



The Climate Action Fund Learning Signposts #4

Engaging Young People in Climate Action

Produced by Jael Williams, MB Associates, on behalf of The National Lottery Community Fund



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Engaging Young People in Climate Action

Who is this for?

This learning signpost is primarily intended for people involved in Climate Action Fund projects and other projects or groups that are engaging young people aged between 10-25 years. It shares some of the early learning from Climate Action Fund projects that are working in this area.

Introduction

“The world is home to 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 to 24 — the largest generation of youth in history. Young people are increasingly aware of the challenges and risks presented by the climate crisis and of the opportunity to achieve sustainable development brought by a solution to climate change.”¹

Many young people are committed to making a difference, but often their voices are not heard, leaving them feeling disenfranchised and powerless. Including and empowering young people in climate action is crucial in helping to build a sustainable future for all of us.

The National Lottery has its own Youth Voice Team (aged 10-24) who have devised their own top tips and guidance infographic for working with young people:

- **Be transparent and set clear expectations**
- **Be accessible, provide a safe space**
- **Be interactive and fun**
- **Be together with young people in design and evaluation of projects**
- **Be diverse and inclusive**



Some lessons emerging from the projects we highlight in this resource are:

Do:

- Map audience and provision in your local area and understand local need, through research and consultation.
- Take the long view in developing relationships with schools and youth providers whilst connecting with home schooling networks and other out of school groups.
- Find your champions and partners who are local and have credibility and direct connection with a wide demographic of young people.
- Bring young people together in a social and safe space to share ideas and innovate.
- Build trusting relationships that are grounded with a comprehensive safeguarding policy and mentoring and pastoral support package.
- Choose starting points that are relevant to young people’s everyday lives and passions and that integrate creative approaches. Food, nature, fashion, and local issues are great ways in.
- Give them the tools but let them lead. Encourage and support youth-led ideas and action, building on the variety of passions and skills that all young people have.
- Offer leadership skills, accreditation and career development opportunities, and fair pay, where appropriate.
- Create a continual feedback loop ensuring all ideas are valued and outcomes and impacts are visible.
- Create and capitalise on local opportunities and platforms for young people to share their learning and ideas and influence local decision making.

Figure 1 - The National Lottery Community Fund Youth Team guidance





Don't:

- Be tokenistic with any provision. Make the honest commitment, for the long term, to responding to what young people and your partners say they want.
- Use jargon. Even the words 'climate', 'green', 'campaigning' or 'activism' can present barriers.
- Forget that young people have busy social, education and personal lives, with many being carers for others.
- Forget to have a Plan B for inevitable changes in circumstance including alternative spaces to meet.
- Assume a level of knowledge or ability in all young people.
- Assume that schools are providing climate education. Find out what the provision, capacity and commitment is in your local schools.

Project 1: Ouse Valley Climate Action (OVCA)



The Ouse Valley Climate Action Project (OVCA) is a multistakeholder partnership project spearheaded by the South Downs National Park Trust (SDNPT). The project vision is for the Ouse Valley community to become a national pioneer in tackling climate change and increasing sustainability. Engaging with young people aged between 5 and 25 years, in and out of school, and in both rural and urban areas, is seen as a core activity.

During this development phase activities to engage young people have included:

- Mapping primary and secondary school-based climate action or environmental groups, networks and forest school provision.
- Visiting local schools to connect with climate 'experts' and pilot a cross school youth forum.
- Providing creative workshops at local youth centres offering alternative opportunities for those not attending school, including excluded and home-schooled young people.

- Developing a series of COP26 films with young people from Sussex Film School, aired at a local cinema event.
- Screening of 'We The Power' film about community-owned energy, after which local secondary students were invited to quiz a panel of community and renewable energy experts and local Councillors. They asked some serious and challenging questions!



Figure 2: OVCA, young people at 'We the Power' event

Learning so far

Understanding the landscape

- Understanding local education provision, skills and capacity helped to identify potential ‘warm’ school partners and revealed ways to attract parents as audiences. One school already had an active student eco team, one a youth voice group and one school has attracted previously disengaged parents through a rewilding project on the school grounds.
- Get out, meet and talk to young people on their own turf and at bespoke local events. “We met children who wouldn’t have joined these things through school. We took a craft and discussion activity to Newhaven fish festival... We also met some amazing speakers at an Extinction Rebellion event.”

