

## Power Agents

### Consumer organisation “VZ NRW” working with the Make Energy Change Happen Toolkit

**verbraucherzentrale** *Nordrhein-Westfalen*

#### Who are the “Power Agents”?



The Power Agents project aims at spreading knowledge of energy saving and changing behaviour in households by clear positive messages. The project wants to motivate and support young people in becoming “Power Agents” who take care about their own energy consumption and who spread their knowledge by taking care of the energy consumption of their families and their personal surroundings. The Power Agents project is part of the EU project “Mein Haus spart” (“My house saves”).

Claudia Bruhn works at the regional consumer organisation “Verbraucherzentrale NRW” in North Rhine Westphalia (VZ NRW) and is involved in the Power Agents project. “A lot of simple measures to save energy in everyday life are not practiced in wide parts of the society even though saving energy is recognised as an important step in counteracting climate change. We want to give young people some knowledge how to effectively save energy in their surrounding and the benefits these measures can bring.” The project focuses on energy savings in households and is especially designed for a target group of teenagers in order to make energy issues important to these young people already at this early stage of their life.

#### This is how it works:

Groups of young people in the age of 10 to 14 years are trained on a voluntary basis in a series of training units. The participants of these workshops are already involved in existing group structures (e.g. school classes or school working groups, youth groups) and these groups are generally supervised by an adult, e.g. a teacher or tutor. The new Power Agents are equipped with an energy check with which they can detect saving potentials at home and at their friends and neighbours houses. They also receive a list with general energy saving tips and a list with the individual energy saving measures, which they can give to neighbours etc.

Additionally, the Power Agents get an identification card that also serves as a recording of the number of the Power Agent's consultancies. Groups of Power Agents are presented on a website, where they can also get more information and give their feedback. At the end of the workshops the Power Agents get a certificate, which honours their voluntary engagement for climate protection.

In total, 330 Power Agents have been trained in 20 different groups and learned a lot about energy saving measures. In over 600 consultations the Power Agents shared over 2500 saving advices with friends, family, neighbours, etc.



*Girl at a Power Agent workshop*

**VZ NRW’s experience with the Make Energy Change Happen Toolkit:**

The visualisation and clustering of our stakeholders helped us understand the needs and requirements of each group better.

*Claudia Bruhn, VZNRW*

“The activities of the toolkit were very helpful in more than one way for the implementation of the Power Agents project” says Claudia Bruhn from VZ NRW. “Thanks to the activities we have thought about our target group and network systematically and now the questions from the toolkit are always in the back of my head and often make me double check whether we have really thought about everything”.

Below some of the activities applied by VZ NRW are described:

**1. Identify relevant stakeholders**

The team of the Power Agents project started to systematically assess groups of stakeholders and thereby began to think about what the different groups need and also what benefits they could bring to the project. They used the Tool “*Strategic Assessment of Partnerships*” to think about how to best work with the different actors, as shown in the following table.

<b>Activity: Strategic Assessment of Partnerships</b>					
	<b>Parties influencing the problem you are working with (including the 'target group')</b>				
<i>What are the main parties influencing the problem you are working with?</i>	1. Society for education (NJA NRW)	2. Energy Agency/local climate protection agencies	3. Department for education NRW	4. teachers	5. target group
<i>What are they doing about the problem now?</i>	organize network meetings with educational partners to introduce our offer	offering information and events to interested institutions	publishing our offer in their magazine to all schools in NRW	contact us and demand our offer	becoming a Power Agent
<i>What are their main interests in relation to the focus of your problem?</i>	covering the topic energy saving in their portfolio of educational offers for schools	reaching their climate protection goals by changing the behaviour of people	carrying the topic energy saving into schools	offering their pupils a special event in an up-to-date topic	having fun and doing something for the environment
<i>Do you have interests in common?</i>	offering further education to pupils	motivate consumers to save energy	provide educational offers to young people	the aim that the pupils learn something easy to use in their every day life	spending a joyful time together in the workshop
<i>Do you have contradictory interests?</i>	they want to involve us more intensively as an active network partner apart from our offer	Some of the agencies have similar offers to pupils so that a latent competition arise	No	Sometimes they want our offer so much that they keep secret that their class doesn't fit to our requirements	Every group is different: Dependent on the pre-knowledge of the target group the contents of the workshop could be too easy or too difficult for them
<i>What would happen to your project if you completely disregard the interests of this party?</i>	less contacts to schools and multiplier	less promotion for our offer	they won't act as a multiplier any longer and stop distributing our offer	no request of our offer a second time for a different group	they won't be motivated during the workshops so that they won't learn a lot
<i>What would happen to your project if you make your project exactly fit the interests of this party?</i>	promote our offer to other multipliers and schools	promote our offer to other multipliers and interested schools	distribute our offer to schools	second request possible and promotion of our offer to colleagues	Power agents motivate their surrounding more and in a longer term to save energy

