

Empowered by Energy

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

April 2021

SGN



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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	01 February 2022
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	

2 Problem statement

For people coming to Britain as refugees or asylum seekers, life is exceptionally challenging. Across the UK, refugees are disproportionately represented in unemployment statistics and they suffer much of the poorest housing. These two factors alone result in a high risk of fuel poverty.

Currently over four million UK households live in fuel poverty, with this number expected to exceed 6 million in the coming months due to the energy crisis. This means people living in cold, energy inefficient homes that are expensive to heat. Fuel poverty can lead to poor physical and mental health, increased inequality, and a reduced quality of life.

To further compound this situation, many refugee and asylum seeker communities face specific language difficulties and cultural factors which make them less likely to engage with energy efficiency advice and assistance. Many refugees and asylum seekers come from regions where household heating is not common and activities such as installing or practicing energy efficiency measures or behaviours, or payment of utility bills, may seem alien. In addition, the transition for asylum seekers from having their utility bills paid by UK Border Agency, to having to manage and budget for these themselves may be difficult. Given the recent Afghan refugee crisis during 2021, the need for this project has never been more important. [Recent figures](#) suggest approximately 17,000 Afghan refugees have arrived in the UK since April 2021, demonstrating the increasing need for support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem of fuel poverty in the general population and therefore worsened in refugee and asylum seeker communities. Fuel poverty worsens under 'normal' recessions or times of economic pressure, but the necessity to stay home during the pandemic means that, even if households have not seen declining income, they might be experiencing much higher fuel bills. This comes in addition to pressures of unemployment or reduced income, which can cripple a family's ability to pay for their energy. This could lead to increases in debt, self-disconnection, and dangerous energy behaviours. Such individuals might also find it difficult to discuss problems, so noticing vulnerabilities and being able to address them is vital. As part of [Operation Warm Welcome](#), financial support has been provided to local authorities via the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP). Support has been focussed on the first year after arrival in the UK. Following this year, Afghan refugees will be migrated to the UK benefits system and funding for support workers will be extremely limited. It is vital to the success of integration that support is provided to Afghan refugees so that they are prepared for having their own energy accounts and empowering them to be competent consumers who are enabled to access support by giving them the information to help them understand their rights and responsibilities.

3 Scope and objectives

The partnership looks to identify engaged members of the refugee and asylum seeker communities and support them to become energy champions, to make changes not only to their own situation but also that of their friends and peers. The overall aim of Empowered by Energy is to support refugee and asylum seeker communities in achieving warm and safe homes for their families by building energy skills and resilience via effective engagement and a network of support.

In partnership in shared distribution areas SGN alongside Scottish & Southern Energy Networks (SSEN) and Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) will look to deliver the following activities in order to combat the issues outlined above:

- A minimum of twelve workshops will be delivered over a 3-week period, with between 8 -10 participants at each workshop. These interactive workshops consisting of three sessions, will educate participants in areas of energy efficiency with each session having a different focus. Themes will be tailored to the individual community needs and include energy and water efficiency; tariff switching and information about social tariffs; understanding bills and paying for energy. Translators will be utilised during the workshops where required. The same cohort of participants will attend all 3 sessions as part of their workshop.
- Upon completion of the workshops, participants will receive an energy efficiency pack to supplement their online learning, demonstrating immediate changes that can be made at home. Packs can include energy efficient products such as radiator foil, LED light bulbs, thermocards, slow cookers and language-appropriate materials.
- A quarterly newsletter will be produced and circulated electronically for supporting organisations and relevant outreach centres in the area to ensure participants and others within the community can stay up to date on knowledge relating to energy advice.

The workshops will be delivered with a mixed online and face-to-face delivery approach. This is to ensure that the workshops will be as inclusive as possible whilst taking into account logistical considerations such as covid restrictions, travel costs and childcare. As refugees and asylum seekers often don't have regular access to technology, face-to-face delivery will be offered to those who are unable to participate online, whilst online sessions will be offered to those with access to the necessary technology. The online format will also assist in delivering a cost-effective approach in which mixed-gender workshops can take place in a way that is sensitive to the needs of the community.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria as it will provide energy safeguarding services including direct advice and support to refugee and asylum seekers, including those at risk of or living in fuel poverty. The aim of the programme is to enhance the life skills of refugee and asylum seekers, equipping them with understanding and knowledge on how to manage their energy and critically stay warm in their homes.