Partnership building

- It takes time getting into schools and building trusting relationships with the right teachers. Ambitions to create a cross-school youth forum were initially challenging, with low engagement from local schools. “Some schools didn’t have the capacity to respond due to the challenges of their area, undergoing academisation or general firefighting. We managed to engage with one school by going to an event they were at, specifically to build a relationship with them – the result was fantastic and we now have that school on-board”.

- Working with a local sixth form student who is a Youth Ambassador for the United Nations Association for Climate and Oceans provided real inspiration for the youth forum members and was another solution to attracting wider school participation. The students were invited by the United Nations to write climate action articles for the United Nations Association website, raising the profile and status of the whole project locally, and catching the attention of non-participating schools.
- Connect, learn, and share with other similar projects. The team are now benefitting from sharing ideas around Youth Fora with the team from the Stand for Nature Wales project detailed below.

Engaging and communicating with young people

- Take the right people with you. The team have worked with ‘experts’ who the young people can relate to, can communicate with and who are local.
- Avoid using jargon. ‘We used the word ‘planet’ and always relate it to the local area, for example people’s concerns about the erosion of cliffs.’
- Don’t be afraid to address challenging subjects. Young people from Sussex Film School produced films that were politically challenging, but it was important to allow them the creative freedom and empowerment to express their views.

Links

[Click here](#) to find out more.

Project 2: Climate Action Fife



Led by Greener Kirkcaldy Ltd, the Climate Action Fife project is bringing individuals, communities, government, and business together, working to tackle the climate emergency and make Fife a greener and fairer place to live. For the Climate Action Fife team, engaging with young people aged 16-24 years was a new area to explore.

To make sure that they built a sustainable youth engagement programme, the team delivered a wide consultation with young people in youth groups, YMCAs, Scouts, colleges, and the Climate 2050 Scottish Young People’s group. They wanted to better understand:

- Whether there was an interest from young people.
- How they might want to be involved.
- What aspects of climate action interested them most.
- What questions they should be asking young people.
- What communication channels and social media would be best for communication.
- What activities and events young people might want to deliver and design themselves.

Following consultation the team developed their **Young Persons Climate Action Team**, aged between 16 and 24, who have worked on designing and programming events and running social media communications, in particular Instagram, targeting other young people.

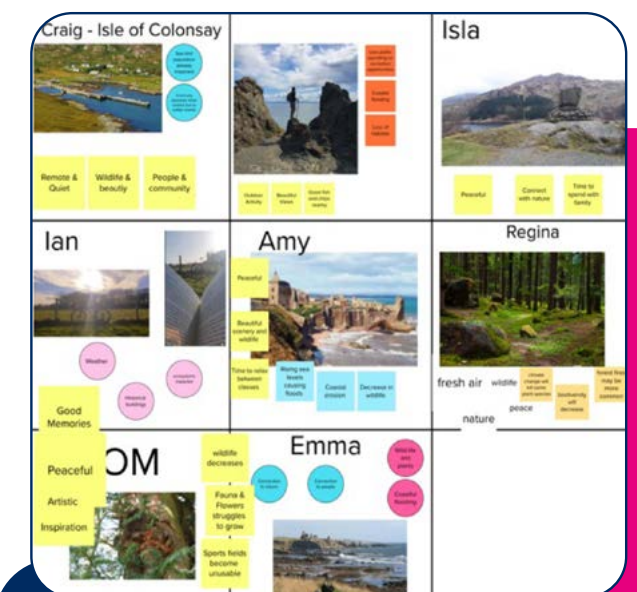


Figure 3: Climate Action Fife, young people’s consultation feedback

Learning so far

Understanding the landscape

- Start with an in-depth consultation. This will give you the information you need to directly address the interests and needs of young people, using the right language and communication channels to attract a wide youth audience.

Start with passions and sharing expertise

- The Climate Action Fife Young Persons team are a very passionate and knowledgeable group, who are keen to spread a climate message to their peers. They are natural collaborators and can help to reach many more young people.
- Share your own organisational expertise and passions. For a social media workshop, the team brought in their own Marketing Officer to offer support. This helped build relationships and validated a member of the staff team.

