



Community Social Care
Fuel Poverty and SCARF

V/o:

Fuel poverty. People on low incomes come upon a whole range of problems unknown to those who are better off. However you measure it, fuel poverty is a particular problem in Scotland.

Woman:

For one thing you really couldn't afford it, I mean I was putting ten pounds-worth of cards in some weeks and it was practically finished, you know what I mean, and I was only using one fire.

Man:

I also had this electric heater as well so I was alright that way, and I had three hot water bottles in my bed 'cos you needed them, 'cos it was a really cold, dark place.

Woman:

I don't know what the answer is to the price of fuel. It's a hard one for people especially in the winters. We have very, very severe winters sometimes up here, and the money's not there to pay for it.

Woman:

You get off the bus at Hamilton and you're right at the district council offices so you go in there and you pay your poll tax, come out of there and go into Dunfermline, you pay your mortgage, go down the street and round a corner and that is you to pay your electricity. Once you have done all those three things what you have left has got to feed you for the whole week, right. If you pay your rent, your electricity, if you don't have enough to live on you go and shut that door and nobody needs to know.

Woman:

In Scotland the cold is associated with the excess number of winter deaths that we have each year, and we have a higher rate of winter deaths in Scotland than the UK; for instance if you compare it to countries like Scandinavia the concept of excess deaths in winters is new to them, they don't quite know what we mean.

V/o:

Jackie Carling works in a community advice centre in Dundee. In her view the signs of poverty are becoming more visible.

Jackie carling:

Well I think over the last ten years or so like every place the work situation has worsened. There's a lot of factories that we had here have closed down. Unemployment in itself means the lack of ability to do anything with your family, that people don't have the money to do anything in order to make their lives better, and the ability to buy food, decent food, heat their properties, things like that, you know, you can see the poverty now whereas before it was probably a bit more hidden.

V/o:

Angela Yih from Age Concern, Scotland, details the scale of the problem.

Angela yih:

The statistic that we have at the moment shows about 738,000 households having to spend more than ten percent of their income on energy, and that's a fairly accepted definition of fuel poverty; if you have to spend more, then you're fuel poor. In those figures 69,000 older

householders, people whose houses are headed by someone over sixty, have faced extreme fuel poverty. That means they would really need to spend more than twenty percent of their income.

V/o:

Ian Treaner is an energy adviser in Dundee. He's familiar with the types of housing in the city and the problem of heating.

Ian Treaner:

Well these are traditional Scottish tenement blocks as we call them, they were built either just at the turn of the century or just after, and it's traditional stone. The walls here are sometimes 2-3 feet thick and traditionally they're quite large rooms in some of these blocks so a lot of people find a problem actually heating these houses. Traditionally we find, too, that it's normally bottled gas where there's no central heating and this causes all sorts of problems, horrendous condensation and of course that affects the health life, particularly in the winter when condensation really is excessive. And then when we turn our backs here we look to the skyscrapers up the avenue down here, and when we look at this at the Hilltown as the name suggests we're sitting fairly high up from the city centre in Dundee itself, and these blocks really stand out when you come across and see the skyline of Dundee. And again we look at some of the problems involved; they're all electrically centrally heated, but there's very, very few people in these blocks actually use the heating; if they were to put the central heating on now you'd be talking about fifty pounds a month to try and keep that warm, that's only warm, that's not really a comfortable heat.

V/o:

Working in collaboration with Dundee City Council, Ian Treaner runs SCARF.

Ian:

SCARF what it stands for is to save cash and reduce fuel so we're interested in saving householders cash and also reducing the amount of fuel that they actually need, so they go hand in hand together. The biggest impact we try to make is with the fuel poor and Scotland. We do have a very high amount of people that suffer from fuel poverty at the moment. SCARF actually covers Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, covers the city of Dundee and also Perth and Kinross, which is over twelve and half thousand square miles so we really cover a vast amount of the east coast of Scotland, and we do tackle different projects and offer help wherever we can relating to energy matters.

V/o:

Thomas Marnie is one of the people Ian is helping. Before moving to his present accommodation he'd run into serious difficulties with paying his bills.