This project will also engage on key matters to build energy resilience, increase awareness on the dangers of CO and key support services including the Priority Services Register whilst delivering a forecast positive Social Return on Investment.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

Since 2019 SGN and SSEN have been working with NEA developing and delivering the Empowered by Energy service, providing unique, tailored and targeted energy advice and support to a under supported group of people, refugees and asylum seekers. In 2022 SPEN joined the partnership enabling greater delivery in Scotland where there was an increased demand for support.

In 2020, the project adapted to offer the service online initially as a pilot, so we could continue to provide practical support to vulnerable refugee and asylum seeker communities during the Covid-19 pandemic; a time when people are spending greater periods at home, incurring extra energy costs and at increased risk of falling into debt. For those who attended the workshops, our evaluation demonstrates that these individuals now have increased knowledge and confidence to take control of their energy use and access the support available to them.

There were also some unexpected learnings gained through the delivery of the pilot. Due to the delivery style of the project during Covid restrictions largely being online, this also meant that there were a number of additional benefits. This included the inclusion of women in the sessions by ensuring they were delivered without the use of a camera online to cater for cultural sensitivities; childcare and associated costs were not necessary as the families could take part from home while their children were present; and there wasn't the need to pay for travel costs or ensure venues were in close proximity to participants.

However, whilst an online delivery approach worked incredibly well during the Covid-19 pandemic and was well received by participants, this does rely on participants having access to the internet and basic digital skills. It should be recognised that this method may not be appropriate for all age groups or for people without the confidence or capability to use digital technology. The partnership are therefore choosing a combination of digital and face-to-face workshops (Covid-19 permitting) going forward to ensure all clients had the ability to engage and participate.

5.1 NEA – Empowered by Energy - participant feedback:

“It was three weeks of information that I could never have imagined exist. It was very exciting as I now know where to go to or what to do should I have issues with my energy supply. Thank you”

“I have already shared the information to two of my friends. One is a new mum and the second is a mum that has a daughter with special needs and has also fled domestic violence”

“The sessions were great, well structured, covered a lot of information, and interactive. Rebecca answered a lot of questions and offered support. Families found it really helpful and some of them asked to share the presentation with them to keep it. They asked for more sessions like this which focus on daily experiences.”

5.2 Moving Forward Together – Stakeholder workshops 2018 and 2020:

Sharing our top 5 scenarios with our stakeholders during our engagement workshops in 2018, and updated retests in 2020 they agreed that providing essential emergency funding and essential skills for customers in vulnerable circumstances should remain one of our top priorities due to the impact of Covid on our most vulnerable customers in relation to affordability. In addition, our stakeholders wanted to see us approach affordability broader than 'gas', as customers who face financial hardship need support with all their utilities, and that water, gas and electricity should be approached as essential services.

5.3 Vulnerable Steering Group:

During 2020/21 our Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2. For year 1 we prioritised key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers and they recommended that we work with established charities that support people most in need. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group that SGN prioritise customer groups that are 'hard to reach' ensuring that our support is targeted to those most likely to require tailored and tangible support to achieve a safe and warm home. An approach that has been endorsed by our strategic panel, as it looks to provide a holistic and empowering service in partnership with other utilities.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

The planned and measurable outcomes for the project are:

- Refugee and asylum seekers have increased confidence to take control and manage their energy bills, empowering them to keep warm and healthy at home
- Subjective improvement in health and wellbeing and reduced attendance for medical intervention for cold related illness
- Strengthen resilience for refugee and asylum seekers by relieving stress about fuel debt or social isolation due to living in fuel poverty
- Increased skills and knowledge of frontline staff with awareness of the impacts of living in a cold home and how to support their clients

In total, this project will directly engage between 96 - 120 people within the refugee and asylum seeker community. Although the number of people directly impacted through the project delivery may seem small, the complex needs of refugee and asylum seekers means more in-depth support is required and shorter/lighter touch advice is not appropriate. As participants are recruited to become energy champions within their community NEA estimates based upon previous outcomes from the delivery of the pilot, that for every individual trained, this will indirectly impact a further 10 people who they can pass on advice and knowledge to. Therefore, the number of indirect beneficiaries of the project is estimated at 960 - 1200 people.

