

# How can your museum support children and young people to understand and respond to the Climate and Ecological Emergency?



According to the 2018 Special Report published by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we have until 2030 (11 years at time of writing) to act to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C. Temperature rises above this level are likely to have a severe impact for hundreds of millions of people, causing floods, droughts, extreme heat and poverty.

The Climate and Ecological Emergency affects everyone, but its impact will be felt most by children and young people and they are becoming increasingly concerned by the issue. In the 2017 Global Shapers Survey of around 30,000 young people under 30, climate change and the destruction of nature was identified as the most serious global issue. Since Greta Thunberg walked out of school to protest about her government's response to the climate emergency, there have been youth climate strikes in more than 130 countries, according to the Fridays for Future website.

Museums can play an important role in supporting young people to learn more about the Climate and Ecological Emergency, to discuss and debate the issues surrounding it and to get involved with social action to achieve long-term change. Young people's activism on these issues has the potential to be very effective in helping them feel empowered in the face of a global problem, increase their sense of wellbeing, and deliver messages about the need for action to adults - as shown in a recent American study.

Museums are trusted as sources of reliable information and education, but they are also increasingly seen as places for discussion about contemporary issues and as sites for social action. This is particularly valued by younger visitors. In a 2017 survey by Museum Next USA, young people said they were more likely to visit a museum with displays about issues that were relevant to them, such as climate change.

Museums are ideally placed to help children and young people act in response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency. This could mean anything from encouraging families to use less plastic at home, to supporting a climate strike, and many things in between.

## How to get started

There are a range of considerations when planning a project with children and young people in response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

### 1. Think about your organisation's current position on climate change and involvement with social action.

- If your organisation is engaging with children and young people on climate and environment, are you also leading by example? What plans and policies does your organisation already have in place? What positive environmental action are you taking? The Julie's Bicycle website has a range of practical resources and a Museums' Environmental Framework to help develop environmental action.
- You might want to consider the environmental credentials of particular parts of your organisation, such as the café. The Horniman Museum and Gardens Café introduced a 'no single use plastics' policy last year.

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- Would your organisation consider publicly declaring their commitment to taking action to respond to the emergency by becoming part of Culture Declares Emergency? This could be important in communicating your values to the children and young people you want to work with.
- How far is your organisation prepared to be challenged by children and young people's ideas and views on climate change, and to support the positions they take? For example, there have been contrasting views on school strikes, and not all organisations will feel able to support children and young people taking time out of school. Think about how you can get support from across your organisation.

## 2. Collaborate with children and young people at all stages of the project

- Think about how children and young people are already involved in decision making and governance in your organisation. If you already have a youth panel or Young Trustees, involve them in developing your plans. If you don't, Kids in Museums has a guide to setting up a youth panel and the Roundhouse has a guide to involving young people in your governance. Ask these young people about what they would like to do to respond to the Climate and Ecological Emergency.
- Find your local Youth Climate Board or branch of the UK Student Climate network and talk about how you can collaborate with them.
- Get hands-on and creative. This can be the best way to help children and young people engage with complex issues.

## 3. Use the right language

- Think about how you talk or write about the Climate and Ecological Emergency with children and young people and to your audience more widely. The Climate Outreach website has several resources about talking and writing about climate change and its impacts.
- This could be a good topic to include in any consultation you do thinking about what different terms mean to young people and which works better for them.

## 4. Be aware of the wellbeing of children and young people involved in your projects

- Learning more about and discussing the Climate and Ecological Emergency may cause increased stress and anxiety for some children and young people. Some of the language and news stories can be frightening. There may also be children and young people who have connections to places worse affected than the UK by the Climate and Ecological Emergency.
  - Getting involved in a project and taking action that empowers them may help alleviate this stress, but you may want to signpost them to organisations such as Childline or The Mix if they are feeling overwhelmed, experiencing anxiety or wanting to talk at greater length. Both organisations offer emotional support for children and young people over the phone and online.
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## Ideas for enabling children and young people to take action

If you're stuck or want some guidance when trying to plan with your group of children and young people, here are our ideas to help them to take action.

### 1. Work with children, young people and families to plan a day of activities to support an existing campaign or event

- There are many existing environmental events and campaigns that your museum could support. Talk to children and young people about what interests them.
- The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education has a comprehensive calendar of dates to help you plan.
- The Horniman Museum and Gardens ran a family day to mark World Oceans Day in June 2019. This included a range of different family activities and encouraged participants to make pledges.
- Think about how you could link your collection to support an environmental campaign – for example, could you work with children and young people to write some alternative labels that highlight environmental issues or plan craft activities using waste materials?

### 2. Support youth activism

- This might not be for all organisations, but could you consider supporting the climate strikes? You can find out what's going on in your area through the UK Student Climate Network.
- This might include giving space to the young people involved, enabling them to take over a space in the museum or your social media to amplify their message. Why not take part in our Teen Digital Takeover?
- Kettle's Yard hosted a banner making workshop for climate strikers in Cambridge.
- You might find inspiration from Climate Museum UK's digital collection for activism, or any of the other ideas listed on their website.

### 3. Host a climate change debate

- Can you work with children and young people to organise a debate or discussion about the Climate and Ecological Emergency? Museums such as Vale and Downland in Oxfordshire host regular student debates with local schools.
- You might want to look at some of the 'Possible Culture' resources from Climate Museum UK to frame some of the thinking.

### 4. Collaborate on new events or exhibitions

- Can you work with a group of young people to create a display or event that highlights the impacts of the Climate and Ecological Emergency, or encourages your audience to take action to reduce their environmental impacts?
- The Youth Forum at National Museum Cardiff created an installation using plastic found on Welsh beaches to highlight the impact of plastic pollution in our oceans. They also created information to help the public reduce their plastic consumption.
- At Valence House, a group of local young people aged 16-25 created a temporary exhibition, also about plastic pollution.
- Manchester Museum hosted a wide range of events and discussions as part of their Climate Control exhibition.

## Top tips

- Involve children and young people at all stages of the planning process.
- Find out what's already happening in your local area and see how you can complement and support what children and young people are already doing.
- Start small. Your ideas may not be perfect initially, but taking some action will have positive benefits for the children and young people involved.
- Link up with other projects via social media to amplify your message.

## Organisations that can provide information advice and resources

- 350.org
- Climate Museum UK
- Climate Outreach
- Culture Declares Emergency
- Curating the Future: museums, communities and climate change
- Happy Museum
- Julie's Bicycle
- Kids in Museums

## A note about this resource

This resource has been produced in response to the growth of the youth climate strikes in the UK. The organisations that came together to produce this (Climate Museum UK, Happy Museum Project, Julie's Bicycle, and Kids in Museums) felt that museums could play a role in supporting children and young people's activism in response to the climate emergency.

As this is a fast-moving area, we would like your ideas and feedback as well as to hear about the climate activism already going on in your museum. Please fill in our online survey to give us your thoughts.

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