Engaging and communicating with young people

- Have creative online meetings. Young people loved using online whiteboard apps like Mural, which provided a great tool for consulting with them as well as planning events and activities. Having an additional facilitator to type post it notes really helped the conversations flow.
- Using incentives like a Bluetooth speaker giveaway opened up new audiences and conversations with young people who may not have got involved in climate conversations previously.

- Instagram was the best way to engage with young people, with Tik Tok and Twitter coming close second. The young people in the group also recommended their go-to websites.
- Deliver all your content during your workshop. The team found that young people were unlikely to do any homework or other activity between workshops.
- Be flexible with your timescales and know it will always take longer than you think. If you are committed to responding to what young people really want, then expect the goal posts to change and move in the direction they want to go.

Partnership building

- Find a known youth partner. The biggest challenge for the project has been reaching disengaged young people. The team have now partnered with Youth First Fife who have direct expertise and access to wider demographic of young people.

Links

To find out more, see:

- [Climate Action Fife](#)
- [Greener Kirkcaldy](#), Going Greener Together

Project 3: Stand for Nature Wales



Stand for Nature Wales is a pan-Wales youth climate change project bringing together the six regional Wildlife Trusts to tackle climate change with the help of the young people Led by North Wales Wildlife Trust, the aim is to empower and inspire young people to lead on action for nature and wildlife in their local area. With a focus on youth leadership, this work is embedded across all aspects of project participation and governance for the partnership.

Youth fora have been established in each of the six Wildlife Trusts², using learning from the early development of an established youth forum in Anglesey to inform development of the five others. The Anglesey Youth Forum draws young people from a wide rural area and is a year into delivering, whilst the other five are still in the development stage.



Figure 4: Stand for Nature Wales, the Anglesey Youth Forum

² Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, North Wales Wildlife Trust, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Radnor Wildlife Trust, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, [Wildlife Trusts Wales](#)

Learning so far

Understanding the landscape (literally)

- Explore sustainable travel solutions early to address rural issues to participation. The most significant challenge for this project is the lack of travel infrastructure for young people to attend youth fora meetings in person, an important aspect of building trust within a developing group. The team have encouraged car-pooling and sharing options as trial solutions, but this continues to present a significant practical and ethical challenge.

Partnership building

- Don't rely solely on schools to reach young people. Whilst schools provide a captive audience, quality of engagement can often be better in out-of-school contexts. Tapping into youth groups and home-schooling groups has been a real success for the team, offering greater flexibility in learning style as well as easier online provision.
- Develop a toolkit or best practice guide that you can share with others. The Anglesey team provided early support for other Wildlife Trusts, but a guide could have prevented common mistakes and pitfalls later. The team started with the [Five Pillars of Youth Work](#) in Wales to guide early practice: Educative, Expressive, Participative, Inclusive, Empowering.

Start with passions and sharing expertise

- Use a love of wildlife as a way in. The Wildlife Trusts see the interconnection of nature, wildlife and climate change as an important way of introducing people to take climate action. The fact that many young people care deeply about wildlife is a great hook for exploring this relationship.

Developing a youth forum

- Build trusting relationships with and between young people joining your forum. Keep the initial engagement fun, light and sociable. The team found that offering pizza was always a winner.
- It's difficult to start your forum with a very broad age range. If your aim is to build a mixed age forum, start with an older group and introduce younger members gradually working with the older ones to mentor and support confidence building.
- Establishing a balance between self-expression, learning and guidance. The team sought to create a safe space where young people could join in free from judgement, but also recognised that many of their younger members needed to feel informed before they had the confidence to contribute.

Links

To find out more, see:

- Wildlife Trusts Wales, Stand for Nature Wales wtwales.org/stand-for-nature-wales

Project 4: Be Green³

The Be Green initiative is a partnership between the Women's Environmental Network (WEN) and R-urban. It is a climate leadership program delivered by Leaders in Community (LiC) which aims to educate and empower young people (16-24) in Tower Hamlets, London, to create local climate campaigns.

The programme offers expert support and input and real problem-solving opportunities in a safe and social environment, equipping the young people with a range of key skills to support careers in the future.

