

SERVE Social Case Study for Retrofitters/Contractors

Case study No.5

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Tipperary Energy Agency

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Case study basic information:

Name of contractor/company:

The subject of the fifth case study is Larry Ryan who is the proprietor of Ryan Stoves Ltd.

Address/location:

His company is located in Burgess, Nenagh, County Tipperary.



Short description of contractor/company:

Type of company: Ryan Stoves was listed as a limited company in 2004 but Larry had been registered and working as a sole trader for about eight years prior to that.

Number of employees: At present Larry employs five people.

Type of services offered: The services offered by Ryan Stoves are stove sales and fitting/installing.

Number of retrofitting works implemented so far in households: Larry estimates that he installed stoves in 330 SERVE households.

Market coverage (local, regional, national, international): Larry estimates his market coverage is 75% local and 25% regional/national.

Level of engagement in SERVE project

Number of retrofitting works implemented within SERVE project as only or joint contractor: Larry worked as a sole contractor for stove installation in SERVE houses. Initially there were some instances where clients who had purchased stoves from Larry had used alternative fitters/installers; Larry would then ‘sign-off’ on the work if the installation was carried out to the appropriate standard/quality. This scenario presented some instances where Larry was unable to sign-off on the work and he then reverted to installing all stoves in SERVE houses himself.

Opinion of the benefits of the SERVE project

Impact on reduction of energy consumption:

Larry feels that there was a definite reduction in energy consumption as a result of the installation of stoves in SERVE households. Not only that, he feels that the type of fuels

now being used by SERVE householders are cleaner, as people who had formerly burned coal in open fires now burned wood in high efficiency stoves. Although many stoves installed would allow users to burn coal, up to 50% of all the stoves Larry installed in SERVE houses were designed to burn only wood. He adds that the more sophisticated, modern stoves have extremely low emissions and that in general a properly functioning stove, using the appropriate fuel will reduce emissions by up to 70%.

An added benefit of the SERVE project is the result of the comprehensive measures required. Larry feels that because SERVE houses were insulated to a high specification the size (kW output) of stove required was smaller than might otherwise be the case. He gives an example where a stove was replaced as part of the SERVE project and the new stove had only half the kW output capability of the previous unit.

'.....people were buying smaller stoves.....your knocking it back maybe as much as five or six kilowatts, that's what we're finding so obviously that's a huge difference.'

Larry feels that the SERVE project made accessible/affordable a durable unit that has high design and efficiency standards. These units will hold their higher efficiency levels for a longer period than the cheaper models on the market.

'.....It allowed people to buy a better quality unit, a more efficient stove; like for example a person might be looking at a stove for €350 which would eventually only end up working at 40 - 45 % as opposed to something that was 70 - 75 % efficient but it would hold efficiency over the years.'

Help to local economy/creation of new employment:

Larry employed extra staff over the course of the SERVE project and assumes that there has to have been a 'knock-on effect' in terms of the local economy.

Environment protection:

In terms of environmental protection Larry stated that the emissions reduction from the replacement of open fires with high efficiency stoves is about 70%. He also feels that the SERVE project raised awareness of energy efficiency in the home to a prominent position in people's minds, both homeowners and contractors alike.

'It was nice to see a better quality unit going out.....So there was like a feel good factor all around.'

Now in Larry's company employees actively promote high efficiency units and use the SERVE approval/endorsement of various models as a selling point.

Other benefits:

Set performance criteria for the units being installed eliminated the use of substandard models from the project.

'.....one main thing.....it did eliminate the really, really cheap budget stoves because there was an actual performance level that they did need to work at.....'

Larry feels that from the point of view of the SERVE customer the biggest benefit was the available grant assistance and the access to better quality units it enabled.

‘.....The main benefits to people would be money; that they were saving money and getting better quality of unit.’

The auditing and feedback received on work carried out created increased awareness of building regulations and safety standards.

‘.....He (the auditor) came back to us with a few queries and questions here and there, so it did keep us on our toes to be honest, and it did make us more aware of the building regulations and safety regulations as well.’

Opinion of any issues/problems with SERVE project

Access to information for consumers (for example, regarding companies performing retrofitting) and/or contractors:

Given that Larry was one of an only four listed suppliers for wood burning stoves listed in the SERVE area he feels (selfishly, he admits) there was adequate information for prospective customers. He contrasted this with the list available for insulation contractors, which is far more extensive.

Adequate amount of grants/subsidies to motivate homeowners:

Larry maintains that the level of financial assistance available through SERVE was unprecedented, although as a supplier he would always appreciate a grant assisted sector and the knock-on benefit for business.

.....Well obviously I'm going to say no, but like it was very good while it lasted..... but the concept behind it wasn't the money it was the environment.'

Any technical problems:

Larry encountered only minor technical problems in the installation of stoves which were rectified easily.

The availability and steady supply of dry, seasoned wood is a problem that Larry foresees developing in the future. This will be discussed later in connection with customer's awareness of EE technologies.

Larry noted the differing international standards for the testing and certification of various brand/units. This applies to efficiency and/or emissions and, he feels, relates to the quality and regulation of imports. Different nations test their units in different ways for the same parameters. He contrasts the difference in quality and durability (how the unit maintains efficiency over time) of a given unit between a Chinese stove and a Scandinavian stove. He suggests regulation and the establishment of a national 'testing

house' through which all units would be tested and the results calibrated to avoid confusion and act as a better guide to homeowners and suppliers.

