

# SERVE Social Case Study for Retrofitters/Contractors

Case study No.6

8/4/2011

Tipperary Energy Agency

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CONCERTO is co-funded by the European Commission

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## Case study basic information

**Name of contractor/company:** The subject of the sixth case Study is Shane Lancaster proprietor of Ecosy Insulation Ltd.

**Address/location:** Shane's business is located in Ballina, North Tipperary.



Short description of contractor/company:

Type of company:

Ecosy Insulation is a limited company. It was founded in 2009 and at the moment Shane employs two people.

Type of services offered:

The services offered by Shane's company are attic and wall insulation and various/other insulation services.

Market coverage:

Ecosys Insulation Ltd's market catchment is local.

Number of retrofitting works implemented so far in households:

Shane estimates that he would have worked on 50 SERVE houses over the span of the project. Shane's company would have been the sole contractors for

attic and wall insulation in the houses he was involved with through the SERVE project.

### **Level of engagement in SERVE project:**

Aside from the number of insulation works carried out by Shane's company he also attended the public meetings at the scheme's inception and liaised with the various agencies involved such the Tipperary Energy Agency, SEAI and North Tipperary County Council. His involvement with SERVE customers involved explaining the upgrades and their implications for the house, as well as how the grants from the SEAI and SERVE could be combined to lessen the overall cost.

*'We got a couple of e-mails (from TEA) asking me did we have any SERVE people ringing up about it (the scheme) and could you let them know..... And they were asking us to explain to people how the serve was run.'*

### **Opinion on the benefits of the SERVE project**

Impact on reduction of energy consumption:

Shane maintains, based on his personal experience of thoroughly insulating his own home that an accurate prediction of the reduction of energy consumption attributable to attic and wall insulation in the average SERVE house, would be in the region of 40%.

*'Any time you insulate your house, your walls, you're reducing your carbon footprint, so any grant related project like this is fantastic, so it was great.'*

Help to local economy/creation of new employment:

Shane's opinion is that the SERVE project did not lead to more companies being set up over its duration. He does think it was of benefit to the local economy in creating a stream of work for companies already in existence at that time however, not to the point where they employed extra staff.

*'It helped the economy, I don't think it created new employment but it gave extra work for companies who were there.'*

Environmental protection:

In terms of reducing emissions, Shane feels there have been definite benefits regarding environmental protection. He correlates this with a reduction in oil consumption consequent of the upgrades. Knowledge of environmental considerations grew over the course of the project as more people became aware of the benefits and effects of the upgrades.

*'.....There was an awful lot of advertising going on about it (the scheme and it's benefits) and eventually people started to understand what was going on..... the people in North Tipperary have a better understanding of carbon footprint and emissions,'*

## Opinion of issues/problems with SERVE project

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

It has been Shane's experience that clients prefer recommendations from people they are familiar with rather than choose from a list. He was frequently asked by customers to advise them on whom to choose to carry out other SERVE measures.

*'A lot of these people can look at the internet to find names but they all like recommendations.'*

Shane feels that initially the aims and workings of the scheme were unclear. He attributes the slow uptake of the scheme to this lack of clarity. He explained that after the first public meeting he himself was very confused and rated the homeowner's chances of having understood it's content to be even less than his own. He thinks the content of the first meetings were too technical.

*'.....Householders who attended the first meeting, as far as I could see they were baffled and did not understand; there was two or three meetings in the Abbeycourt (Hotel) and after the first meeting I had very little idea as to what was going on.'*

The accessibility and assistance of the County Council in clarifying the issues and paperwork for homeowners was commented on.

*'.....yes they (customers) had a lot of paper work to do but the council was very helpful. I found that they could ring up and ask and that was a big thing.'*

Adequate amount of grants/subsidies to motivate homeowners:

Shane feels that the level of grant assistance available was sufficient to motivate homeowners to undertake the upgrades/retrofits.

*‘Yes..... It was really good.’*

Any technical problems:

The only technical problem Shane encountered was in relation to the different documentation requirements between the SERVE project and the SEAI upgrade schemes. Under the SEAI schemes there is no demand on his company to produce an invoice and receipt for each customer whereas in the SERVE project this was a requirement. The result of this confusion was a delay in the payment of the grant to the customer.

*‘.....Every house needed an invoice and a receipt and we were not informed of that at the start but once we got into the swing of things we knew that every household needed an invoice, so that held up the grant a small bit.’*

Other issues:

Shane feels the limited BER Assessor list caused some confusion for contractors and homeowner’s alike. This resulted some in customers getting assessments from qualified

assessors who were not on the SERVE panel, paying the fee and having to repeat the process with the appropriate assessors and paying a second fee.

*‘.....Recently I was talking to a BER (assessor) and he didn't realise that he couldn't do BERs and that there was a contractors list, he wouldn't have known that and I wouldn't have known that either.’*

### **Opinion of homeowner’s knowledge on RES and EE technologies:**

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

Shane’s opinion of the average homeowner’s knowledge of the technologies involved as good, rating it at 7 out of 10. The SERVE customers were generally well informed and did ask questions to clarify any unresolved issues they had. He feels that SERVE homeowners had to go through large quantities of technical documents to engage with the project and consequently have a good grasp of what was involved.

*‘.....they get an awful lot of paperwork from the council, it's very technical but it's well explained and both husband and wife in the house would be well informed.....’*

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

Shane contrasts the SERVE homeowner’s level of knowledge with that of average homeowners who are undertaking the SEAI upgrades only which he rates as very low.

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

### General opinion:

Shane has concerns about the future of the sector in light of the diminishing (SEAI) grant levels. He explains that many other contractors are worried for the future as well.

*‘.....We have the big worry that when the grants (SERVE) are gone, that the SEAI grants won’t be enough to cover it ... is this going to continue?’*

He feels that if the scheme could be reintroduced again it would be good for the sector and that uptake would be at a faster rate that was initially the case with SERVE.

*‘.....I can obviously see now that North Tipperary, well they have a better understanding (of energy issues) then maybe any other county in Ireland because it's been there and people talk. So if it was re-introduced again there would be a huge influx of people going for the grant.’*

In the RE/EE sector in general he foresees an increase in the conversion of open fires to stoves and will be recommending that upgrade to his own customers.

*‘.....I’m going to be recommending that people take out the open fire and put in the stove, your using so little fuel and it heats your house even if you can't afford insulation.’*

Identified main barriers:

Shane feels that the main barrier to the uptake of these measures/technologies in Ireland is cost. Even when people are aware of the benefits, be they financial or environmental, the cost of upgrading a home can be prohibitive regardless of grant entitlement and availability. He described a socio-economic strata of society who, with basic insulation upgrades, could benefit on a primary level (attain a basic level of heat in their homes) but who cannot afford the financial outlay.

*‘.....Unfortunately there's an awful lot of people out there who can't afford to get their houses insulated and a lot of those people are the ones who need to get their houses insulated..... everybody's worried about their carbon footprint, they really are, but it's the financial that's the huge thing, if you can't afford it you can do nothing about it.....I know the smaller the house the less it costs but the money isn't there.’*

Identified main drivers:

As outlined earlier Shane feels the main driver for increased use of RE/EE retrofitting was/is the availability grant monies coupled with a certain level of financial security. The typical household profiles of those taking advantage of these offers are usually middle aged or close to retirement, and of a middle class background with a certain level of disposable income.

*‘.....It would have been the 30 - 50 age groups that would have gone for this, or the early retirement (age-group).....’*

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

Increased awareness of EE/RE applications and their financial and environmental benefits should aid the uptake of these technologies in the future according to Shane. Less reliance on fossil fuels, particularly oil should also be stressed.

*‘.....the more people understand about it, the more chance they have of going for it.’*

### **Overall satisfaction with the SERVE project:**

Opinion on whether the SERVE project had a measurable positive impact

For contractor personally:

Shane’s experience with the SERVE initiative has been positive. He estimates that over the course of the project SERVE would have accounted for about 10% of his income/workload.

*‘.....I got a nice bit of work out of it but I would have been kept going anyway with SEAI.....’*

For RES/EE contractors in general:

Because the actual amount of attic and wall insulation companies in the immediate SERVE region was small other less local companies worked in the SERVE region. This, Shane feels would have had an impact on the local economy.

*'.....Contractors were coming up from Limerick; they were coming up from Thurles. Because there was an influx of people because of the grants, you had the SEAI in Limerick but you had the two grants in Nenagh. So yes, it would have been good for local business.'*

Other comments:

Shane feels that a grant for the installation of stoves is an imperative to ensure that people like the elderly can have a warm home.

*'For people who can't afford (upgrades) .....a stove will heat their whole house, pop it in for €800, give them a grant for €400, just let them have it, they're burning less fuel and less coal and if there's an elderly person they can be really, really warm .....That's actually one of the more important comments.'*