There are several strands to the programme:

- Young people are recruited to the programme using Instagram and other partner organisations.
- Workshops, talks and meetings are led by industry 'experts' and entrepreneurs, where young people learn about various climate issues.

- Mentors are matched with young people according to campaign themes and subject specialisms and support them through the development of their campaign. There is a pool of campaign mentors, ranging from social enterprises, charities, freelancers, and businesses, all recruited through the wider WEN partnership.
- Young people are given a platform, often at a local festival, to share their campaigns.
- Young people attend a residential to celebrate and consolidate their learning.



Figure 5: Be Green, the Be Green team during COP26

³ This is just one aspect of a wider programme titled Just Food and Climate Transition which is a five-year programme led by the Women's Environmental Network in partnership with London Leap and a range of local community food projects to build a sustainable food system that delivers environmental benefits and improves social conditions for Tower Hamlets residents. The goal will be to create a community-led blueprint for grassroots food and environmental work that can be shared with other boroughs and cities, and a corresponding movement that will push for significant investment in public health, food and sustainability in Tower Hamlets beyond the grant period.

Learning so far

Partnership building

- Use what is already going on in your community as a platform for sharing. Providing wider platforms for young people to launch their campaigns includes piggybacking onto other community events.

Building trusting relationships

- One of the biggest challenges has been recruitment and continued engagement in the programme. Young people aged between 11-24 have busy lives at home and in education contexts, and many at the centre are carers or have evening jobs. Changes in personnel at LiC has also had an impact whilst new relationships, familiarity, rapport, and trust are built. These challenges are overcome by agile planning and staffing models.
- Commit for the long term to delivering for, with and by young people, even when numbers drop. What has stood out to the LiC team is that despite sometimes lower numbers, the young people have not been put off. Parents have often been surprised at the level of commitment they have seen and the personal wins for many of those who keep coming back.

Understanding the lives of young people

- Being hyper-aware of the lived experiences of young people includes being flexible around exam times, Ramadan and other cultural or religious periods. The team have trialled offering breakfast and weekend sessions and are considering whether to slow the pace of work down over spring/summer. Blended activities online and in person also offers flexibility in participation.
- Offer real time feedback and support. Working with mentors has been an amazing experience for all the young people. Listening to and being inspired by those who have done it before.
- Don't be overly ambitious, know who you are working with and what's doable within the time frame, demographic, and age group. Have back up spaces and plans to work with.

Engaging and communicating with young people

- Communicate safely and broaden horizons. The team at LiC use a text reminders service and a communication app that was safe because it doesn't share contact details. They provide an accessible online resource bank using PADLET so young people can pick and choose what they want to learn about whilst exposing them to resources and YouTube channels that they might not have found before.
- Don't be too reliant on digital. Many young people want a break from technology and welcomed creative sessions at the centre.

Career progression

- Offer progression routes for all young people. For LiC this is really important. The young people are developing leadership and project management skills, but the team are keen to explore accreditation and work experience opportunities in the future, as a greater incentive for participation. Young people from previous cohorts are also being offered the opportunity to buddy with newer cohort members.
- Talk about leadership skills in your marketing. 'We've been talking about 'campaigning' and that might be a language barrier. We need to talk more about being a leader in the climate action movement and about developing transferable skills. Public speaking, teamwork, budgeting, project management skills.'

Links

To find out more, see:

- [The Women's Environmental Network](#)
- [The BeGreen initiative](#)



Project 5: A Zero Carbon Cumbria: For the People by the People

Led by Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAfS), The Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership (ZCC) is aiming to make Cumbria the first net zero carbon county in the UK, by 2037. The programme includes a variety of community-based projects helping people reduce their carbon footprint, particularly from food, waste, and the goods we buy.

This includes a dedicated Youth Climate Action Programme focused on engaging and empowering all young people of all ages, across the county, to have a voice and to influence those in power to make real change. The Youth Project Coordinator for the project takes a role in linking young people in both rural and urban areas, with the wide range of organisations within the ZCC Partnership and beyond. Activities have been designed in consultation with young people and have included:

- Young people’s involvement in community sustainability projects, including youth-led meetings and local citizens juries.
- Linking young people to existing projects of interest. For example: a University of Gloucester Climathon research project to work on a sustainability-linked archaeology project; a series of eco-anxiety drama workshops.

