

# Green Communities Case Study

Dorset DA21



## Dorset's DA21 Transitions Towns Training

Dorset, in the south west of England, is famous for its beautiful coastline, stunning countryside and quaint little villages.

But that geography offers a challenge to local people concerned about the threat of climate change and what it might do to those fantastic coasts and country views.

With so many small towns and villages, spread over such a widespread county, how can people ensure they are working effectively and together to get the county to go green?

Dorset DA21, a Dorset charity that aims to spread the word about climate change and what communities can do to reduce their own environmental impact, had an idea.

If it could get lots of local green groups together from across the county for a two-day training, the groups would go back to their local areas and pass on what they had learned.

The Dorset DA21 Transition Towns Training took place in May 2009. Ten groups from Bridport, Weymouth, Sherborne, Purbeck, Sturminster Newton, Poole and Bournemouth came together to debate, to share knowledge and to learn all about simple actions villagers and

townsfolk could do themselves to reduce their negative impact.

Dorset DA21, which was set up in 1995, aimed to get the local groups working together as part of the Transition Towns Initiative, a tried and tested way of organising local people to take action to reduce the environmental impact of their local area.

The initiative involved establishing local groups to promote things like choosing green energy, generated from wind turbines, using public transport instead of their cars or growing local food instead of buying vegetables flown in from all over the world.

At the DA21 training, the groups learned how to pass this knowledge onto the communities they work in. It has been having an impact across the county ever since.

## What is the Transition Towns initiative?

Transition towns is a movement that aims to raise awareness among local communities about climate change, and about how dependent we've become on oil – burning fossil fuels like oil is one of the key drivers of climate change.

The model is based on 12 gradual steps a local community might take, starting with



putting a steering committee together for a new group and telling people about it, to working with local government and gaining specific environmental teaching skills. <http://transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork/12Steps>

### Dorset DA21 and the Energy Saving Trust

As with any event, cost was a key factor. The group needed to find and pay for somewhere to host the training, and make sure people could afford to attend.

That's where the Energy Saving Trust and other partners could help.

DA21 received a £200 Community Bursary grant from the Energy Saving Trust to pay for a venue. And the group received more money from the high-street cosmetics company Lush, its Poole factory a well-known local employer. That paid for marketing, fees for the trainers and refreshments.

For DA21, the event was also an opportunity to practice what it preaches. Groups could apply to attend online and information was sent out by email – both reducing paper use. It also kept costs low.

### DA21's achievements

"It's all about inspiration and spreading the word", said Paul McIntosh, manager and one of three staff at DA21.

Through initiatives like the training day, DA21 has been spreading its message for over 14 years. Last year it had over 200 registered members, offering its quarterly newsletters to 1,000 contacts. The groups' website, [www.da21.org.uk](http://www.da21.org.uk), gets over 2,000 visitors each month.

"Transition towns in Dorset are already setting up community orchards and farms, organising renewable energy workshops, and raising awareness in their communities by showing films explaining the issues," said Paul.

"We hope that the training will have given groups the skills and inspiration to do still more."

### DA21's challenges

With community groups spread out across Dorset, the logistics of bringing people together was a challenge, not least organising transport.

There was also an issue with pitching the training at the right level. With 10 different groups coming along, some were bound to be more experienced and knowledgeable than others. DA21 didn't want to waste time and resources telling groups what they already knew, but also needed to make sure newer groups got the basic training they needed.

A challenge too was that the groups were busy. They had their own presentations, advice and support commitments locally. There was a danger of taking up too much of their time and placing a strain on their resources.

But the training aimed to help groups make those commitments more effective and efficient.

Continuing to help groups manage those calls on their time will be a key challenge for DA21 in the future.



## The future for DA21

The charity is looking ahead to several projects, including Roots to Growth, which will bring together businesses and environmental groups, and a new website – Sustainable Dorset – to put all the information, contacts and community groups into one place.

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