Due to the in-depth nature of the training, this will have a profound impact on mitigating the impacts of fuel poverty within the refugee and asylum seeker communities.

6.2 Success Criteria

- A minimum of twelve workshops delivered for between 8 -10 participants at each workshop. 96 - 120 refugees and asylum seekers trained as energy champions.
- Confirmation that trained energy champions self-assess as having increased confidence in managing a safe and warm home (who to call in an emergency, energy advice from how to efficiently warm a home, to how to identify the best tariff, and relevant funding schemes for those in hardship eg. Warm Homes Discount)
- Confirmation that the trained energy champions can identify the signs of fuel poverty in their community and feel confident in supporting others in achieving a safe and warm home
- Participants registering to the PSR and being able to confidently promote the scheme to eligible households
- Participants are confident that they know the signs of CO exposure and what to do to reduce CO harm
- Participants are confident that they know where to go to for help should they find themselves in utility debt.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

NEA will lead delivery of the project working closely with SGN, SPEN and SSEN. NEA will also engage with third party organisations, including but not limited to: Tamil Womens Group; Migrant Help UK; and Scottish Refugee Council who directly support refugees and asylum seekers. Additional support, both financially and in kind will be requested from other utilities who also have a role to play in supporting their refugee and asylum seeker customers, these will include the regional water companies and potentially energy suppliers.

SGN – lead gas network providing funding and support to the delivery team, including training, access to broader referral partners, and direct services for customers including but not limited to Locking Cooker Valves, CO alarms and access to the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme.

SSEN and SPEN – regional electricity network providing funding and support to the delivery team, including training, access to broader services, and access to the energy Priority Services Register.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

During the project implementation, there will be a range of monitoring activities established to ensure robust evaluation of the project. NEA will measure the outcomes of the project using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data will be collected on the number of people accessing the services and the range of people, noting their age, ethnicity and marital status. Where applicable (given the complex needs of some of the service users), a sample of clients will be asked to complete a questionnaire before they receive advice and then asked to complete it again following NEA's intervention. The results from a random sample will measure how much understanding and knowledge has increased amongst clients.

As a partnership we will work closely to ensure that we all understand the issues faced by the refugee and asylum seeker communities and adapt the support provided to address barriers to a safe and warm home.

The data and information collected from the project activities will be collated and analysed to create a post-project report with findings and recommendations and to show the real difference that has been made. This project report will be published on NEA portals, such as the charity website, and disseminated to project partners, and relevant members and stakeholders in the sector through the VCMA showcase and the Annual Report.

Learning

Through the delivery of this project, NEA can use the data and feedback captured to create best practices for supporting the refugee and asylum seeker community with vital energy advice. This will allow NEA to continually adapt the advice to cater for the complex needs and sensitivities for refugees and asylum seekers so they can manage their domestic energy efficiently.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

SGN are working with leading social impact research consultancy Simetrica where we have developed a bespoke social value bank of financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers. The approach used to estimate social value is based on best practice endorsed by HM Treasury for the evaluation of social policy and utilises values from the Treasury's 'Green Book' where applicable. The partnership are also working with SIA partners to review projects as part of the pre-assessment process and they have confirmed that we would expect a minimum of £5.50 SROI without the inclusion of CO alarms and emergency funds which would not apply for all participants.

*SROI breakdown provided separately

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2023

11 Geographic area

Shared distribution network areas covered by SGN, SSEN and SPEN in England and Scotland

12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications