

SERVE Social Case Study for Retrofitted Houses

Case Study No. 2 - draft

6/10/2011
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CONCERTO is co-funded by the European Commission

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1. Case Study Basic Information

The name of the householder in case study No. 2 is Helen Clifford. She lives with her two sons in a bungalow in an estate in a busy town in North Tipperary.

The house was built on a council site in 1978 and Helen has lived here since. A widower for 20 years now, Helen imagines she will stay here for the foreseeable future. The area of the house is 138m² and has been designed and improved throughout the years for wheelchair access.



“The reason for building the house was because my eldest son is in a wheelchair”.



In the last few years, with the winters getting colder, the householder had begun introducing measures to make it warmer. A small wood burning stove had been installed and the windows had been replaced through the help of a grant previous to the SERVE retrofit.

“That was my first big step ... the old windows, the wooden ones ... you’d have thought sometimes you had them open”.

The house is situated close to a busy road in the town in quite a central area. The site is spacious enough to cater for an impressive vegetable garden to the side and rear of the house.



2. Situation of Household before and after retrofitting

The Clifford household had the following types of retrofitting:

- 1) Cavity fill wall insulation
- 2) Attic insulation
- 3) Heating controls
- 4) High efficiency boiler
- 5) High efficiency cylinder

Energy consumption and costs – comparison

The Clifford household had made some improvements towards reducing their energy consumption prior to the SERVE retrofit, in the form of double glazed windows and a wood burning stove.

“I didn’t know about the stove grant at the time and we had it put in ourselves”.

As a result of the measures installed, the householder has noticed a reduction in the amount of oil being used. The householder has always been careful with regards to her oil usage, although an estimate was not provided; the householder is definitely consuming less oil.

“I don’t use that much now ... I’d always be careful with things ... I find I don’t have to keep the oil on as long”.

Although the householder has had many measures installed in her home she is interested in further improvements, in the form of solar energy.

“I enquired about the solar panels ... but it had just finished ... I could apply again ... my son has installed battery operated panels ... they charge from the sun ... but only do a certain amount of work”.

Quality of living-comparison

Since having the measures installed, in addition to the windows and stove being fitted, the Clifford household is much warmer and this has contributed to the quality of life amongst the householders. In the past, the house could be quite cold and the heating could be on in the morning and during the day, yet still the house would turn cold as soon as it was switched off. Now even in the cold weather experienced last year with temperatures dropping to -4°C , the heating only needed to be turned on for an hour or two, morning, afternoon and evening and the house stayed warm all day.

“The house definitely maintains the heat ... once the heating has been on ... going to bed at night you’re quite comfortable”.

Over the years small adjustments have been added to the household to facilitate the use of a wheelchair by a member of the Clifford household, yet the energy efficiency measures have been of most benefit to the overall comfort of those living in this house.

3. Main Reasons/Motivations for household retrofitting

The householder first heard about the SERVE project about two years prior to making an application. She followed the information on the radio and television and almost applied at this stage.

“What put me off at the beginning was ... I couldn’t really believe that you would get so much money back ... I thought I might be taking on too much ... what if you didn’t get your money back”?

Over time, as the householder heard about the project on the radio and in the local paper and through advertisements by the county council, she became more and more interested. She found that the information provided was sufficient and it gave her adequate information about the types of measures that could be done. Furthermore the information made the householder aware that initially she would have to provide the full investment, and the grants would be issued once the work was completed.

Once the decision was taken to apply, the householder went to her local county council office and received the package with all the information about the grants.

“It started from there really ... I filled in the form and sent it off”.

The grants and subsidies available for the retrofit of this household were essential for this householder, without these the work could not have been done. The majority of work that has been carried out in this house has been subsidised in some way.

“Any of the work ... I always had help with because of my son ... I couldn’t have afforded it on my own”.

Essentially though, it was a gain in comfort that motivated this householder to have the work done, having felt the benefits of the windows and the stove she was eager to gain as much comfort as possible from her home.

The householders' son has a keen interest in the environment and has installed battery operated solar panels, which create enough energy to mow the lawn and run a computer. He also supplies the house hold with vegetables grown and has maximised use of the space available in the site. The householder has changed from burning coal to wood and she seems to be familiar with the positive environmental effects of reducing energy consumption, although she gives more credit to her son in this area.

“He is a bit more aware than me ... he doesn't like me burning anything that shouldn't be burnt ... he is very strict”.

4. Main Barriers/Problems encountered

Financial problems

The householder in this case study was slightly concerned about receiving her grant once the work had finished. She felt that paying for the work herself first required a certain amount of belief in the project that was difficult to summon, prior to her individual experience of SERVE.

“You feel you're taking on a lot of ... it's a lot of money up front ... it's hard to realise that it does work out”.

Although the householder had arranged for the capital to be available for the work, she did worry that that the grant may be delayed. In fact there was a hold up, purely due to paperwork that was beyond her control. However her son figured out what was needed and once all the forms were completed correctly, the money came through. This did cause undue stress though.

“At that stage I was afraid that it was getting near the end of my time to get back the money ... I thought I would lose it”.

The householder feels it could have been handled differently and suggests that, if say, all the relevant information and paperwork were kept together, the problem she encountered could have been avoided.

Technical problems

Overall, the householder is very happy with all the measures installed in her home. She did have a small issue with a frozen pipe outside the house in the cold weather, but this has since

been rectified through her insurance company and she maintains it bears no relation to the work done through SERVE.

5. Overall satisfaction with installed measures

Subsidies

The householder found the information from the county council regarding the grants available very helpful and the staff member she dealt with was very helpful with the paperwork. Apart from the mix-up with paper work, the

householder feels the grant process went smoothly and is happy with the money she received towards the retrofit.

She does suggest that perhaps the grant for the BER could be slightly higher as this is the first payment a householder needs to make; it can be a big step.



“It was a big lot to hand out first of all ... it doesn't give you a lot back”.

“Overall I am very satisfied really ... it's definitely improved the comfort ... it's certainly improved the house”.

Technical issues

The householder is very impressed with the heating controls installed in the hot press and finds the system easy to understand and very useful. The booklet provided is adequate for her needs and she demonstrated how you use the controls.

“The switches in the hot press are very handy ... the water and heating are separate ... I’m very pleased with it”.

Quality

The householder is very happy with the quality of the workmanship of all the contractors involved in the retrofit and found the work was all completed in accordance to the appropriate timescale. Having had work done previously on her home, she feels the standard of the work done through the SERVE grant is very high and the end result very satisfactory.

“When people said they’d be here at a certain time, they were ... I wasn’t here waiting”.

Value for money

The householder feels that the value of her house has increased. As already mentioned she would not have been able to complete the retrofit without the help of the SERVE grant and she feels the work was good value for money. However she does feel perhaps more assistance could be offered to home owners, in particular to the first payment for the BER. She recommended being part of the SERVE project, but stressed that having the money up-front was an important aspect of the process.

“Anyone I have met I’ve told them what I did and how easy it was to get done ... but I will say this, it’s difficult to have the money up front for some ... it’s a big hand out and you only get part of it back”.



6. Conclusion

The householder in case study No. 2 is situated in an estate close to a busy road in a major town in North Tipperary. A number of measures were installed in her home as a result of the SERVE project. As a result of these and previous home improvements in this household, the level of comfort has hugely increased. The process of application and receipt of SERVE grants went relatively smoothly, yet this householder did have concerns regarding payment of the grants due to a delay in the paperwork. However, overall the satisfaction level in this household with the workmanship and newly achieved comfort is quite high. This householder is considering the installation of solar panels for use in the house and hopes to avail of any grants available for this purpose.