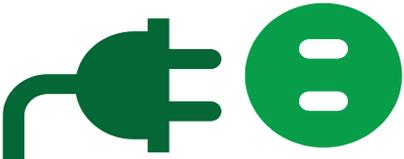


# Promising Practices



## Grassroots Initiatives on Energy Efficiency

### Neighbour-to-Neighbour Saves Ottawa Homeowners Money

The Neighbour-to-Neighbour (N2N) project was started in 2009 through Sustainable Living Ottawa East (SLOE), in an attempt to make the communities of Old Ottawa South, Old Ottawa East and Sandy Hill environmentally sustainable, while helping residents save money through energy conservation.<sup>1</sup> Initially focused on home energy audits, it eventually morphed into a part of Tucker House's Get Energy Smart Series, which provides seminars, workshops and walking tours.

SLOE initiated N2N as it saw engaging individuals to take action on energy conservation as having the biggest potential to reduce carbon emissions. As a community project, the idea was that after residents learnt about energy savings and their associated financial benefits, they would spread word of the program neighbour to neighbour, making it a truly grassroots initiative.

Scott McKenzie, N2N project manager, developed home energy audits, which involved going into homes and identifying major electricity users. A watt reader was used to determine how much electricity was being used by each appliance. McKenzie then made suggestions to homeowners on how to conserve energy. Suggestions included unplugging an extra fridge for at least part of the year, replacing a house's 10 most used light bulbs with compact fluorescents, placing computers and televisions on power bars to turn off when not in use, and hanging clothes to dry instead of using the clothes drier. He used a spreadsheet to record savings in kWh and converted this to money saved. McKenzie also suggested other ways to save energy, such as by turning down the heat in the winter and by closing blinds on the home's south side in the summer to reduce heat intake, which would make the homeowners more

conscious of energy use in general. He says the key step needed in energy conservation is being informed on how much energy is wasted.

McKenzie followed up with residents after the initial home audits to find out how much they were able to save. After two months, all those who responded were in line with the targets or had achieved more savings than anticipated; after one year, those who reported had all saved more than estimated, except one person whose furnace broke down and ended up using more electricity. The average estimated savings was 9%, and the average actual savings was 20%. McKenzie attributes the higher than anticipated savings to the fact that it was not just a home audit, but also a way of informing people about electricity use and waste. Once residents saw how much electricity and money they could save, they started changing their habits to save even more.

Originally, McKenzie planned to conduct one or two audits a week, and then train four or five volunteers who would also do one or two audits a week, and so forth, spreading the initiative. The "neighbour to neighbour" idea went well in terms of spreading the word about audits, though not in terms of recruiting other auditors. A few people were trained but due to unforeseen circumstances did not give audits.

Eighteen home audits took place on evenings and weekends between May-November 2009, with most taking place between May-July. Since it was entirely run by McKenzie, who was volunteering significant amounts of time, once he got a job it was difficult to continue the project. However, the project caught the attention of Kimberley Davis, who teaches a Communication Skills for Engineering Students course at Carleton University, and in fall 2010, the class performed audits. McKenzie taught the class how to

conduct them, and then students paired off, with a goal of performing a combined total of 50 audits.

In summer 2009, McKenzie was hired by Tucker House to work on the Get Energy Smart series, incorporating the N2N project. The Get Energy Smart series included home audits, 13 seminars, two walking tours, and three workshops. Through the seminars, which focused on 25 ways to save 25% of electricity, 608 people were reached. There were five tips for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in each of the following categories: electricity, home heating, transportation, consumption and waste. These tips can be found on pledge forms online.<sup>2</sup> The sessions were mostly downtown and attracted lower income residents as well as those who were already environmentally inclined.

The Neighbour-to-Neighbour Energy Conservation Project received a \$10,000 grant from the TD Friends of the Environment Fund to give kits to participants of the home audits and individuals who filled out pledge forms after attending a seminar. The kits included a power bar, some compact fluorescent light bulbs and clotheslines.

The project's main difficulty lay in recruiting other auditors, and MacKenzie suggests in the future, auditors could be paid a nominal fee. The professor and students from Carleton may continue the audits as well, which would also be an effective means of spreading the project.

## Surprising Results

On paper at least, the Get Energy Smart presentations were much more effective in achieving N2N's goals than the time consuming home energy audits. In the three hours spent on a single home audit, two presentations could be given to 100 people. Through the presentations, over 600 people were reached, with 374 of them filling out pledge forms. The results from the forms indicated over 100 times more savings than those savings achieved by the home audits. Home audits led to savings of about 2.8 tonnes of GHG emissions (the combined work of 18 homes). The seminars led to an estimated 1,594 tonnes GHG reduction (based on pledges from 374 people). On the other hand, the home audits were effective in that several changes were made on the spot, guaranteeing implementation, and there was more follow up for

participants. McKenzie emphasizes that there is not one solution to encouraging others to take part in energy efficiency; each method has its strengths and weaknesses, and together they are quite useful.

SLOE has never seen N2N as a simple greenhouse gas reduction initiative; it has long-lasting impacts. The project forces individuals to rethink their behaviours as they understand how energy is used (and wasted) and how this impacts the environment.<sup>3</sup>

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### References:

Please note: Unless otherwise noted, all information comes from:  
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<sup>1</sup> TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. "Making a Difference in Your Community." *TD Friends of the Environment Foundation*. TD Group Financial Services Site, Nd.

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<sup>2</sup> Tucker House. "Get Energy Smart Pledge Form." Website text. <https://maisontuckerhouse.wufoo.com/forms/get-energy-smart-pledge-form/>. Accessed July 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Supra note 1.

