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### Energy

# Brown students light the way to energy efficiency

[By Ted Nesi](#)

PBN Staff Writer

When a pair of Brown University students visited Gladys Guerrero recently at her tidy second-floor apartment in South Providence, they gave her an odd gift – 11 new compact fluorescent light bulbs, free.

The students, Keiko Fukuda and Liz Encarnacion, work for Project 20/20, a new program that is replacing incandescent light bulbs with more energy-efficient compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) in low-income homes around the Providence area.

The benefits are economic and environmental, because the greater efficiency of CFLs reduces both carbon emissions and utility bills. But CFLs are also more expensive than old-fashioned incandescents – and that’s where Project 20/20, and its free



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN ABROMOWSKI/ BROWN UNIVERSITY

BRIGHT IDEA: Brown University student Kelly Glaser removes an incandescent light bulb in the Larch Street home of Alethia Mitchell, right, in Providence.

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CFLs, come in.

“These light bulbs should save you \$15 to \$20 a month,” Fukuda told Guerrero, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic who works as a home health aide, while unscrewing a living room light fixture.

“Wow! Very good,” replied Guerrero, as she watched the two young women climb over her beds and bathroom sinks to change bulbs. “Everything is expensive,” she added, shaking her head.

When they finished, Guerrero went downstairs and asked her elderly neighbor if she wanted new bulbs. “How much?” the woman asked. “Free. No cuesto!” Guerrero said – and soon, the two women and their boxes of bulbs were ushered in.

The nearly 20 students working for Project 20/20 this summer recently installed their 10,000th light bulb. In July alone, they visited 394 households and installed 6,442 CFLs.

Most of the homes have been within 10 minutes of the Brown campus, but requests have come from as far away as Newport. The organizers have partnered with churches and community groups to reach out to people who could benefit; Guerrero signed up at her church, for example.

The project is funded with \$100,000 from Brown and \$100,000 – plus free bulbs – from Wal-Mart. The goal is to install 100,000 bulbs in 5,000 households.

“It’s been a great success,” said Steven Hamburg, an associate professor of biology at Brown who guided the students who developed the project.

Project 20/20 is also showing Brown students a side of Providence that many of them never see, by sending them to lower-income neighborhoods far from the East Side. “The people are just so grateful,” Fukuda said.

The students say they have encountered some resistance, particularly among older people, who sometimes question whether climate change is real and, more often, express concern about the mercury in CFLs. But those worries are usually outweighed by the economic benefits.

“Most people are just attracted by the free bulbs and saving money on their utility bills,”



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Fukuda said.

Hamburg explained, “The idea is really to create a kind of momentum in our society, and you don’t do that unless you reach out to other socioeconomic groups.”

Project 20/20 is being managed on a volunteer basis this summer by David Fox, who retired six years ago after a career in the technology industry. He believes the program is the first of its kind.

“I think we have a real sustainable model,” he said. With financial and logistic support, Fox believes Project 20/20 could be done in communities nationwide.

Project 20/20 is part of the Community Carbon Use Reduction at Brown (CCURB) initiative, a push by the university to spur local efforts to reduce emissions as concern grows about the impact of climate change.

In January, Brown officials announced an aggressive plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the university’s existing facilities to 42 percent below 2007 levels by the end of the next decade.

Although Project 20/20 has moved the fastest, it is one of four student projects that won CCURB funding grants earlier this year. Two other programs will weatherize area homes and install programmable thermostats in them, and a third will partner with a local middle school to create emission-reduction projects. •

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