

## Local authority communications case study: Luton

# A communications campaign to promote recycling within Luton's Indian sub-continent communities

## Introduction

The communications campaign run by Luton Borough Council between September 2006 and March 2008 sought to develop materials that communicated effectively with those residents whose origins are in the regions making up the Indian sub-continent – primarily India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir and Sri Lanka. Across the town as a whole they make up around 25% of the population, but are concentrated in certain wards, where they make up as much as 70% of the population. The target area for the campaign was three wards in the south-west of the town with the highest proportion of Indian sub-continent population. The wards were identified from a previous WRAP-funded project which showed clearly those areas and wards in Luton which were falling behind in terms of recycling and waste minimisation. The project also showed that there was a strong correlation between these low performing areas and the target community group.

## Key Facts

- 'Bollywood' theme<sup>1</sup> used for campaign materials to attract attention of target audience.
- 8% more residents in the target area now participate in recycling.
- The campaign ran from September 2006 to March 2008.
- Campaign budget was £105,000.
- Cost per household was £6.18.

## About Luton

- Luton Borough Council covers the urban area of Luton town which has a population of 184,900.
- The town has been likened to an inner London borough with its high levels of deprivation, densely populated areas and considerable ethnic diversity.
- 18.2% of the population of Luton is classified as Asian or British Asian.

## Background to campaign

All households in Luton receive a weekly refuse collection and are provided with a kerbside recycling collection (mostly fortnightly). Dry recyclables (newspapers, magazines, junk mail, cardboard, plastic bottles, steel and aluminium cans, foil and cartons) are collected in a wheeled bin or clear sack. Around 86% of households are also provided with a fortnightly green waste collection.

There are 60 mini recycling centres around the town with facilities for glass, paper, cans, plastic bottles and textiles. Two Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) take all these materials as well as bulky waste, white goods, batteries, car tyres, hazardous waste and waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE).

<sup>1</sup> The campaign developed a look and feel commonly used in Asia for which the term 'Bollywood' was used.



Experience had shown that participation in recycling among Luton's Indian sub-continent communities tends to be lower than in other communities in the town. It was therefore crucial to tailor the campaign to suit the cultural and social background of these communities, and to choose the best method of conveying information about the benefits of recycling and how to recycle.

#### Communication objectives

The campaign's objectives were to:

- increase the overall recycling rate in Luton by the end of March 2008 to 24%;
- increase the amount of material recycled in the target areas by 5% by March 2008;
- increase the level of participation within the target area by the end of March 2008;
- increase the number of people who fit into the 'committed recycler' category in the target area by March 2008; and
- develop a successful communications campaign recognised by residents from the Indian sub-continent by the end of March 2008.

#### Approach

##### Reaching the target audience

The campaign aimed to send out a message that targeted Luton's Indian sub-continent communities using Bollywood themed posters, billboards, advertising shells, a leaflet and roadshows. It was hoped that messages with a 'Bollywood' feel would attract the attention of people who normally ignored standard recycling messages. A highly visual, themed design was developed which utilised the design principles of 'Recycle Now'.

The media used in the campaign were simple and eye-catching so as to draw in viewers before they knew what the message was. Once they had been drawn in, they read a simple message asking them to 'recycle' in a variety of languages. All households in the target area received a leaflet in the same style as the posters and advertising shells explaining how to use the recycling service at home.

The campaign was launched at an event in the centre of Luton in March 2007 and four roadshow events were held in October 2007 – two at community centres in the target area, one in a Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) and one at a Gujarati ladies' group. Display boards showing images of recyclables and bins were used to help explain aspects of Luton's recycling schemes. A translator was used where necessary to convey the talk's messages.

### Planning the design of the materials

The design of the communication materials developed over time. Before the designs were shown to the Council's communications department, a lot of time was spent discussing them, adjusting concepts and drawing sketches. When the communications department finally received the briefs, they were as detailed as possible and included colour ideas, layout sketches and descriptive notes.

In the interests of economy, the photo-shoot for the billboard poster also included photos of poses for the advertising shells and the leaflet. The designs were agreed with the designer beforehand and the project manager attended the shoot to ensure the images were right. Advice was sought to ensure all cultural and social aspects were considered and included in the design process for the poster.



### Residents' views of the design

One of the questions in a survey carried out within the target area on the suitability of the leaflet was about the clarity of the statement. All responses were positive and, those people asked to comment on the translations in more detail, said they made perfect sense and were phrased in a modern style.

The survey also probed whether the design of the advertising materials conveyed the right message and call to action. For example, one question explored the first impression people had of the billboard. The 'Recycle' message was the most common, with 34.9% of people stating this was their first impression. The third largest category was the colour, which 19.2% of people stated as their first impression. The use of such a vibrant colour was intentional to make the billboards stand out from a long distance and to link into the colours that people associate with the Indian sub-continent.

The original trial posters had the strapline 'No matter how you say it, recycling pays'. However, this caused confusion as some people thought it meant the council would pay them for recycling or perhaps rebate some council tax if they recycled a lot. The strapline was therefore changed; after much discussion, 'No matter how you say it, recycling counts' was agreed and no more comments were made by the public.

### Results/Conclusion

By the end of the communications campaign, 8% more residents in the target area were participating in recycling schemes and the number of committed recyclers had risen by 4%.

The amount of residual waste produced annually in Luton fell 3.6% between 2006-07 and 2007-08. The target area, however, exceeded this reduction with a 4.2% decrease in deposited waste.

In addition, the amount of dry recycling increased 8% overall and a very impressive 9.4% in the target area between 2006-07 and 2007-08. When comparing the same quarter of 2007-08 from the previous year there was an increase of 23.4% for dry recycling in the target area, which was 14.3% more than for the whole of Luton. These increases in recycling rates, which far exceed those of Luton as a whole, can – at least in part – be attributed to the communications campaign. Many people were aware of the campaign and were more knowledgeable about what to recycle.

The success of the project can primarily be attributed to the time taken initially to understand the need to identify a common cultural and social theme that pervaded the target community.

### Key Learning Points

- Identify a cultural and social theme recognisable by all communities.
- Check the accuracy of the final printed translated text. One of the letters in the Gujarati translation was not recognised by software used in the design process and was changed by mistake. This resulted in the phrase 'Recycle *your* rubbish' becoming 'Recycle *you* rubbish'.
- Check the style of the translated text. The original translations conformed perfectly to every grammatical rule, but the translators were obviously not native speakers of the languages as the translations used archaic words and phrases which were definitely not in the vernacular. The translations were therefore redone to be more 'street wise' such that the audience could relate more strongly to the message.

*'The WRAP project was an excellent chance to prove that difficult to reach community groups can be successfully targeted using innovative approaches to a communications campaign.'*

**Kully Birring, Luton BC Project Manager**

While steps have been taken to ensure its accuracy, WRAP cannot accept responsibility or be held liable to any person for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading.

This material is copyrighted. It may be reproduced free of charge subject to the material being accurate and not used in a misleading context. The source of the material must be identified and the copyright status acknowledged. This material must not be used to endorse or used to suggest WRAP's endorsement of a commercial product or service. For more details, please refer to our Terms & Conditions on our website – [www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)

---

**Waste & Resources  
Action Programme**

The Old Academy  
21 Horse Fair  
Banbury, Oxon  
OX16 0AH

Tel: 01295 819 900  
Fax: 01295 819 911  
E-mail: [info@wrap.org.uk](mailto:info@wrap.org.uk)

Helpline freephone  
0800 100 2040

[www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)