

## Low Participation Areas: Case Study 4 – Breckland District Council

# Improving participation in migrant worker communities



Breckland District Council (highlighted above) addressed the issues of low participation and high contamination of its recycling collection services by engaging with their migrant worker communities.

# Breckland District Council: Improving participation and reducing contamination in areas of migrant worker communities

## Background

Breckland District is one of seven districts within the county of Norfolk. It has a population of 127,000 with 55,000 households covering a large rural area of 1,305 km<sup>2</sup>. Around 50% of the population lives in the five market towns of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffam, Thetford and Watton and the rest is spread across 107 rural parishes varying in size from 20 to 300 residents.

Breckland District Council provides an alternate weekly refuse and recycling service to all households and a chargeable (opt in) garden waste collection service. Householders separate their recyclable materials (paper products, card, cans and plastic bottles) into black 240 litre wheeled bins for a fortnightly kerbside collection service.

Breckland has become home to a large migrant worker community attracted by employment opportunities within the agricultural, food processing and manufacturing sectors. Over the past 10 years the migrant worker population has grown from the early Portuguese migrants to, more recently, a growing Eastern European population. The migrant workforce is estimated to be around 15,000 mainly dispersed throughout the indigenous population with clusters in the five towns of Breckland.

## Aim

The aim of this project was to engage with the Eastern European migrant worker community about Breckland's kerbside recycling services in order to increase participation and decrease contamination rates amongst this community.

## Identifying low participation areas

Incidents of high contamination were identified as being associated with individual rented migrant worker residences. The crews observed this, and recorded it on their daily worksheets, and some residents called the council when their neighbours did not place their recycling bins out for collection. Distinct areas of low participation were not observed because migrant workers living in Breckland are typically widely dispersed.

## Understanding the issues

The issues of low participation in the kerbside recycling collection services and high levels of contamination are not new to Breckland. These issues once existed within the Portuguese migrant communities and are now evident within the newly established Eastern European communities.

Having had previous experience of delivering communications to the Portuguese community, council officers realised that the more standard communications approaches used to reach householders i.e. door-to-door leafleting, press releases etc. would not be successful with the new migrant communities. The issues that needed to be taken into account are outlined below:

- migrant workers are typically housed in temporary accommodation which is dispersed throughout the indigenous residential areas – this makes them difficult to locate and then target;
- the transient nature of migrant workers, coupled with the fact that they often live in multi-occupancy rented accommodation makes it difficult to sustain communications with them over any period of time;
- language and cultural differences make it difficult to communicate and explain the need to recycle; and

- recycling is often less of a cultural norm for the migrant communities.

The transient and dispersed nature of the migrant groups also makes it very difficult to quantify their participation in recycling. However, it has been noticeable that there is high contamination amongst migrant residents - in some cases up to 12% - particularly contamination of recyclables with plastic bags, nappies, garden waste and the wrong types of plastics.

Neighbours of migrant workers who have not been participating in the kerbside recycling services have acted as the “eyes and ears” for the council and provided anecdotal evidence on a need to know basis. This often prompts a visit by the community liaison officer or council officers to encourage residents to recycle.

## Defining the target audience

Migrant workers make up approximately 11% of the district's population. The council knew from previous experience of engaging with an immigrant population, and from observations made by staff and members of the public that they needed to target migrant workers to improve participation. Further investigation, including speaking to local neighbours, suggested that the majority of these workers came from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia.

## Developing communication solutions

Breckland District Council benefited from a Rotate Communications Plan developed in September 2005. This plan outlined a strategic approach for communicating with the migrant communities within the district. The recommendations, coupled with the lessons learnt from addressing the issues of low participation and contamination within the Portuguese community,

have been combined and adapted to address the same issues arising with the Eastern Europeans.

The resulting work identified six key communications approaches that have had the most impact on improving participation and reducing contamination within the migrant communities. These six approaches are:

1. Pictorial (photographs of materials used) notices on bins – see example in following section.
2. Leaflets and notices translated into relevant languages (Portuguese, Latvian, Lithuanian etc.).
3. Using Community Liaison Officers who can understand and empathise with concerns of the migrant communities. A frequently asked questions (FAQ) sheet was developed for use by the Community Liaison Officer – see the FAQ sheet in following section.
4. Some of the refuse and recycling crew members have been recruited from the migrant communities.
5. Landlord forums are held at Breckland District Council to give landlords the chance to meet with council officers, find out about and discuss issues relating to council services, including the waste and recycling service.
6. Neighbours have been helpful in providing information on the nationality, number and change of tenants in nearby properties housing migrant workers.

These approaches are explained in more detail in the next section.

## Communications campaigns to connect with migrant populations

The five communications approaches outlined in the previous section have been divided into two:

1. Communications materials (including application and choice of messaging).
2. Other channels for reaching migrant workers.

