

Yasmin Abraham, Community Power

Title: Success! Adding Mentorship to Home Upgrades Combats Energy Poverty in Alberta

Abstract: Empower Me[®] is Canada's only energy conservation and behaviour change program designed specifically for and delivered by members of underserved and hard to reach communities. Empower Me supports immigrants, seniors, Indigenous communities and families who struggle to pay their bills (known as being in energy poverty) with energy efficiency education delivered in communities, and in language. With the support of the Government of Alberta, Empower Me piloted a Home Upgrades Program in 2018 to help renters and homeowners struggling with energy poverty to save money on utility bills and make their homes more energy efficient. The Home Upgrades Program is innovative in its design, using a diagnostic approach rather than the prescriptive approach used over the past four decades of home energy efficiency program design. In this way, program participants receive customized upgrades that maximize energy savings potential. The combination of home upgrades and ongoing support offered through the program also make a meaningful difference in the vulnerable communities they serve in terms of home comfort, safety and education. The combination of the diagnostic approach, long-term education and the peer-to-peer support model ensures ongoing energy savings after upgrades are complete. Scalability in concert with a community-based model, and diagnostic, customized upgrades is something rarely seen in programs targeting hard to reach and vulnerable communities. The success of this model has prompted a customization for Indigenous communities also struggling with energy poverty. Yasmin Abraham, Managing Director and Founder, Empower Me, draws from her first-hand experience designing and scaling energy efficiency programs that target underserved and hard to reach demographics. Abraham will outline the program design, results and the next steps for scaling up Empower Me and the Home Upgrades Programs.