

Practical action for Transition

Eva Schonveld explains how communities can be inspired to change their everyday lives and form their own Transition group.

The Transition model is only five years old. It started as a project by a year group at Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland – they created a vision of their community in 20 years' time, and then worked out the steps they'd need to take to get there. From there it has become a bit of a global phenomenon, with people all over the world looking at how they might put some of these ideas into action in their home communities.

For some of us, the Transition model might not feel all that new. For many who have been quietly getting on with this stuff over the years, the real challenge can be how we get other people involved. For a long time this kind of behaviour was so far away from 'normal' that it was easy to feel that the only way through was to 'head for the hills' literally or metaphorically.

But we are now witnessing a wave of public awareness that our planet can't continue to sustain us and all the other forms of life that we rely on if we continue to behave as we have been. Those of us who've been aware of this for a while need to use this wave as an opportunity to help shape responses to this crisis which are inclusive, easy to participate in and above all effective.

Finding ways to enthuse other people in your community can be

a real challenge (depending on the community!) if you've not tried it before, but there will often be some way in. Here are some of the ways communities are beginning to change their everyday lives:

Food: growing more of our own by creating allotments, community orchards, market gardens and so forth; and making arrangements with local farmers to grow for us. This will not replace all food trade, but will allow us to provide the basics much more cheaply, allowing us to still bring in spices and such like from elsewhere in the world.

Energy: insulating our homes and public buildings; putting up community-owned wind turbines; creating combined heat and power systems; growing wood for fuel.

Waste: composting; creating 'libraries' of items which can be shared in our communities; finding space for local 'swap shops', reducing, re-using and finding ways to recycle locally.

Money: sharing instead of buying; setting up LETS schemes, or local currencies, which keep money in the local economy.

Work: working more from home, establishing community offices and workshops; creating more local jobs as we start making more of what we need in our own communities.

Transition groups often start with one or more awareness raising event, which often include an introduction to what a Transition group might get up to in your community. With any luck, enough people will be inspired to form one or more working groups – most often people will want to do something with food. Energy, transport and health are popular themes too. The main idea is that there's space for people to do what they feel most enthusiastic about, creating a positive energy which draws others in.

The Transition model is being taken up all over the world. In Scotland, Transition Scotland Support (TSS) is the first organisation in the world to receive government funding to build a network of Transition communities across Scotland. We are currently in touch with over 80 communities, from tiny islands to local areas in big cities.

To get in touch and find out more, email eva@transitionscotland.org or tel. 0131 657 2555. See www.transitionscotland.org and www.transitiontowns.org

Eva Schonveld is the Co-ordinator of Transition Scotland Support.

Photos from left to right: Painting Edinburgh Green (an awareness raising event); the community garden in Forres; a pile of dressed-up bikes in Portobello.



Inspiration and support for community action

The last few years have seen a rapid growth of community action to tackle climate change and find a sustainable future. This has taken many forms, becoming a movement characterised by diversity. Here we showcase just a few of the exciting projects out there which are acting as inspiration for new community action.

Neilston: Switched on and powering down

The struggle towards environmental sustainability can best be achieved by grassroots projects and the whole community getting involved. The Neilston community is already doing just that. As part of a network of 26 communities headed by Community Energy Scotland and the Development Trusts Association, Neilston Community Powerdown is looking at ways of reducing the carbon footprint of the whole village to help combat climate change.

Our latest project includes home energy surveys for all households in Neilston, demonstrating energy efficiency measures to householders and carbon footprinting Neilston village. Awareness raising about climate change and what can be done to tackle it is a major part of the project and volunteers are working with local schools in organising an energy awareness poster competition. School children, together with a local band, are also producing an "eco-song" inspired by the powerdown project. A lantern parade and the promotion of local food production will also form part of a festival called Neilston Powerdown: Liven Up planned to take place from 19th to 21st March 2010.

On the renewable energy front, the Neilston Development Trust is set to establish a community wind farm in a joint venture project. The community will have a 50% share of the project, which will bring in the much needed funds to carry out the regeneration of the village. Four wind turbines will be installed on derelict

land and the proposal is set to go for planning permission before the end of the year. This project will take 12 years to pay off the necessary start-up loans, but after that time it will generate over £1 million per year for the community. There are currently also feasibility studies being carried out for a hydro project scheme in the community.

Jonas Cromwell



Sustaining Dunbar



We are a Transition Initiative and Development Trust which is working to facilitate a transition to a resilient local economy in a future independent of fossil fuels. Our focus is on the small coastal town of Dunbar and the surrounding rural hinterland, an area with about 5,000 households and an expanding population of about 12,000.

Our '2025' vision map and action plan project is asking the question: What will the Dunbar and East Linton area look like in 2025 and how can the transition to a zero-carbon future be an opportunity for positive change? Where will we get our food, where will we work, how will we heat our homes, how will we travel? We are using community mapping to engage as many people as possible in contributing to this process and will then be drafting a community action plan for positive change. We are developing 'resilience indicators' to allow us to monitor our progress as the plan is implemented.

In the meantime, we are a lead partner in the BeGreen energy advice project and employ a team of energy auditors to provide personalised assistance to householders to reduce their home energy consumption and to install micro-renewables, where appropriate.

