

Every Action Counts

Discovering what you can do to improve your environment

Every Action Counts (EAC) was an England-wide Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) partnership initiative to promote understanding of sustainable issues and change in individuals' daily actions in their homes, workplaces and social activities. The programme provided information, ideas and resources for working within communities around 5 main themes:

- Travel wisely
- Shop ethically
- Save our resources
- Care for your area
- Save energy



As part of the partnership, Black Environment Network (BEN) researched and ran workshops with BME youngsters and older people in the north west region.

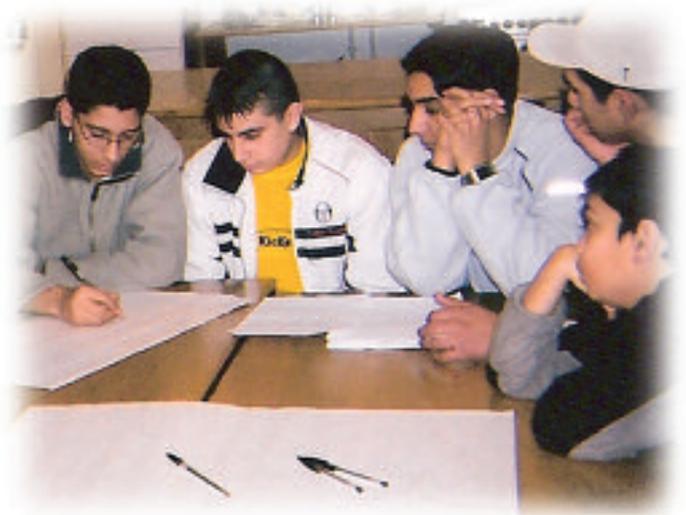
Making it happen

The BEN Development Worker identified a youth group and a family group from areas of multiple deprivation that included crime, drugs, employment, poor housing and health. In these places, many find it hard to believe that anyone can make a difference by their individual behaviour. Following discussions with the groups, two EAC courses were set up to run over 6 weeks covering a different theme each week. They began by finding out what the group members already knew and how they felt about the issues, share learning and resources, and together establish the best ways to change habits and raise expectations.

Starting where people are

A flexible and interactive approach allowed everyone to draw from their own experiences and share learning. Participants also set the grounds rules as to how the sessions would be run. Using the EAC materials, the weekly themed discussion were thorough and informative, covering:

- Energy saving bulbs
- Re-cycling – plastic bottles, cans, paper, carry bags, clothes
- Saving water – personal hygiene, showers or bath, washing machine use
- Transport – public, walking, car sharing, bicycles
- Food – supermarkets, local produce, farmers market, packaging issues
- Shopping habits – designer labels, peer pressure





- Caring for your local environment – litter, reporting issues, image and profile of the local area.

The groups then looked at their own behaviour and what affected changing their habits, including their own expectations and those of family, friends and colleagues. They discovered that making positive, personal changes to their current lifestyles, no matter how small the contribution they may make, could have a major impact on the sustainability of the community in which they lived. Manchester Energy Resources Centre gave them energy saving devices to use around their homes.

Key to the course for the youngsters was the opportunity to discuss their own values openly and examine the pressures they feel from peer groups, media and family on their lifestyle.

They could see how 'buying-in' to making changes as a group would support them in their efforts. The older people had more habits of recycling and local shopping from their home countries and the skills involved in making resources stretch when times are hard and incomes low. The course made it clear how precious these skills are.

The Future

All of the participants are positive role models or mentors within their community through their new knowledge. One youth club formed a Re-cycling project for plastic and paper, through the leadership of one of the participants. By the end of the course, both groups had a list of local networks and organisations that could support their environmental actions. The groups are now well equipped in terms of information, resources and shared learning, to continue their energy saving practices within their families and communities.

FACTFILE

- **Funders:**
Big Lottery Fund
Every Action Counts/DEFRA
- **Partners:**
Every Action Counts
Oxford Road Youth Centre
Bury Groundwork
Manchester Energy Resource Centre
- **Target:**
BME groups in the North West
- **Numbers:**
8 young people
10 older people
- **Key Point:**
 - Well written and targeted materials supported by sensitive group work in their own localities enables ethnic communities to be equally involved in sustainable issues and behaviour



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