



Sustainable Steps Wales Case Study

Women Connect First
Diversifying Voices On Climate Change

DIVERSIFYING VOICES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

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Case Study – Women Connect First

THE ORGANISATION

Women Connect First is a charity based in Cardiff and covers South East Wales. It aims to empower Black and Ethnic women by offering a range of services and training and, by doing so, improve lives and employability.

Women Connect First was formed on 1st March 2001.



THE PROJECT

The “Diversifying Voices On Climate Change Project” aimed to support women, girls and their families from Black and Ethnic Minority communities, to participate in climate action.

After initial issues appointing staff for the project and with a change in senior staff, Women Connect First felt that, because of lack of organisational capacity, they would have to finish the project early. They are currently writing up a report for TNLCF and a new way of delivering may be found.

The case study therefore focusses on the learning from activities so far rather than specific outputs and outcomes. The learning about climate change and climate action has been evident across Women Connect First projects, not just the one funded by Sustainable Steps Wales. There have been parallels in approach with projects such as the Golden Years- Let’s Age Well project.



HOW DID THEY GO ABOUT INSPIRING PEOPLE?

Women Connect First has been able to inform people when they question some of the aspects of the climate change message. No one doubts the seriousness but sometimes the way that information is communicated is complex.

The charity is a trusted community organisation that can make sure knowledge and skills are percolated through the community and can show the positives in statutory agency policies. They can help organisations to communicate in an appropriate way and make the case for policies.

The trajectory of individuals that Women Connect First has recognised through its own internal evaluation, involves 3 elements: **Awareness - Action - Advocacy**

Awareness comes in many forms. Some people know a lot, others just see the publicity on say the side of a bus but do not know how to take action in their own lives. It is important to start to change behaviours from where people are currently in their understanding and knowledge and build from there.

Sometimes people just do not realise, for example, how much waste they are generating. One key member of staff casts herself as the “rubbish police”, challenging behaviour and inspiring people to change behaviours. Sometimes strong messages such as, “don’t need it, don’t buy it! are deployed. At times of high cost of living this message has particular resonance.

Sometimes awareness is raised through information or videos, but informal techniques are often more effective. This includes activity to spread the message through conversations and clarifying misconceptions. Women Connect First provides opportunities for group conversations and spaces where people can ask questions or clarify information. They often see tips being shared and women encouraging others.



Individuals may question the impact that a single person or a family can have on what may seem like a very big issue. Women Connect First has used the analogy of a “piggy bank”. A single person’s penny may not seem much to put into the piggy bank but a lot of people putting in pennies can build up to a significant sum. So with climate change, although a single person’s action can seem relatively insignificant, when a lot of people make small changes or take small actions, they can build up to something substantial.

Information overload can be an issue, so learning through action is important.

Women Connect First recognises the importance of monitoring as a way of showing people the progress that has been made. They have used video diaries and digital stories for other projects. They could be used for this initiative.

Action can be with particular sections of the community or intergenerational.

Many of the older generations have lived experience of having to upcycle and adapt because of lack of resources. These are the skills that can now be applied to taking action to combat climate change.

Activities with children are also a good way of inspiring families. An example has been the initiative to encourage children to design artwork about climate change for T-shirts. Children learn through thinking about the design they want to put on their T-shirts.

Another example has been a video competition. Two girls aged 11 and 9 researched the material for their videos, mainly by going online. Project organisers have been surprised how little activity around climate change that children do in school.

However, it is the intergenerational activity that has the most impact. Project staff say that “stuff seems to happen” when women with knowledge from older generations team up with the energy of younger people. A matriarchal figure within a family can help with the messaging. Within families, the skills that the older generation have can be brought together with the knowledge about

climate change from younger generations. In one example of a family, it was the daughter that was informed but the older women had the practical knowledge and skills.

Some people respond well to signing a pledge as a way of challenging them to change behaviours. Others are amazed at facts such as the use of recycled nappies to make roads.

Simple actions are used to communicate big messages e.g. planting seeds in coffee cups as a way of producing food but also re-using something that is normally discarded after one use.



The cost of living is focussing minds, so simple actions like walking and not taking the bus may save money as well as having climate and health benefits.

Advocacy. Women Connect First's position as a trusted organisation is significant. They are able to act as an advocate for the climate change messages, translating policy messages into practical actions and impacts in a family setting.

The project aims to empower individuals to become advocates, recognising, as has already been pointed out, that peer to peer support in the form of tips and suggestions is powerful.

The project recognises that some people may jump from awareness to advocacy without necessarily implementing action themselves. Perhaps this is a feature of human nature but Women Connect First is able to work constructively with individuals to work on this individual action.

LEARNING

- Women Connect First is a trusted organisation and is able to translate policy messages into knowledge and skills for families.
- Their trusted nature means that they can challenge when necessary as well as encourage.
- Raising awareness and taking action is encouraged through activities such as sewing classes and art activity for children, not just by providing information.
- Providing a space for peer-to-peer learning helps people to share tips and experience.
- Intergenerational activity is powerful, although some activity aimed say at children is also important. Older people have experience and knowledge. Younger people have energy.
- Effective monitoring demonstrates how progress is being made.
- The cost-of-living crisis has focussed minds.