

The Osborne's Green Journey, Part 3

The family discovers that having an energy-efficient home is rewarding in more ways than one. by Donald Fraser



The red door and fan look like something out of a science fiction novel – billowing slightly and sucking air out of the house. There's a small window in the centre that acts as a peephole for the Osborne children, Jacob, Caleb, and Kylie. Their father, Jerry, looks on, impressed, as any guy would be with such high-tech tools. Six-year-old Kylie sums up the situation in a single word: "Cool!"

Peterborough Green-Up's Vince Hughes adjusts the setting on his contraption and explains what he's doing. "This blower door," he says pointing to the fan, "sucks air out of the house, lowering the air pressure, and exaggerating air leaks. It makes it easier to find out where cold air is coming in and where warm air is leaking. Important information when it comes to heating your home efficiently."

"Don't worry," he says as an aside to Kylie, "it hardly ever sucks up children." And the kids scatter away, mock screams adding to the noise of the fan.

In previous issues of *Peterborough Kids*, we were introduced to the Osborne family. Parents, Jerry and Michelle, have decided that they want to make their lives more ecologically sustainable in hopes of providing a healthier environment in which to bring up their children. *Peterborough Kids* is tracking their progress.

The Osbornes called Vince for a home visit after hearing about the federal government's new ecoENERGY program. The program, which offers rebates of up to \$5,000 for energy retrofits done on houses, rewards families such as the Osbornes for making their homes more energy efficient. "I know that the more natural gas we burn, the more we contribute to climate change and air pollution," says Jerry. "And the early results of the program are pretty impressive."

ecoENERGY's predecessor, EnerGuide for Houses, reduced carbon dioxide emissions by an annual average of 6.17 tonnes per house. Natural Resources Canada estimates that the new program will be even more effective. This is good news for families interested in reducing their impact on global climate change.



It's not all about the environment, however. Like most families, the Osbornes are on a budget. "This is a big ol' house," reports Jerry. "It takes a lot to heat this sucker, and then it's still cold."

The health of the Osborne children was also a factor. "The kids can get colds from the drafts," says Jerry. "And they get real chills from the cold floor."

Vince points out a good example – the blower door has found major air leaks in the wall and floor behind Kylie's bed. Hidden by floorboards and the baseboard, the holes lead directly to the bare brick outer wall. Cold air can be felt with a bare hand. Jerry is taken aback at the thought of this cold air washing over Kylie as she sleeps.

In other nooks and crannies, air leaks have caused moisture build-up – a perfect breeding

ground for mold.

"That's the thing," says Vince. "There are obvious places to check – around doors and windows – and then there are places that completely surprise you. I've been doing these audits for 15 years, and I'm still surprised on a daily basis at where I find drafts. And the blower door takes the guesswork out of it."

According to Jerry, the audit results were surprising. "I thought we'd have to spend quite a bit of money," he says. "I was thinking we'd probably need a new furnace, for instance. But Vince let us know that our existing one was really quite efficient." In fact, many of the upgrades listed in the report were inexpensive.

Much of the needed work involved simple air sealing. "We weather-stripped the attic hatch and sealed the plumbing stack," says Jerry. "We put outlet gaskets on all of our plugs – where you could actually feel outside air coming through the electrical outlets. And we're looking at new insulation." According to Vince, these small steps will have far more bang for their buck than big ticket items, such as new windows."

And the Osbornes will be getting paid for the work they are doing. "The ecoENERGY program supplies grants for upgrades that you've done," explains Jerry. "The average grant is somewhere around \$1,000. And while we probably won't be getting a cheque quite that size, we will be able to defray the cost of anything we do."

"Being green has never been so easy."

Donald Fraser is a freelance writer and consultant, specializing in air quality and climate change issues.

Peterborough Green-Up delivers the federal ecoENERGY Retrofit program locally: 705-745-3238; www.greenup.on.ca.



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