

CLIMATE READY GWENT CASE STUDY – Blaenau Gwent Children’s Council

1. Nature of engagement

This describes the scope of the engagement to capture the lived experience.

Blaenau Gwent Children’s Council provides a forum for representatives from all primary schools in the area to work with the local authority Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC), enabling young people (year 6 children aged 10-11) to influence what the Council does. The Children’s Council meets several times a year and engages in interactive activity to inform the children and agencies working in the area. CRG engagement sought to capture young people’s views of climate change, understand how they perceived climate risk in the community and key messages for decision makers for planning for changes in Blaenau Gwent’s climate. CRG were particularly interested in the perspectives and views of young people on the future impacts of climate change on their community and their messages to decision makers about the future.



Note: Blaenau Gwent is made up of densely urbanised communities and large tracts of open countryside ranging from 400-1200ft in altitude, with a population of approx. 70,000. The schoolchildren represented communities from across the Borough.

2. Establishing engagement

This describes how the engagement was developed with local groups and agencies to explore the lived experience.

BGCBC suggested that the CRG project should engage with the Children’s Council as part of one of its regular meetings on 12.02.19. The project team liaised with BGCBC officials on the length, method and focus of the session and capturing the session with photographs. An ‘offer’ from the project team was agreed to provide morning session on climate adaptation as part of a day long programme for the children.

3. Community and agency involvement

This outlines who was involved in the discussion of the lived experience.

48 year 6 pupils from 23 different primary schools were engaged in discussion on climate risk and adaptation. This covered schools from all areas of the Borough including Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Brymawr, Blaina and Abertillery.

Primary schools involved: Bryngwyn Road, Queen Street, Roseheyworth , Soffryd , St. Iltyds, All Saints, Beaufort Hill , Cwm, Ebbw Fawr, Glyncoed, Willowtown, St. Joseph's, Deighton, Georgetown, Glanhwy, BrynBach, Rhos y Fedwen Saint Mary's, Coed y Garn, St. Mary's RC, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, Blaenycym.

4. Formats and methods adopted

This summarises the methods adopted to stimulate discussion and record the lived experience.

The session was held at the Llanhilleth Institute, a large hall, with IT facilities and plenty of room to engage the children in an interactive session. The session ran from 10.30-12.15. This included;

- an opening 15-minute *presentation on climate impacts*, emphasising the need to manage climate risks into the future, the types of impact we can expect, how we might manage them and the fact that young people all over the world are getting involved in climate protests. Questions focused on the nature of changes, how we can cope and what do we do about it
- *triad questions*, with movement, focusing on what's going to see be biggest impact from climate change: people; the environment; local businesses
- *mind mapping* – group work focusing on climate impacts on the place that the children live; the most urgent issues and any opportunities that might occur – this included feedback to the room. Data was captured in mind maps from the children.
- *message for the future* – group work focusing on visioning for the future and writing a message to the people of Blaenau Gwent in 2050. Data was captured on paper from the children.

- *message board* – developing a 15-word headline, a ‘call to action’ for decision makers in the future – photographed on a message board

The project team and BGCBC staff facilitated the tables and exercises. BGCBC staff took photographs. Facilitation was also provided in the Welsh Language



5. Relevant local information used

This summarises the local data and evidence which was used to stimulate discussion on the lived experience.

In order to ‘localise’ climate impact, photographs of extreme weather events from Abertillery, Blaina, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar were used to illustrate the range of conditions which are likely to become more prevalent and extreme. Triad questions focused on impacts of climate change on these specific towns.

6. Key issues raised – Past

This summarises the perceptions of those involved, about how the climate has changed during their lifetimes and their memories of how severe weather has impacted on their lived experience.

This question was not raised specifically for the children, although they were encouraged in the *Message from the Future* exercise to think back from 2050 about how climate change had impacted upon their lives (see quotes).

7. Key issues raised – Present

This summarises the perceptions of those involved, about how severe weather impacts now on their lived experience.

This question was not raised specifically for the children – although they did discuss deep snow, storm and flooding incidents as part of the morning’s exercises, especially in the mind mapping exercises.



