

University of Salford Sustainability Champion Diana Baker



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Profile

- HEI
- 20,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2500 staff
- Urban

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POWERING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Section 1 About Diana

Summary

University of Salford student Diana Baker, 25, reached the 2014 finals of the prestigious Green Gown awards, in recognition of the work she does to raise awareness of environmental sustainability in deprived communities. Her project, Be Keen Go Green, has made such an impact it's been picked up by Manchester City Council, which has made it part of its agenda to change the view on environmental matters.

Diana, who is from Longsight in Manchester and in the second year of a BSc in Environmental Management, has been recognised for creating Be Keen Go Green, which delivers practical environmental advice to deprived communities in Manchester. She has carried out the majority of the work herself, creating her own materials and delivering workshops in Longsight, Moss Side and at the university. She has also been involved in several university projects, including one which encouraged staff to be more aware of their carbon footprint.

Section 2 The results

The problem

Having come through the care system and grown up in a deprived area herself, Diana decided to take on a campaigning role rather than simply looking after her own environmental impact as she thought she would be a positive role model for others in similar situations.

Finalist's case study

Diana's approach

Before Diana started her degree course, she was studying Health and Social Care at college. A module on public health, which looked at the history of how people treat the environment and events such as the smog in London in the 1950s which killed thousands of people and how poorly people treated the environment in those days got her attention. Although the situation isn't as bad now, she recognised certain things from her own community. Diana has experienced first-hand when people are deprived; they're focused on not being hungry and just thinking about surviving, they're not worried about their carbon footprint. What Diana aims to raise awareness of is that being more environmentally aware will have huge benefits for them.

Diana first decided to run environmental awareness sessions when she was in her first year of her degree. She was volunteering as a Green Impact project assistant, which involved helping staff to understand the impact of and reduce their carbon footprint. At the same time, she was made aware of an enterprise grant of £250 from the university, so she decided to set up her own project to take into these communities. If she could prove it was having an impact, she'd be able to apply for more funding. That's how Be Keen Go Green started.

The Be Keen Go Green initiative involved a two session programme delivered in a local community library in Longsight. The first session included a wealth of information delivered with a practical focus on how to live more sustainably using a variety of techniques and interactive content including demonstrations. The second session included a trip to the Biospheric Foundation, a local research project for sustainable food to help inspire the community members to grow their own etc. In addition the participants were given materials to take home to help apply what they learned during the sessions. To encourage the participants to follow through with this, Diana developed a competition element asking participants to submit evidence of actions they had done at home with the first prize of a bicycle (again reinforcing the message of sustainability). Diana produced all her own materials and, in addition to the external funding, Diana approached other organisations to gain support, e.g. for competition prizes and resources, and recruited a team of volunteers from fellow students whom she coordinated to help deliver the community sessions.

With the enterprise grant, the University provided Diana with a business support and also a mentor for her project, Bec Bennett, Environment and Sustainability Officer. This has enabled Diana to gain further experience by getting involved with more sustainability projects on campus and specific career advice.

Diana's goals

- To help residents to be aware of their environment
- Help them to be environmentally sustainable by saving energy, saving water, reducing food miles, recycling and green transport
- Saving residents money
- Help reduce the impact of climate change by helping others to reducing their carbon emissions
- Help Manchester to be a low carbon emission city (Manchester A Certain Future)

Performance and results

The initiative that Diana has established has had a direct, positive impact in her local community and with her peers on her BSc course. The initiative has increased awareness of the local community members who participated in environmental issues and it provided them tools and guidance for positive actions including reducing energy and water bills and reducing food waste.

Since the first programme in her local community, Diana has gone on to deliver Be Keen Go Green in Moss Side, during University of Salford Welcome for new students and embedded content into a package for the Care Leavers' Association in Manchester. This organisation helps young people who have just come out of

care. Diana has volunteered as a mentor with the organisation for a number of years already to be a positive influence on other young people who have grown up in care and has now worked with them to embed environmental awareness into their workbook.

The participants in Be Keen Go Green varied in age, gender and race. Feedback Diana gathered through surveys at the beginning and end of the programme showed positive comments on the passion of the Be Keen Go Green team, enjoyment of the session, evidence of behaviour change and gratitude that the programme was being delivered locally and specifically for their community. Every respondent asked Diana to return to deliver more sessions!

Additionally, Diana has had a positive impact on her student peers by involving some of them in the initiative as volunteers. They have gained valuable experience in presenting and coaching to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote positive sustainable behaviours as well as general skills in project management and communication.

In addition to the benefits to the local community, Diana has benefitted personally through building on her interpersonal, increased confidence and leadership and project management skills. She also found that she learned more about attitudes to environmental sustainability through the conversations generated as a result of the community engagement; experience which she can take forward in developing the initiative further.

Diana has also established a Facebook page as an ongoing engagement tool with those she has worked with and to enable them to easily share information on becoming more sustainable, she currently has over 70 likes on the page, demonstrating the wider reach of her work.

Through the project Diana has recognised the importance of working with a community and hopes to continue to do this as part of her future career aspirations. She wants to use her experience of the locality, the care system and her voluntary work as a mentor to identify with community members and inspire positive change.

“Most of the people I work with in the community just thought it wasn’t something they had to worry about, it washed over them. I showed them practical things they could do with an immediate benefit, told them about free schemes to insulate their homes, gave them gadgets they could use to save water. I pointed out the benefits and told them it wouldn’t cost anything and would actually save them money, and that they could volunteer and help spread the word and get work experience at the same time.” said Diana.

Diana also received a Community Action Award for her actions at the University of Salford Awards earlier this year.

Section 3 The future

What does it mean to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

“These awards will be amazing; just to go and network with all the people at the top of their field is good experience. I’ll get to learn new things, even if I just ask a question and get a sentence in return it’s still learning and I can take that away and it’ll help me to grow.

“Before I came to university I was doing silver service catering and when I was serving I thought to myself, one day I’m going to be one of them, sitting at a table and eating like this. Now I’m actually going to do it at the awards! It’s nice to be able to get there and have an impact on other people, because even if I don’t win, my story and what I’ve done has had an impact. There are so many benefits to being a finalist; it’s good to motivate other students and maybe others will see me and realise they can do something themselves. If I can motivate people to take action then I’m achieving what I set out to do.

Finalist's case study

"That's why I do this. I feel like I can make a bigger impact than just doing my own thing, on my own. It took a collection of people to cause the problems so we need a collection of people to change things."

Diana Baker, Student, University of Salford

"I am delighted that Diana has received well-deserved, national recognition with this Green Gown Award. Volunteering in itself is fantastic; however Diana has gone further to really make a difference in a community which is classed as one of the most deprived in Greater Manchester, where she has grown up herself, and promote a positive sustainability message. The effort and dedication she has shown is an inspiration to others."

Professor Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor

"I nominated Diana as Sustainability Champion as she has shown real leadership in establishing the Be Keen Go Green project from scratch. She has been inspired by existing projects but developed something bespoke and more relevant to her community, succeeding in understanding and meeting the needs of that community. The testimonials she has received from participants demonstrate the vision, values and positive influence that Diana has provided through this project. Our University Strategic Plan Our Salford 2014-18, sets out our mission; transforming lives, stimulating discovery, realising potential. Diana's voluntary work epitomises this. She has taken her learning to benefit others in her community and help them become more sustainable as well as supporting sustainability projects on campus. She has demonstrated real commitment to realise her potential and that of others. It is just fantastic to be able to support someone with such enthusiasm and passion in making a difference and to see this recognised on a national level"

Bec Bennett, Environment and Sustainability Officer

Further information

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