## Communications materials

Council officers identified three notices that had the most positive impact on reaching residents within the migrant communities. The key to their success lay in the use of the messaging and the visual impact. The key features of the signage and the notices are:

- simple;
- focussed;
- short; and
- pictorial (as much as possible).

Samples of the three most successful notices used – the pictorial guide, no bags notice and the combined messaging and pictorial notice translated into Lithuanian - are shown below.

### **Pictorial Guide** (see figure 1 below)

This is used on bins where the language of the residents is not known. This notice is laminated and stuck to residents' recycling bins and remains with the property as a constant reminder.

Fig 1 Pictorial Guide – used as laminated notices on recycling bins

**'No bags' Notice** (see figure 2 below)

The 'No bags' notice below was used successfully to address the issue of residents putting their recyclable materials into plastic bags before depositing the bags (containing the materials) into the recycling bins thus causing contamination at source.

Fig 2 No bags notice



### Combined pictorial and text notice translated into Lithuanian (see below figure 3)

The combined message and pictorial notice was used to inform Lithuanian residents of the types of materials collected in the black recycling bins. Translations are sourced from Language Line.

Fig 3 Combined pictorial and text notice translated into Lithuanian

**Ką galima dėti į juodą perdirbamų šiukšlių dėžę?**



Popierių ir kartoną



Maisto ir gėrimų skardines (prašome išskalauti)  
Aerozolių konteinerius



Tik plastmasinius butelius:  
Butelius nuo gėrimų ir pieno, valymo priemonių, šampūnų buteliukus, purkštuvus su pompa

Į juodą šiukšlių dėžę šiukšlės turi būti sudėtos palaidos, o ne plastmasiniuose maišuose

## Other channels for reaching migrant workers

Apart from the campaign notices the council identified and successfully trialled other channels to reach their migrant audiences. These channels included the use of a Community Liaison Officer, collection crews and landlord forums - all of which proved to be successful connection routes to the target audience. Neighbours have also proved to be a very useful source of information for the council.

### **Community liaison officer**

The district council employed a Community Liaison Officer who, throughout her daily work with community and residents groups, was able to field enquiries and answer direct questions relating to the waste and recycling services. A useful FAQ sheet was developed specifically to answer the more frequently asked questions relating to issues experienced more by the migrant communities. A sample of the more frequently asked questions have been listed below:

- What do I do if my bin is not emptied?
- Can I use my neighbour's bin if my bin is already full?
- What do I do if I move to a new house and there is no waste or recycling bin?
- Are the waste and recycling bins free of charge?
- How many bins should I have?
- What can I put in my black recycling bin?
- Where can I get rid of large items of furniture?

### **Collection crews**

Breckland Council has recruited some of its collection crew members from the migrant communities. This policy has been successful with the Portuguese speaking community and will be used where possible with the Eastern European communities.

### **Landlord forums**

Council officers have tapped into landlord forums, held by their own council housing team, which invites landlords to attend meetings set up specifically to share information about council services. This has proved to be a successful route to reach these more transient residents, who by the nature of their work and residency status, find themselves making multiple moves within the rented housing market. It is in the landlords' own interests to ensure residents are kept aware of the refuse and recycling collection days and the instructions on how to use the services.

### **Neighbours**

Neighbours have provided an important source of information when there are issues relating to the high turnover of migrant tenants. In these cases, neighbours can provide useful information on the nationality and numbers of tenants in neighbouring properties so the council can act by providing the appropriate notices and numbers of bins and in so doing avoid problems escalating.

## **Achievements and results**

To date there has not been any monitoring of participation or contamination across Breckland District mainly because of the transient nature of the migrant communities and that fact that these residents are often well dispersed amongst the indigenous population.

The success of the communications used by Breckland District Council has been measured on an observational basis with anecdotal evidence from crew members and council officers. Based on these observations the measures described and used by Breckland Council are showing an improvement in the uptake of recycling and the reduction in contamination amongst the districts' growing Eastern European migrant communities. These

improvements have no doubt led to the marked increase in recycling rates from 33% in 2005/06 levels to 39% in 2006/07.

Whilst there is no hard data to record reduced levels of contamination, council officers report that there are fewer incidences when vehicle loads of recyclables are landfilled due to high levels of contamination. The effect of the constant engagement with migrant communities and use of effective communications approaches has increased participation and reduced contamination levels noticeably compared to those previously experienced.

All costs for the project except for those relating to translations were met from the council's core budget.

## Lessons learnt

The three key lessons learnt from the engagement process with the migrant communities can be summarised as follows:

- the style of messaging (simple, short and focussed) used for the migrant communities has been an important factor in decreasing contamination rates;
- the use of a Community Liaison Officer and crew members employed from the local migrant communities have both been instrumental in making connections with the migrant communities; and
- other channels of engagement such as the landlord forums and liaison with neighbours have also contributed to the continued success of this project.

**For further information, please contact:**

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