We are also working on various practical projects including setting up a community owned bakery, looking into a possible woodchip fired district heating scheme, auditing barriers to active travel, setting up training in facilitating creative and productive meetings, supporting a residents association to start a community garden and orchard, lobbying for new allotments and more...

We hold regular events such as an Apple Day, Bikefest, filmshows and ceilidhs and recently hosted the first Scottish Local Food Gathering.

Philip Revell





Isle of Eigg goes from strength to strength

The Isle of Eigg is the only Scottish finalist in NESTA's £1million competition The Big Green Challenge. The end of the competition year is up and we are now waiting with bated breath for the results which will be announced by the end of the year.

Over the past year we have tackled using less fossil fuel, more efficient use of what we use, more insulation, transport alternatives, reducing waste,

and growing as much as we can. We are ambitious to ensure what we do helps to sustain our own future, but also protects the wider world.

We think every small community can be a green island, it doesn't matter whether you're surrounded by water or not. A village, a street, a block of flats, or an office can call themselves an "island". Together, as a community of green islands, we can do more than working on our own. With just five simple steps, your community can become a green island and share experiences, news, and tips with other islands who, like Eigg, are trying to make a difference. So whether you're just thinking about doing something, or are up and running, share your ideas and ambitions for all our green futures at www.islandsgoinggreen.org

There has been a real buzz within the community with green issues being discussed as part of normal day to day conversation. All our projects have attracted great enthusiasm, for example the Community Woodland Association being on board helping us with our woodfuel feasibility study. Another project which has just kicked off is a feasibility study looking into a car club for the small isles, Mallaig, Morar, Arisaig and Knoydart. In the future we look to building on the projects we have completed this year to continue going green!

For more information on the island look at www.isleofeigg.org

Tasha Lancaster

Photos clockwise from left: Putting up a yurt at the Giants Footsteps festival; installing solar panels; a view of the island from the air.

Climate Challenge Fund – act now!

Act now if you'd like your community to benefit from the Climate Challenge Fund, writes Karen Grant.

Scotland's Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) has already supported over 150 communities to take climate action. The more groups benefit from this, the better placed Scotland will be to face up to the challenges of climate change in an ambitious way.

If you'd like your community to benefit from this opportunity it's important that you act soon because Funds are currently only committed up to April 2011, which means that projects aiming for the January applications deadline will only be able to apply for one year's funding. There is no decision as yet on the future of the fund after that.

The Fund is based on two main criteria: projects must be community-led; and they must deliver emissions reductions. These reductions can happen within the duration of the project, or they can be projected reductions which will happen in the future as a result of the project. The team of Grants Officers are genuinely keen to help you through the process, giving advice on thorny issues such as demonstrating emissions reductions.

The next major deadline for grants will be in January, and it is essential that any group intending to apply gets in touch as soon as possible to begin the process and give themselves the best chance of success.

Projects recently funded include a local food project in Edinburgh, an energy audit of buildings in Assynt to help plan future energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, an energy advice service in Argyll and an innovative urban community arts project tackling climate issues.

Some of the most exciting projects show communities creatively using emissions reducing work to reach out for a wider impact. Tackling climate change needs diverse approaches and the Fund is quite open to supporting that diversity.

The CCF represents enormous potential for communities to lead the way in showing what climate action can mean. It is essential that we all rise to this challenge.

For more information, see www.climatechallengefund.org or view a

map and details of all CCF projects funded so far at <http://tinyurl.com/6m756f>

Karen Grant represents the voluntary sector on the decision-making panel of the CCF. She can be contacted through Catalyst Campaigns (catalystcampaigns.blogspot.com).

Further resources for communities

www.sead.org.uk

Scottish Education and Action for Development (SEAD) has a 120-page website designed to support community action. The Climate Action Hub has links to everything you'd want to know about climate change plus resources for setting up your own events and case studies from Scotland and around the world. The Community Action Toolkit provides information on engaging and involving people, how to hold successful events, make an action plan and design successful projects. It is action-oriented and focuses on positive solutions.

www.stopclimatechaosscotland.org

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland is a coalition of civil society organisations – environment and development groups, faith groups, humanitarian organisations, women's groups, trade unions and many others – working to mobilise public concern, and through this the necessary political action, to stop climate chaos. See their members list for a good introduction to the diverse bodies campaigning on climate change in Scotland.

www.localpeopleleading.co.uk

Local People Leading is an informal alliance of national networks, local community groups and individuals joining forces to campaign for a strong and independent community sector in Scotland.

www.coinet.org.uk

The Climate Outreach and Information Network is an Oxford-based organisation offering courses, including Climate Change Condensed course, a Speaker training course and a Communicating climate change course.

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

The Energy Saving Trust was set up by the government with the aim to cut emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) by promoting the sustainable and efficient use of energy. You can call 0800 512 012 for free advice on all aspects of energy use and efficiency, including information about grants for householders and communities. Its project Community Action for Energy (CafE) networks people interested in community-based energy initiatives, and the Scottish Community and Householder Renewables Initiative.

www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk

Community Energy Scotland supports and funds community groups throughout Scotland to develop sustainable energy projects. They deliver CARES, the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme across Scotland.