

# Turn Your Energy Waste Into Social Good

Written By: **Ron Dembo**  
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## HOW DO WE CHANGE BEHAVIOUR WHEN ENERGY IS CHEAP AND PLENTIFUL?

→ Collectively, Canadians waste an enormous amount of energy. We have one of the highest energy footprints per capita in the world. If the average Canadian used the same amount of energy as the average Swede, we would save \$600 per capita annually. That translates into \$50 per month for each Canadian household – significant, but not overwhelming for many of us.

Energy prices here are still low and incomes are relatively high by world standards, so motivating people to save energy in their homes based on saving a small amount of money is difficult. True, one can provide information comparing you to others and that will change behaviour somewhat, but not enough to make the kind of difference we need. It is fair to say that there has not yet been a truly successful Canadian home energy program that we are aware of. Yes, some small successes here or there, but nothing large-scale or universal.

The same is true for business. Saving a million dollars on energy does not excite a large bank with turnover in the billions; it is simply not material. It is also not a great motivator for the bank employee to save a few dollars in the branch when it goes to the 6<sup>th</sup> decimal place in the bank's earnings.

## WHAT IF WE CHANGED THE STORY?

→ But what if we changed the story? What if we allowed people to save energy and turn it into good for their community or for others in need? What if each dollar saved made a positive difference to the world? In this case, their actions would not only improve the environment but also produce social good. What if individuals could direct their energy savings to the cause of their choice? And, what if we could create models that leveraged each dollar saved on energy into *many* dollars of social good? This would be motivating!

For example, it is a national shame that many of our aboriginal communities lack adequate housing, running water and spend enormous amounts of money on energy in their poorly insulated homes and poorly constructed schools. What if we encouraged schools in Toronto to achieve energy efficiency and to dedicate the savings to bringing energy efficiency to aboriginal schools? In turn, the aboriginal schools would save energy, which could be applied to further improving their schools. This would be a great way to motivate students to save energy and to see the social good it can create. What's more, it is a model in which each dollar saved on energy leverages additional savings and social good elsewhere.

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What if school children and teachers saved energy at their school and their energy savings were applied to improving their own school – better lunch programs or restoring after-school programs, for example? Better still, what if there were a host of social programs that they could pledge their savings to, track these savings and see the good they create?

There are many foundations that support after school programs, such as the Royal Bank Foundation, Pathways to Education and others. What if instead of an outright grant to a school, teachers, students and staff banded together to reduce wasteful energy use, and grants instead matched every dollar schools saved? When added to the dollar saved on energy, the end result for schools would be two dollars in their pocket to reinvest; for example, in after-school programs. Instead of one foundation dollar generating only one dollar of good, this approach would match every dollar saved on energy (environmental good), resulting in two dollars of total benefit for schools (social good). This is not to mention the educational value that would accrue. This is leveraged sustainability and that's what makes it interesting.

This general idea could also be applied to homes, schools, hospitals and day care centres. We call it "turning waste into social good." For each 1% of energy saved in homes across North America, we free up approximately \$2.5 billion dollars annually at the same time as taking 11.5 million metric tons of carbon emissions out of our system. Given that there is room for saving closer to 10% per household in the short term, this is a huge capital pool waiting to be mined. And this could also be leveraged through existing charitable programs as we have proposed.

Tapping into this pool could possibly help achieve the broad level of engagement we need. It is, in a sense, "free money" that can change communities while lowering our environmental footprint.

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