8. Key issues raised – Future

This summarises the perceptions of those involved, about key issues that decision makers need to manage, between now and mid-century, to plan for climate change.

The children were encouraged in the **Message from the Future** exercise to send a message back in time, from 2050 on how climate risk had been managed.

MESSAGE FROM THE FUTURE

CLIMATE IS SAVED! To the past, climate change hasn't happened, the world and communities that are healthy. Thanks to electricity saving and the eco-friendly houses, you have saved this from a tragedy that could've took over our nature. Lily

A lot has been happening because scientists have changed the climate. And when summer appears it will be summer until summer is over. And when winter appears it will be stay winter until winter stops.

Climate change hasn't happened yet because of all the little things you have done to help all the people in the world. This letter is for you to remember to thank you for all the little changes that you have made to help the millions - especially the Earth.

Everybody this is a message from 2050 and I know how to help with climate change. Talk to every government and committee then to switch to fusion energy and eradicate fossil fuel is from Sam

This message is from the future. It is an important message from the future!

Now there are no more heat waves, heavy snow or bad rain. All is peaceful. More trees are planted to catch the rain the chance of snow is decreased, and the rain has decreased because of the trees.

Dear Past, if you are worried or concerned about global warming here is what we have experienced. Global warming was stopped, and the water levels were controlled. But the only way we stopped the floods what was people believing in themselves so always believe and you will always succeed.

To the Past: We haven't had climate change yet because we have made eco-friendly houses with stilts underneath our houses. Thanks, from Lacie.

I am now 45 years old and a lot has happened since 2019. The flooding has got a lot worse. In fact, we are all in the middle of a flood right now. It is raining really bad and I have to stay in my house because I will be pushed down on the floor by the wind. So, I decided to write a letter to the past! I hope that someday we will have stilts underneath our home. Change for the world!

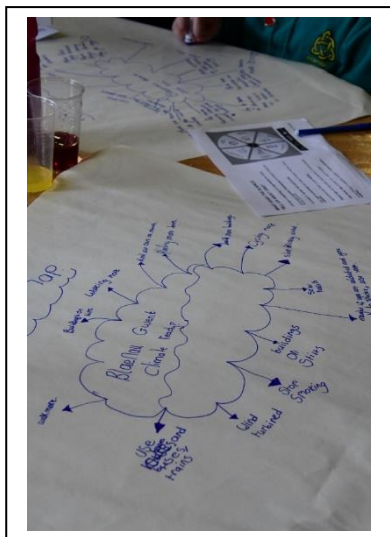
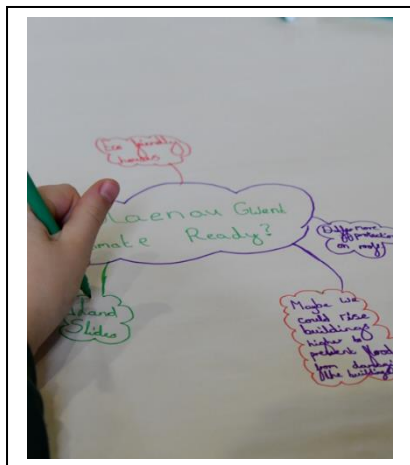
CLIMATE CHANGE DEFEATED Climate change did not happen. Because the community helped, and they put out all the fires with buckets of water and also houses from the gardens. Also, the elderly were not affected by the snow because younger people cleared their yard and they didn't sleep in the snow. Harley

9. Risks to the community/place.

This summarises the risks identified by the children to residents, the town, local economy & business and landscape and nature

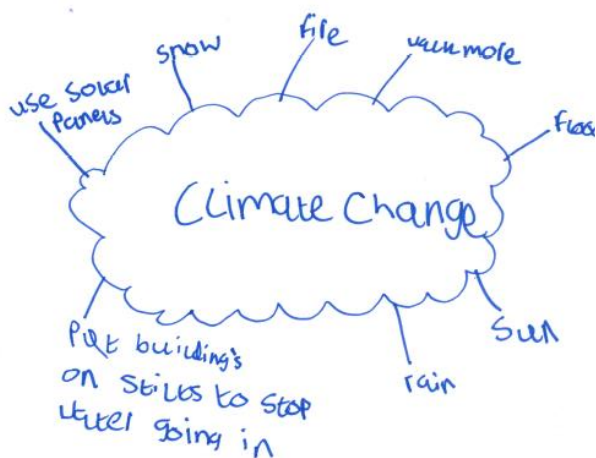
These are the risks that concerned the children when thinking about climate impacts on their community through discussion and mind mapping.

