



BEST PRACTICE IN ADULT EDUCATION FOR A JUST TRANSITION

Sustainable Living Program
Empowering Individuals to Address
Climate Issues

JULY 2024



Co-funded by
the European Union

Sustainable Living Program

– Empowering Individuals to Address Climate Issues

Context and Initiative Details

Name of the initiative	Sustainable Living Program
Geographical scope	Mostly local
Sources of funding	Rethink Ireland and operating a Social Enterprise model
Duration of the initiative	Since 2020
Target audience	community organisations, businesses and the public via libraries
Social justice focus area	Just Transition, climate justice
Goals of the initiative	Through impact-driven courses to empower individuals at work and in their communities to address the climate crisis through lifestyle changes and collective actions.

Good Practices Description

Stakeholder engagement in the process

An initial survey was carried out with over 300 responses to determine the challenges individuals were facing when seeking to live more sustainably. Additionally, community groups and businesses are consulted prior to training so that it can be tailored to their particular needs.

Methodology used

The approach is about building confidence and supporting individuals who feel unsure and isolated about addressing sustainability. Participants are supported to reflect on their own lives and feel positive about making small changes that are possible within their means and not to feel overwhelmed and disempowered by the larger scale of the climate crisis. Cumulative small changes have impact.

In the interactive classes participants learn practical ways to reduce their carbon footprint and adopt sustainable habits, improving their lifestyles while also reducing costs.

Teaching approaches

A typical course comprises 4 x 2hr sessions, including practical elements wherever possible

Sessions are: Reduce the Plastic in your Life; Cosy Homes; Your Sustainable Wardrobe; A Climate Friendly Kitchen

Follow up resources are offered

The group receives an impact report

Challenges and outcomes

Key factors contributing to success

- Responsive to groups' needs
- Avoids jargon and concentrates on easily adopted changes with immediate practical benefits
- People feel empowered by being 'linked into' the wider sustainability movement and having personal contributions acknowledged
- Approach is informal and very accessible

Encountered difficulties and challenges

People do not want to or are unable to commit to lengthy courses and so this programme is a maximum of 8 hours. Even that can be challenged by groups only wanting to commit to hour-long sessions or only wanting to focus on one specific issue. Obviously, this lessens the impact.

The language of climate justice can be a barrier as not everyone has an understanding nor want to engage in the 'big issues' which can be overwhelming, so leading in with the everyday, with topics people can easily relate to can ease the way to wider discussion.

Recommendations

At the macro level funders should recognize that supporting small changes can have an important ripple out impact. Also measures need to be supported that enable people to live more sustainably in ways they can easily adopt and that have real-life impact.

Impact

There have been 13 deliveries to date, reaching 200 individuals. Community groups are mostly from areas of disadvantage. Courses delivered to the public via libraries attract a wide range of learners in terms of gender and age.

The biggest but invisible impact is the increased sense of wellbeing felt through connecting to a wider sustainability movement/community.

Collective impacts as well as individual impact are possible when the course is delivered to community groups or businesses.

Quotes from learners –

The programme has helped provide practical steps to deal with the constant messages we hear about Climate Change and the need to reduce our Carbon Footprint.

After doing the course I was able to see simple changes I could make on a day-to-day basis to be more sustainable and that made me more hopeful for the future.

It opened my eyes to the little things I can do on a daily basis that contribute to much bigger changes.