Thomas Marnie:

Well the place I used to live was a bed-sit flat, one room, toilet and a kitchen, with a gas fire and electric meter, and it was a tiny wee flat – it was a bedroom, your dining room, everything was in the one place. And it was that wee you really touched, you could touch the walls near enough, so it was a very dull and dreary place to live to be honest with you. And when I was up in the morning I had a wash and shave and something to eat, I was glad to get out till late at night to come back and just go to my bed, then to sit and look at four walls, just had a gas heater, but as I said something would run out and I couldn't afford to go the post office and buy more so I just decided not to use it.

Ian:

The situation was that Mr Marnie had no gas supply and the amount outstanding was £54 which was really a nominal sum, so what we done got some details from Mr Marney, contacted Scottish Gas who informed us that he'd been in this situation for over three years and so we asked could they restore the gas supply that night, and eventually they seen reason and connected the gas supply that night, we got that back on, and what we agreed to do is monitor the gas consumption and make sure this never happened again. So entering into dialogue with Scottish Gas just to tide us over, we feel that they've got some

responsibility in the matter too in that they just left him for over three years, so what we done is contactedScotland who agreed that they would pay the gas bill.

V/o:

Mr Marney spent his life working in the polypropylene fibre business but it took its toll on his health.

Thomas:

I was working there for 23 years and 15 years out of that I was breathing in polythene dust twelve hours a day. When I was told I had to see the works' doctor he told me I had emphysema and wasn't fit for work any longer. I saw the director and he says sorry Mr Marney but we'll have to pay you off through ill health. But I says yes, incapacity and a pension from the work. The good thing about it is that I get my capacity weekly, pension I get monthly, which is a very small pension, it's only fifteen pound a week, sixty-five pound a month. Well as I said the time I was off my work we had to pay the full rent which was thirty pound a week for one pokey wee place, the electric to get, gas to get, food to get, clothes to get, so I just skipped my rent occasional times, as well as skipping the gas and skipping the electric, just could not do anything else. So as I said you had to rob Peter to pay Paul, or vice versa.... Then when got you in deeper trouble you pay your rent.....the rent then goes up so you're skint, you've no money, so what do you do? You go to some of your friends and borrow a tenner which you get dead easy, but you're putting yourself in a worse mess 'cos you've got to rob somebody to pay that ten pound back as soon as you get paid that week. So it's just a vicious cycle.

V/o:

Mr Marnie ended up in debt to the city council but it recouped money when he was moved from his single room to the slightly larger flat that he now occupies.

Thomas:

Through the council's moving you, you got £1500 for inconvenience and what other, well I did not get £1500, they kept £1000, I got £500. Me and the council are not very good friends at the moment. But that's life. Some people are worse off than me so that's the story.

V/o:

Now that Mr Marnie is in his new flat and with both gas and electricity connected, Ian's offering to give him ongoing advice on energy use.

Ian:

What we're keen to do is to really act on your behalf and to say to Scottish Gas and Hydro Electric that the way that they deal with customers is unrealistic at times and unsympathetic, and we really need to sit down and say that when people have one problem, normally it's multiple problems so we've have to tackle them one by one and let them understand that there are numerous problems here. As always we're glad to have got that at the back of us, so we're in here now. What we want to do is just to make sure that certainly the gas and electric that they don't get out of hand again and we're looking to get a weekly payment done and then we can monitor them and make sure that they're keeping them under control, then really that's two problems that we've really got out of the way anyway. Do you think that's reasonable?

Thomas:

Oh yes, I agree with that, and I'm gong to try my best to do it like, while the money's there and we've got it. There's no other kind of debt but

V/o:

Debt is probably the biggest problem that Ian Treaner comes across.

Ian:

The most common one is when they have a bill of maybe seven, eight hundred pounds, they come to us and say we cannot pay this, and I would normally ask them have you contacted every utility and they say yeah, and I ask them what kind of offer have they made for you to

pay this account, and based on that information I'll go back to the utility and say well, you really should be offering them something better than what you have offered them.