Residents	Town	Economy & Business	Landscape & Nature
future proof jobs pollution clean water food availability vulnerable people damage to homes poor unable to respond	surface water flooding security of power supply resource & energy efficiency	famers and food producers manufacturers of goods (efficiency)	adaptability of wildlife and habitats blurred seasonality deforestation and impact on flooding



10. Managing Climate Risks

This provides an overview of how the children suggest these risks should be managed.



- suitable infrastructure to manage the movement of surface water
- energy efficient housing, factories and places of work
- climate adapted housing
- landowners and farmers planting more trees
- designated areas to grow our own food
- public transport, walking and cycling options
- use unclean water to put out fires

There was a focus on carbon reduction rather than adaptation. Children really got the complexity of interconnections between different impacts and solutions. e.g. tree planting, soil run-off and water quality in rivers.

11. Community role *This provides ideas from the children about how they can support climate resilience.*

- empowering young people so they have a say in their future
- engagement projects looking at sourcing of foods and non-meat diets
- community related action that gives individuals the confidence that they can drive change
- interventions around conservation and understanding local species and habitats

12. Reflections on the engagement

This summarises key issues emerging from the engagement and how the information developed during the engagement could be used in ongoing dialogue between the community and by local agencies.

- a) this involves engagement with children new to the concept of climate risk as a result of past emissions. It may have come as a surprise that consequences of climate change are so soon and will affect them during their lifetimes, whatever they do now.
- b) the participants were very concerned about protecting the environment in its widest sense and talked about pollution, energy use, energy production, carbon reduction and habitat conservation. They were engaged, passionate and wanted to do something, but really unsure and at times frustrated about how to create change within their own communities.
- c) there were some very insightful responses from the children on the need to adapt infrastructure, land use and decision making to cope with and manage future changes. Clearly there is some engineering and political expertise developing in Blaenau Gwent
- d) the children were able to develop dialogue with their peers on impacts, solutions, the role of different actors and their own responsibilities
- e) the children were comfortable in thinking about multi-generational impacts, focusing on their own town, letters from the future, mind mapping, triad questions and writing 15 word messages worked as ways to get them to explore their reactions to the issue of climate risk. The children responded positively to the variety of activity offered.
- f) to build on this session children could be engaged in imagining a Gwent impacted by climate change, using scenarios and them being offered potential solutions might help in future engagement.
- g) in future it needs to be made even more explicit that the session is about what needs to be done as a community to adapt to the changes that are already coming.
- h) this was a first step in that process of shaping engaged young citizens who are going to living with all of this going forward. Their frustration about what was happening and lack of power to do something about it was palpable (see slogans in pictures in Section 14 below).
- i) Blaenau Gwent Council have, since the session, received correspondence from pupils regarding declaring a climate emergency.
- j) the children clearly want to know what is being done about climate adaptation by decision makers, on their behalf.

13. Recommendations for Gwent PSBs

Observations and suggestions for GSWAG and Climate Ready Gwent Working Group on how this case study informs their continued engagement with the community

- a) If the Gwent PSBs are going to engage with schools in the area on climate adaptation, they need to take special care to get across the differences between adaptation and mitigation through interactive activity to make this clear to pupils and teachers.
- b) Gwent PSBs and partner organisations should explore opportunities to bring decision makers together with children on climate adaptation to understand each-others' perspectives and roles.
- c) there is an opportunity for Gwent PSBs to develop discourse as part of Climate Crisis movement and extinction rebellion, through children's and youth groups and fora.
- d) any future engagement should focus on giving children a similar level of information on climate risk, but also give them information on how to engage with decision makers, while learning about local democracy and how their 'place' functions with different agencies and organisations.
- e) children need to be given information and activity to help them to understand how they can affect change in their communities to adapt to climate change.

14. Message Board – a 15-word headline for decision makers

