



Community Success Story

Getting to More Affordable Energy at Osoyoos Indian Band

Community Context

Osoyoos Indian Band is part of the Okanagan Nation Alliance. The Band has 560 members both on and off reserve. Osoyoos is well-recognized for its high level of economic success and ownership of multiple businesses, including the Nk'Mip Resort and Cellars. For over 25 years, the Band has been led by Chief Clarence Louie.

In 2012 with the introduction of the multi-tiered billing system, Osoyoos Indian Band faced rising rates and utility bills. Community members were upset with FortisBC and the unaffordability of their utilities. The relationship between Osoyoos and FortisBC was strained due to the community members' lack of trust in the utility company. Osoyoos's Housing Manager, Darlene George, decided to focus on energy conservation and education as an approach to addressing these issues.

Project Description

Community members at Osoyoos Indian Band could not afford to conduct energy efficiency retrofits in their homes, and so Darlene George looked into programs that could support these updates. She learned about the Energy Conservation Assistance Program (ECAP) that offers a free home assessment, lighting changes, weatherstripping, and low-flow water measures. Qualified homes are also able to receive energy efficient refrigerators, insulation, and natural gas furnaces.

Darlene George connected with Carol Suhan, Manager of Conservation and Energy Management at FortisBC. They started by hosting a community



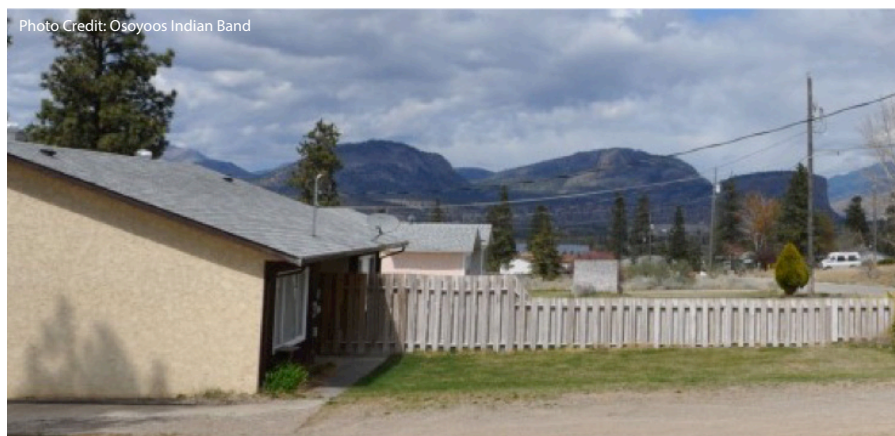
Collaborators

Osoyoos Indian Band
FortisBC

Project Leads

Darlene George
Housing Manager,
Osoyoos Indian Band

Carol Suhan
Manager of Conservation and Energy
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Photo Credit: Osoyoos Indian Band

forum, where Osoyoos band members expressed their anger and distrust with FortisBC. Although it was a difficult forum, the event helped open the communications channel between residents and FortisBC.

Darlene George championed the program throughout her community to encourage as much participation as possible. Messages were spread through Facebook and newsletters, and Darlene raised the topic of ECAP at monthly band meetings. In order to reach low-income households, Darlene partnered with the Social Assistance department to get residents to sign on to the program when they came to pick up their cheques. Initially there was a low trickle of applications, but when people saw the Carillion trucks coming in to do the retrofits, they became curious and called Darlene - and she would help sign them up.

Osoyoos Indian Band had a very successful participation rate in ECAP. 100% of low-income homes participated and 51% of band-owned and privately owned-homes were involved. Since the initiation of ECAP, community members noticed a drop in their utility bills and there have been increased communications between residents and FortisBC.

Lessons Learned

For many households, Darlene filled out the ECAP application herself. Although she recognizes that this may be enabling, Darlene also emphasizes that it is important to get the program started first and then invest time to educate and empower.

A key focus should be on community education. There is a lack of awareness of household energy usage.

Trust builds from word of mouth. Carillion, the company contracted to implement ECAP, was personable and friendly. Word got around the community about their positive reputation.

Offer support to community members through bureaucratic processes such as writing applications, especially for seniors and people with less education.

Involve the management teams from different departments to help increase project participation.

Communicate person-to-person as much as possible.

Ensure ongoing and open communication. Be present to answer questions promptly.

Band members want to be engaged - to save money and help the environment.

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