glad to hear that this will be implemented over the summer break. Another member of staff has suggested planting pollinating insect-friendly shrubs – as a result, we will be purchasing native plants and have also asked the woodwork class to make bug boxes for the site.
- An audit of classroom equipment was undertaken in January

	<p>and again in March to see what had been switched off at the end of the day. This showed there had been an improvement in the number of machines that are being switched off by classes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We attracted additional funding for Climate Week and hosted a celebration event, which included announcing the winners of the class competition and presenting certificates to Envirochampions. Family learning sessions on how to grow your own food and make environmental art were held. Stalls disseminated information about how to be green at Redbridge Institute and at home, the local recycling officer was present and we held a very successful book swap, which raised money for the charity. • A range of information sheets have also been developed and made available to staff and learners wishing to know more about reducing waste, saving energy, water conservation, better travel and more responsible purchasing. Detailed material is available as well as summary documents that are more accessible to our ESOL and Learning Difficulties students.
<p>5. Results that you obtained</p>	<p>The outcomes from this project have been wide, some expected and some not. The response to the Greener Futures project from staff and students has been very positive. The coordinator has found that people have been very interested in the project and both staff and students have been keen to report a real effort being made to switch off screens and use recycling bins in the Institute.</p> <p>On a practical level, we have successfully introduced the recycling scheme and increased the amount of ICT equipment being switched off at the end of classes. If this trend is maintained this will have a positive impact on our electricity bills and we are examining the possibility of renegotiating our waste disposal charges in light of the new recycling scheme.</p> <p>The number of envirochampions that have been enlisted far exceeded expectations and has been very exciting. The envirochampions programme coupled with the class environmental competition raised a lot of discussion, with both individuals and whole classes putting in significant effort to coming up with ways they could be more environmentally friendly. Class text book swaps have been proposed and one ICT student even used her class assignment to produce a PowerPoint presentation educating her classmates about global warming!</p>

Some suggestions that have been made have been subject specific such as, ways to reduce the wastage of glaze in pottery. Other recommendations were more generic, including making more use of the Virtual Learning Environment to reduce paper waste, and better utilising natural light by ensuring blinds are raised and rearranging the classroom appropriately.

During the course of the project a significant number of examples of teaching best practice uncovered. Many tutors are embedding environmental themes and practices directly into their teaching and curricula. By raising the profile of such examples of best practice, we can encourage other tutors to look for ways they can do similar activities and we hope to instigate a 'green star' award for tutors.

We still have work to do in getting learners and tutors to switch off computers. Some tutors still believe that it is better to leave computers on 'for the next class' than it is to switch them off. Unfortunately, the 'next class' may not be for another 4 hours! Despite this, we have seen a reduction in our carbon emissions, suggesting that with a bit more education and motivation, we can reduce our carbon emissions even further over the coming year. We expect to meet our hoped for saving of 11,500 kg of CO₂ by the end of the year.

By embracing sustainability principles we not only stand to save money but have also added value to the courses we run and the services we offer. For example, becoming an Envirochampion has given those learners a positive addition to their CVs providing them with work experience opportunities; by embedding best practice in the classroom, other students have learned ways of saving money and improving efficiency in their home and work lives.

6. What made the project a success? What were the key ingredients?

The key ingredients were top level commitment and having a solid basis from which to work.

The Principal of the college has been leading a team of interested and enthusiastic staff 'envirochampions' - the Sustainable Development Task Force. They have worked hard to deliver positive environmental practices throughout the organisation: developing a sustainability policy, introducing energy efficient technologies, developing plans of action and raising awareness. The Greener Futures project was able to build directly on this progress and commitment.

	<p>In addition, going directly to learners was essential – talking to classes to raise awareness was definitely useful but more valuable were the sessions in the lobby where learners and tutors alike could approach the project coordinator. This offered the opportunity to ask and answer questions, raise issues and discuss things that people might not want to in a class situation.</p>		
<p>7. Any resources or tools produced by the project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handouts that are accessible to learners who may be learning English as a second language or have learning difficulties. • A student tip sheet arising from the Greener Future competition that has practical ideas for how to be greener in the learning environment. • PowerPoint presentations on progress in sustainable development • Materials for engaging tutors and learners 		
<p>8. Total costs of the project</p>	<p>LSIS funding</p>	<p>Match funding</p>	<p>Total funding</p>
	<p>5,000</p>	<p>1,000</p>	<p>6,000</p>

	<p>Funded by LSIS through the Stepping Up in Sustainability Fund</p>	
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