“In the beginning, we had some discussions about who our stakeholders actually are. We of course assumed it to be mainly teachers and people appointed to climate issues at schools, but then of course there are also colleagues at the Verbraucherzentrale and the coordinators of the “Mein Haus spart” project, which the Power Agents project is part of”, Claudia Bruhn remembers. “And we discovered that the stakeholder groups might have different requirements to the Power Agent project, but could benefit from each other as well.”

Consequently the Power Agents project was even more strongly linked to the “Mein Haus spart” project, using its layout for the training materials and functioning as an effective marketing instrument for the Power Agents project. Being committed to “Mein Haus spart”, the Power Agents team of course has to take part in meetings and report about the development of the project, but then again the Power Agents benefit from attractive training materials and the colleagues from “Mein Haus spart” act as effective multipliers and supporters of the Power Agents.



Power Agents as part of the “Mein Haus spart” website

Another stakeholder group that was listed in the visualisation are the participants of the workshops – the Power Agents target group. These stakeholders have special needs, which are reflected in the focus of the age range of 10 to 14 for the Power Agents and in the design of the workshops and training materials.

From the start of the project it was decided to build on existing group networks. “We have some experience at VZ NRW with education campaigns and trainings of groups in different age ranges” explains Claudia Bruhn. “But the practice had shown that the continuity of volunteers in youth organisations is too volatile to get a series of workshops organised. In the consequence, we decided to concentrate our work on classes and working groups in schools under the supervision of a teacher.”

## 2. Get some feedback

Apart from collecting unsolicited feedback received during the training sessions or in conversations with teachers and young Power Agents, the Make Energy Change Happen Toolkit made the team at VZ NRW decide to collect feedback about the success of the project in a more structured way as well. A questionnaire for the participants was developed, which each group of Power Agents is asked to fill out some time after their training is finished.

Claudia Bruhn explains: “With this questionnaire we get to know, how much about energy saving the young Power Agents remember from our training sessions and from their consultations in households. Also, we learn if the kids liked the workshops and whether they are motivated to further spread their knowledge about effective energy saving.”

The image shows a questionnaire titled „Energiespardetektive“ - Der Fragebogen am Gymnasium der Stadt Hückelhoven -. It is from the Verbraucherzentrale Nordrhein-Westfalen. The form asks participants to mark the correct answers for the following question: 1. Was ist in euren Köpfen hängen geblieben? 1.1 Welche Geräte gehören zu den größten Stromfressern im Haushalt? The options are: der Wasserkocher, der alte Kühlschrank, der Wäschetrockner, die Spielkonsole, der Plasmafemseher, das Telefon, die elektrische Zahnbürste, and die Waschmaschine.

Getting feedback from the target group: the questionnaire

The Power Agents project team at VZ NRW is thrilled about the positive feedback they get from the young people. Claudia Bruhn adds: “And we discovered that our project also served as a facilitator in multicultural understanding, something we haven’t even thought about in the beginning.”

A significant part of the students in the Power Agents workshops have a migration background. Their parents often don’t speak or read German very well, but the Power Agent take the energy saving checklist and the list of individual saving measures home and translate the content for their mothers and fathers.

We learned things we hadn’t even thought about in the beginning of the project.

Claudia Bruhn, VZ NRW