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EBICO AND BRISTOL DEBT ADVICE CENTRE PARTNERSHIP HELPS FAMILIES BEAT FUEL POVERTY

- Low-income households offered free advice to combat fuel poverty
- More than **220** Bristol families benefited from project in first six months

More than 220 Bristol families have benefited in the first six months of a groundbreaking project that aims to help low-income families better manage their debt and energy demands.

The Energy Advice Project is run by Bristol Debt Advice Centre (BDAC) with financial support from Ebico, the UK's only not-for-profit energy supplier. The project was set-up to combat fuel poverty faced by vulnerable households in Bristol and the surrounding areas, and serves to promote energy efficiency in the home.

Since partnering with Ebico in September 2010, the BDAC has been able to expand the services to reach further into the local community by offering one-to-one home visits for the first time. And in this time, it has helped 221 families in Bristol and a total of 355 in the wider surrounding region, to beat fuel poverty and reduce their household energy consumption.

The project offers a number of initiatives set to identify, assess and avoid fuel poverty, through helping participants take control of their finances. The project provides advice and support on issues from managing household energy consumption and bill payments, to advising on energy efficiency measures for the home, as well as dealing with winter warmth concerns.

As well as offering home visits and regional drop-in sessions, the project offers access to independent charitable trust grant funding, both through self-help charitable workshops and through one-to-one support for those clients who meet the qualifying criteria. These discretionary grants are designed to help people clear their fuel debts and to purchase energy-saving household items and/or to provide further assistance payments.

Rhianne Cotterill from BDAC's Energy Advice Project said: "Since Ebico began supporting the Energy Advice Project at Bristol Debt Advice Centre, we have been able to expand our services and reach into communities to support those in, or at risk of fuel poverty in a positive and proactive way.

"As part of these expanded services we can now carry out home visits and give clients advice on a range of issues including how to use their heating systems, energy saving and dealing with fuel debt. This home visit programme has been crucial in helping us achieve our aim of tackling fuel poverty in the South West. We could not carry out this vital work without the support of Ebico and we are thankful that they share our passion for educating and supporting people in, or at risk of fuel poverty."

Ebico was set up with the core aim of helping to end fuel poverty in the UK. It does this through fair pricing and energy saving advice and by diverting any surplus company revenue – through the Ebico Trust for Sustainable Development – to community programmes that help people affected by fuel poverty. Fuel poverty currently affects one in five families in the UK and is defined as spending 10 per cent or more of household income on energy bills.

Phil Levermore, Managing Director of Ebico, commented: "It may sound counter-intuitive for an energy supplier to be helping to lower energy use, but at Ebico we are committed to helping to create a low carbon future by encouraging people to cut their energy consumption.

"The Department for Energy and Climate Change recently published figures showing that the number of people suffering from fuel poverty in the UK continues to increase. The knock-on effects of colder weather and government cutbacks could put many UK households in a significantly worse position in the coming years.

"Ebico was set up with the core aim to wipe-out fuel poverty in the UK and partnering with the Bristol Debt Advice Centre on the delivery of its Energy Advice Programme in Bristol and the surrounding area enables us to further work towards our goal."

CASE STUDY

Name: Lea Cardwell

Age: 50s

Lives: Clifton

Lea Cardwell from Clifton, Bristol in is her 50s and was referred to the BDAC through her housing association, Knightstone and carer Amy Odlin.

A BDAC adviser visited Lea at her home in Clifton for a one-to-one visit to give her free advice on applying for social tariffs and independent charitable trust grants as well as ways to improve the energy efficiency of her home.

“I live in a flat in a converted Georgian property that can be extremely draughty and tricky to keep warm. I also suffer from a number of health problems that are made worse by the cold and mean that I am unable to work, so I have a limited amount of fixed income to live on,” says Lea.

The BDAC found that Lea had not been using her central heating controls properly, resulting in her spending a vast amount of time in the cold, especially in the early mornings – something that had been having a negative effect on her health.

The BDAC adviser sat down with Lea to advise her on the most efficient way to use her central heating system to ensure that her home was heated at the right times. They also provided Lea with advice on draft-proofing and insulating her home and secondary glazing, as well as helping her to apply for a social tariff from her energy supplier to reduce her energy costs.

During their visit, the BDAC also found that the majority of Lea’s flat was uncarpeted, with only hard concrete flooring. This was resulting in significant heat loss and higher energy bills, as the National Energy Action states that 15 per cent of heat is lost through the floor in un-insulated homes. As a result, the BDAC worked to secure independent charitable trust grant funding for Lea’s flat to be carpeted, with work due to start imminently.

Lea said: “I’m grateful to Knightstone and my carer Amy Odlin for referring me to the BDAC. Without the BDAC, I wouldn’t have had a clue what grants and benefits I was eligible for. Their advice and support has been invaluable and made me feel so much better about living in my own home again. I really appreciate what they’ve done and can’t wait for my new carpets to be fitted – I’m over the moon!”

Energy saving advice from Ebico:

Ebico was established as a social enterprise in 1998 with surplus money donated through the Ebico Trust in the pursuit of reducing fuel poverty and tackling climate change through community initiatives.

Ebico urges consumers to get energy-fit and offers the following quick advice for anyone looking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes:

1. When purchasing new appliances; always look for the 'Energy Saving Recommended' logo – it could save you up to £34 a year
2. Use energy saving lightbulbs and don't forget to turn off lights when you leave a room
3. Put your washing on at 30 degrees or lower – this uses a third less electricity
4. Insulate your hot water tank – jackets cost between £10 and £15 but could save you around £30 a year.
5. Switch to a high-efficiency boiler

- Ends -

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Notes to Editors:

About Ebico

Ebico is the UK's only not-for-profit energy supply company in the UK and is committed to the reduction and elimination of fuel poverty. The company's flat rate tariff with no standing charge rewards low users of energy. For more information visit www.ebico.co.uk

About Bristol Debt Advice Centre

Since 1989 Bristol Debt Advice Centre (BDAC) has been improving lives by tackling financial problems. The organisation is committed to relieving and preventing poverty; combating social and financial exclusion; promoting equal opportunities; promoting access to justice; influencing social policy and contributing to economic regeneration.

The primary focus for BDAC is its Energy Advice Project, set-up to reduce fuel poverty in the South West.