- A Youth Voice training programme supporting advocacy and influencing skills.
- A Youth Climate Council, generating ideas for tackling climate change.
- A Youth Climate Summit, where young peoples’ recommendations for change were put forward to decision makers at local, regional, and national levels. Ideas were put together into a document and presented by video at Cumbria County Council’s offices, coinciding with the COP26 Youth and Public Empowerment Day.
- A Youth Climate Reporters scheme to encourage citizen journalism.
- A programme of events for schools including carbon literacy training.



Figure 6: Zero Carbon Cumbria, the youth handover at Cumbria County Council

Learning so far

Understanding the landscape

- Get to know your audience and identify champions locally by talking to young people and your partner organisations early on. Understand where they are at, what they are thinking, how they feel and what they would like their local area and their world to be like.
- Schools aren’t necessarily offering climate education. Don’t assume that secondary schools are offering empathetically and ethically driven climate education. The coverage is patchy and dependent on knowledgeable and committed teachers.

Building trusting relationships

- Be authentic. Avoiding tokenism is really important. Make sure there is true representation by young people and that the outcomes are visible. Reaching underrepresented groups can be hard but it’s worth the persistence.
- Prepare to deal with cynicism amongst some young people who feel that ‘adults’ have created a problem that we now want ‘young people’ to solve for them.
- Be sure to think through comprehensive safeguarding policies for the different ways you will engage and communicate with young people in different contexts and settings.

Career progression

- Offer guidance, support, and training. Young champions make powerful advocates, but they need some guidance and support to generate their own projects and share their messages and ideas.
- Support leadership skills. Young people have valued the opportunity to develop leadership skills in the programme. ‘CAfS have shown me that to be leaders and to create positive change for the climate, we need to lead by example, take responsibility and serve others’, Hannah, 18
- Use your partnership. Working across a large partnership has offered a fantastic range of opportunities for young people to contribute original ideas that hadn’t yet been explored.

Links

To find out more, see:

- [Cumbria Action for Sustainability](#).
- [Zero Carbon Cumbria Programme](#).
- [Voices of young people](#) representing Cumbria on climate concerns presented at COP26.



Other resources

Engaging young people

- The National Lottery Youth Voice Team, work with a group of young people on policy and fund development and allocation. They have written their own top tips for Youth Voice guide [here](#).
- The United Nations Youth Climate Action [case studies](#).
- UNICEF Youth for Climate Action [case studies on youth activism](#).
- The World Economic Forum three ways to engage young people for effective [climate action](#).
- NCVO's [top tips](#) on how to reach and keep young people involved in [community activity](#).
- [Youth Work in Wales, Principles and Practice](#).

- A toolkit to help inform young people about the [climate emergency](#), and empower them to take positive action.
- [UK Youth's guidance](#) on what good youth engagement looks like.

And to dig a little deeper into contemporary approaches, take a look at these:

- [The Foyer Foundations Adventures in Advantaged Thinking](#), principles to achieve better outcomes for and with people experiencing disadvantage and injustice.
- [Peer Power](#) is an empathy led social justice charity.



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About the Climate Action Fund

The Climate Action Fund is a ten-year £100 million fund supporting communities across the UK to take action on climate change.

About The National Lottery Community Fund

We are the largest non-statutory community funder in the UK – community is at the heart of our purpose, vision and name. We support activities that create resilient communities that are more inclusive and environmentally sustainable and that will strengthen society and improve lives across the UK. We're proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to work closely with government to distribute vital grants and funding from key Government programmes and initiatives. As well as responding to what communities tell us is important to them, our funding is focused on four key missions, supporting communities to:

1. **Come together**
2. **Be environmentally sustainable**
3. **Help children and young people thrive**
4. **Enable people to live healthier lives.**

Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, we distribute around £500 million a year through 10,000+ grants and plan to invest over £4 billion of funding into communities by 2030. We're privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

National Lottery players raise over £30 million each week for good causes throughout the UK. Since The National Lottery began in 1994, £47 billion has been raised and more than 670,000 individual grants have been made across the UK – the equivalent of around 240 National Lottery grants in every UK postcode district.

www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk



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