

Case Study: New Town Primary School

When New Town Primary got to work on their Solar Schools programme, they soon learnt that there's more to fundraising than they had bargained for.

School governors Sue Rippon and Malcolm Morrison are passionate about the environment and about the school they volunteer time for. Having heard about Solar Schools through Reading Borough Council they hoped it might be just the thing they needed to revamp the schools approach to carbon cutting and generate some much needed support from local residents and businesses. With the councils backing, they took the pitch to New Town Primary's head teacher.



The Reading school is in a mixed socio-economic area and Malcolm and Sue were under no illusion that raising money would be a challenge, but they were ready to take it on. They got permission from the headteacher to go ahead and set an ambitious £15,000 target.

From September to November, Malcolm and Sue raised £285 from local businesses, but they quickly discovered they were going it alone. With no real participation from the school and a lack of support from the head, they struggled to get the manpower they needed and found it next to impossible to gain traction in the local community. The enthusiasm of two people, no matter how great, is nothing compared to the group effort of an entire school.

"The "how-to" pack was very useful and gave confidence early on, and visits from 10:10 team members were absolutely essential to keep any level of interest and commitment. My difficulty was trying to encourage others to take on some of the fundraising activity."

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Sue tried to get school staff behind her, and teacher Balvir Atkin was keen to involve the pupil council. So, with 10:10 and Reading Borough Council's help, Reading 107 - a partner in the Solar Schools project - recorded a radio jingle, in the hope that the pupils starring turns might attract much needed attention. Sadly, without top-down support, it was still proving near impossible to get Solar Schools into New Towns' classrooms and into the hearts and minds of parents.

No events meant no awareness and no big contribution to the pot, and left Malcolm and Sue facing a serious challenge. In an amazing show of determination, they turned to personal contacts, managing to raise over £5,000 in individual donations - a huge credit to them and to the appeal of the Solar Schools story.

With over a third of their target raised and the Feed in Tariff cuts approaching, the pair faced a difficult decision. Borrow money from governors funds, install before the cut off and repay the loan through fundraising, or let the deadline go by and face a lower rate of return. They went for the former, but despite mammoth efforts by them and Reading Borough Council, issues with planning held up plans and the install went ahead just days too late.

Malcolm and Sue's fundraising has continued apace - their total is currently sitting at over £7,000 - and Sue has continued to innovate, using the Jubilee as inspiration for an appeal to local businesses and incorporating the project into an art project at the school. However, their story stands as a cautionary tale to 10:10 and others thinking about taking on Solar Schools. The unwavering support of the entire school community is crucial when embarking on a project of this kind - to be sure of fundraising success, but also to make sure that the school capitalises on all of the other potential benefits like improved community engagement and a skills legacy for the school.

Learning from Malcolm and Sue's experience, 10:10 have ensured that all schools coming on to the programme for 2012/13 have the written support of all their major stakeholders, including the head teacher, local authority, board of governors and parent teacher association. We also now ask that our schools consult with their local authority before beginning their fundraising to make sure they are clued up on planning permission.

10:10 continue to support Sue and Malcolm as they fundraise. Luckily, they consider their participation to be a positive experience overall. It's been a rocky road, but New Town do own a 5kWp rig which both agree would never have happened without Solar Schools. Now, Sue is keen to share her experience and enthusiasm with new schools coming on board.