

idea corner

Show Me How and I'll Do It

Snow blows through cracks in the windows, a newspaper on the floor ruffles as you suddenly feel a chilling draft, a whistling sound comes from the front door. To Family Development and Management (FDM) personnel at Kentucky State University (KSU), situations such as these in the homes of limited-resource families suggested a need to teach families energy conservation methods.

Twenty-six paraprofessionals were trained in ways to make low-cost household energy conservation changes and achieve thermal comfort through wearing apparel selection. Paraprofessionals were also taught how to acquire data on the families' energy practices.

Following a pre-test, paraprofessionals used teaching kits to present energy concepts. The kits included actual examples of how to caulk; weatherstrip; wrap pipes; install plastic over windows; repair holes in walls and floors; insulate walls, floors, and ceilings; and winterize clothing wardrobes.

Post evaluation data were collected to determine what changes the families made. Of the original 603 homemakers who began the project, 407 completed it.

This study represents those families who actively participated in the FDM

program and may not be representative of all low-income people in these counties. However, the findings indicate that many low-income families are willing to make changes given information and shown correct procedures.

Families made the greatest amount of household change in the areas of cleaning/servicing heating systems, changing furnace filters, and weatherstripping windows. Other encouraging changes were made although in smaller proportions (see Tables 1 & 2).

Table 1. Household energy conservation changes.

Practices	% change
Cleaned/serviced heating systems	22%
Changed furnace filters	10
Fixed windows by weatherstripping/caulking	15
Weatherstripped around doors	5
Fixed holes in floors	2
Wrapped pipes	5

Table 2. Family wardrobe changes.

Practices	% change
Wore socks/hose with shoes	7%
Put plastic bags over shoes before putting on boots	4
Made chill chasers for doors or windows	28
Made lap robes from scrap materials	17
Made quilts from scrap materials	6

This study indicates the willingness of some low-income families to practice energy conservation measures, whether household or personal.

When working with limited-resource families, Extension personnel need to remember that encourage-

ment and motivation are keys to the effectiveness of any program. Skills to motivate low-income families need to be acquired by those doing the teaching because this one-to-one contact, although expensive, is the best way to provide immediate encouragement and reinforce learning.

One motivational method that proved successful in this program was the use of visual teaching aids. The visual aids gave homemakers a more realistic idea of energy concepts. It also gave them an opportunity to work with the actual materials they needed to make appropriate changes.

Overall, the incentives for many families to make energy changes were low-cost investment and immediate physical comfort. It appeared that if families could "feel" more comfortable, they would make a change whether it lowered their energy bill or not. As many families said in discussing ways to make themselves and their homes more comfortable, "Show me how and I'll do it."

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