.....it's an actual very grey area at the moment; the testing of these units is where the issue is.....some English companies are actually going to Scandinavia to get their stoves tested there because its better, they're advertising that their stoves have been passed by Norway and Denmark and they're probably the strictest around. But then it's a mine field really, to be honest with you, when you get into the actual efficiency rating and all that because there all tested differently.'

Other issues:

Awareness of the scheme itself was not as widespread as Larry would have liked but admits that there is no way of guaranteeing/assuring that all those who were eligible to partake were aware of the schemes existence. Even though his own company did a house to house leaflet drop in the SERVE area, he maintains that there are still people who would have been eligible for grant assistance, now coming to him to buy stoves, who were/are totally unaware of SERVE ever existing.

Opinion of homeowner's knowledge on RES and EE technologies

Opinion on a scale from 1 (worst) to 10 (best):

Larry feels that people's knowledge and appreciation of burning wood, as opposed to burning, coal is pretty low. He is generally asked whether the unit he is supplying can burn coal. He feels that the public concept of what is dry, seasoned wood is poor and they do not realise that wood needs to be cut, stacked and dried for two years prior to use. His experience is what is generally sold as seasoned wood is not sufficiently dry and could/will damage units while not producing optimum heat. He feels that when people realise the benefits of burning seasoned wood, coal's popularity will fade. The challenge when that happens will be to have in place a reliable supply.

'.....the big problem would be the availability of dry wood.....the only issue is to get good dry seasoned wood but like once you start burning fuel like that you would never think about burning coal.'

Opinion on whether lack of homeowner knowledge is an issue/problem for increased utilisation of RES and EE technologies in Ireland:

Larry feels that people's primary motivation to install stoves is financial. He feels there is a general raising of awareness of energy efficiency in relation to oil consumption and the benefits of installing a stove to reduce oil consumption. The secondary motivation is a desire for less reliance on oil, with concerns for the environment coming in third. At the same time he feels people have trouble grasping the long term benefits of other, more sophisticated, renewable technologies such as solar panels.

'.....You have to put it in yourself to get converted I think, they're not converted until they actually do it themselves, even going to the neighbours and all, until they actually put in it themselves physically, see the actual savings, then you (they) know.'

Opinion on the future of RES/EE in the residential sector in Ireland

General opinion:

Larry hopes that efficiency awareness will continue to grow and that more and more people will convert their open fires and install stoves. He does foresee a time when the market will reach saturation but claims there is still a large percentage of Irish houses with open fires. He does admit that his business continues to grow since SERVE has ended.

‘.....in general people are buying more stoves now.’

Identified main barriers:

For the stove supply and installation sector the two main barriers are i) a secure supply of properly seasoned wood which is currently becoming an issue, and ii) the regulation and intercalibration of products/units on the market.

Larry also admits that the fitting of stoves may cause some disruption to the householders.

‘.....so there’ll be a nice fire place and to actually bring it up to the standard needed for the grant, which is what’s needed for health and safety, there is a little bit of work involved, you need you know your distance away from timber and all that, so there is a bit of, well sometimes there can be a lot of work involved.’

Identified main drivers:

Larry sees the availability and price of oil as the primary driver for the installation of stoves, together with increased awareness of efficiency issues.

'.....Efficiency is number one anyways and I suppose a certain amount of comfort that you will have heat when you want it.....'

Opinion on what should be done immediately/in the near future to facilitate increased RES/EE applications:

Larry suggests that there should be more emphasis placed on awareness raising of the benefits that accompany the installation of stoves, EE and RE measures for the public.

'I suppose its more awareness really; I don't know how it will be done, kind of a better advertising campaign.'

For the sector/industry itself he suggests that product quality and safety be better regulated.

'..... it's an awareness of the quality of what we are importing and what were allowing to be sold, even going so far as to say some of the products are actually dangerous, some of them are really cheap..... it can't be possible to have a good quality cast iron unit for as little as €100 it's just not physically possible.'

Overall satisfaction with the SERVE project

Do you think the SERVE project had a measurable positive impact

- 1. For you personally:** Larry is very positive about his experience with the SERVE project not only in terms of increased revenue but in terms of the increased awareness of issues like cleaner fuels, quality and efficiency.

‘.....Oh definitely there's no doubt, without a doubt, apart from, I won't say financial gain, obviously being a lot busier, but it has introduced us more to the cleaner burning stoves, more efficient stoves and all the staff as well, like if anyone comes in now straight away they're pushing the better product all the time.’

- 2. For the RES/EE contractors in general:** Larry's main comment to this question is that the standard of workmanship for contractors generally has improved as a result of the project.

Other comments: Larry states that in his opinion the project was run well, that those he dealt with in the TEA and the County Council were helpful and professional to all concerned.

‘I have to say, like I thought myself it was ran quiet well from the time of people applying to when they actually, when we signed the say the jobs, whatever it was, to say the job was done, it was a very quick process between applying and getting paid..... there was like a feel good factor all around.’