

Tackling fuel poverty in Barking and Dagenham

“Through being at the events, some of us realised that it’s not just us that are suffering. People came together and were more open to talking to each other.”



Care City

Supporting people across North East London to live healthier, happier lives.



About the project

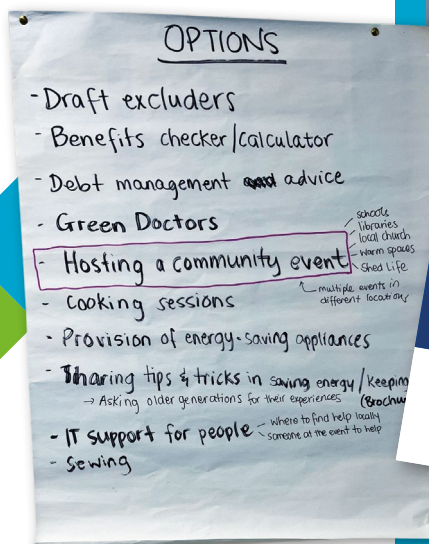
The Cadent Foundation-funded project helped reduce fuel poverty in Barking and Dagenham by uniting local partners to develop community-led solutions for residents most vulnerable to cold-related health issues. Through events, steering groups, and practical support, the initiative provided fuel vouchers, essential items, and access to vital services. 87% of attendees felt more knowledgeable about energy efficiency and community resources, with many benefiting from improved health, social connections, and financial stability.

The project revealed significant unmet needs and demonstrated the power of community-driven efforts to address them. This report details further the impact of our project.

With one in five households in Barking and Dagenham struggling to heat their homes, funding from the Cadent Foundation was crucial in helping to reduce fuel poverty and the related health risks. This support allowed us to pilot a community-led, multi-agency project aimed at tackling fuel poverty and the health issues made worse by the cold. The project brought together local partners, including the Local Authority, GPs, and community organisations, to use local knowledge and research to develop solutions, especially for those most vulnerable to health problems caused by cold homes.

We formed steering groups made up of engaged residents and stakeholders, who helped design community events that offered access to a Health Hub, IT support, and cooking tips. These events focused on making information accessible, creative and enjoyable, helping to build connections between residents and partner organisations. Additional support included distribution of fuel vouchers and practical items like air fryers and duvets to help with heating and cooking. And we directed households to other services, creating a comprehensive support system for those facing fuel poverty and related health issues.

We promoted the initiative using various methods, including GP text service, WhatsApp and Facebook community groups, flyers, and ads in local magazines, reaching 150 community members.



Feedback from participants highlighted the positive impact

Three key lessons we learnt about delivering a community led approach to fuel poverty:

1. Overcoming language barriers

Effective communication required multiple outreach methods and clear language adaptations. Connecting with local services was crucial to reaching the target audience and conveying the project's goals.

2. Effective engagement channels

The most successful ways to reach residents were through the GP text service, word of mouth, and community WhatsApp groups. Maintaining two-way communication across multiple channels was essential to address misinformation and ensure clear messaging.

3. Greater-than-expected needs

The project revealed a higher level of need than initially anticipated. Many residents, who were not reflected in local data, faced challenges like not being registered with a GP or living in unstable housing. Some reported lacking basic necessities like working appliances, proper heating, and sufficient living space.

*The positive impact of the events is illustrated through attendee feedback with **87%** feeling more knowledgeable about energy efficiency, health services, and community connections, and **50%** feeling more connected to their community from the first event to the last.*

The events also provided longer-term benefits through signposting and referrals to housing, health, and community services. Residents reported gaining a better understanding of the services available to help reduce fuel poverty and how to access them. This included:

- Access to hardship funds and grants
- Mental health support and food bank vouchers
- Debt payment plans and advice on suitable benefits
- Joining community activity groups like cooking and walking clubs
- Being able to afford food and keep warm thanks to winter support vouchers and items

As predicted, GP visits increased, which we believe was due to residents feeling more confident in seeking help. Service providers also noted higher engagement and referrals from those who attended the events. Additionally, they benefited from increased connections with other local services that they hadn't previously collaborated with.

Other reported benefits included:

- **74%** of residents said the winter support fund helped them stay warm, feed their families, and reduce energy bills
- **50%** received additional referrals or appointments for specific health conditions
- **27%** accessed mental health services
- **23%** saved money on fuel bills
- **14%** received food bank referrals
- **10%** were moved to more suitable, mold-free housing
- **10%** saved between £10-£20 per month on household bills
- **10%** received gym memberships



case study

Aysha's Story

40 year old Aysha lives in Thames View and is an incredibly busy mum to seven children, three cats and a hamster. She works as a Teaching Assistant and is also a carer for her Mum.

Aysha lives with asthma and arthritis, both of which worsen in cold weather, especially her asthma. The poor insulation in her council property makes heating expensive, leading to frequent doctor's visits during winter. She has been prescribed a nebulizer to help with her breathing and keeps a steroid and antibiotic pack at home due to recurring chest infections. Her arthritis has also worsened, and she's waiting for a hospital referral.

Aysha first heard about the Winter Support community events when a neighbour invited her to come along for company. At the event, she realised that help was available for her as well. She received food vouchers and an electric blanket, allowing her to cut back on heating costs.

Before attending these events, Aysha didn't use community services to support her health conditions. However, thanks to new connections made at the event, she now attends school-organised groups and has been offered Talking Therapies. She also received advice from the Homes and Money Hub, which helped her secure a reduction in her council tax and better understand the benefits available to her.

“ The Winter Support Community events opened my eyes to the help that's out there, which I didn't even know existed. I now use the Money Hub frequently to manage my money and visit the Sue Bramley Centre for advice and support whenever I need it.

case study

Debra's Story

Debra lives with several long-term conditions, including asthma and osteoarthritis, which worsen in cold weather. These conditions require her to visit the hospital monthly for check-ups and injections. Her doctor believes her health has been impacted by the damp conditions in the hostel where she lives.

Debra first heard about the Winter Support Community events through her Bible Study Group, where she enjoys meeting friends for coffee and prayer. She attended three events where she connected with organisations like Talking Therapies and Turn2Us, who offered advice on managing her health conditions. She took part in a “food on a budget” cooking class run by Creative Wellness and received a food voucher and slow cooker. And she benefitted from advice given by other event attendees, one of whom was a food bank volunteer.

“ The Winter Support Community events have been a lifeline for me. The support and advice I received on managing my health have been invaluable, and the cooking class was a fantastic opportunity to learn how to prepare nutritious meals on a budget.

The voucher helped me buy food for myself and my daughter, and the slow cooker has made it easier to cook meals since we only have access to a communal kitchen in the hostel.

Most importantly, these events have given me a sense of community and connection, helping me build a social life and find comfort in the support of others facing similar challenges.



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