



# Notes from Thrive LDN’s Fifth Climate, Environment and Mental Health Action Forum

30<sup>th</sup> January 2025, 10am-12.30pm in-person at [The Phoenix Garden Community Building](#)

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## Welcome and updates

Ben (Project Officer, Thrive LDN) gave a brief overview of the purpose of the Forum and how we’ve reached this point:

- The Forum is a pan-London space to connect individuals and communities with multi-sector organisations to enable more effective, co-produced, and joined-up action on climate, nature, and mental health.
- We’ve had four (online) meetings so far, covering topics including networking, collaboration on projects, digital tools, and empowering communities to take climate action. We’ve had great engagement and enthusiasm from all of you, and useful feedback. We are looking forward to developing the Forum with & for members going forward.

Ben also mentioned Thrive LDN’s progress with partners on our bid for funding from the [National Lottery’s Climate Action Fund](#):

- He shared that we are in the process of developing our final, Stage 2 application for a funded partnership that envisions an environmentally sustainable London where everyone has equal opportunities for good mental wellbeing; we will try to create this by addressing climate and wellbeing together through a systems-thinking approach.

- If funded, this Forum and all its members would be able to help shape the partnership's direction and decisions. Ben said we'd keep the Forum updated on the progress of our bid.

## **Optional mindfulness activity**

Ben led an optional mindfulness exercise focused on mental health and climate change.

Participants were guided through breath awareness to ground themselves, followed by an invitation to acknowledge emotions related to climate issues. These feelings – whether worry, hope, or numbness – were normalised and validated. The exercise concluded with a visualisation of connection to the earth and collective resilience. Everyone was encouraged to release tension, embrace purpose, and carry this awareness into the meeting.

## **World café**

Katasi (Project Officer, Thrive LDN) facilitated an interactive 'World Café' session where participants discussed their work and interests related to mental health and climate change.

Participants engaged in rotating one-on-one conversations, finding a new partner for each of eight prompts. These prompts started with light, personal reflections (e.g., breakfast, feelings about the day) before moving into deeper discussions on climate change, mental health, community resilience, climate justice, project impact, and potential collaborations.

The session encouraged networking, idea-sharing, and deeper reflection on key issues, as well as getting to know each other in person.

## **Storytelling: from mental health to climate benefits**

We explored the connections between mental health and climate action through personal and local storytelling, with a focus on London. Using the 1-2-4-All method, participants first reflected individually on the mental health impacts of the climate crisis, then discussed in pairs and small groups, identifying London-specific themes. Insights were captured on post-its and grouped collectively to highlight key patterns, along with supporting facilitator notes

Some key themes emerged from this the discussions for this item, which are summarised below. Overall, the discussions highlighted the need for integrated approaches that address both the individual and systemic dimensions of the crisis, while also emphasising the importance of community, connection, and justice.

### **Feelings of powerlessness and guilt**

- There was a strong sense of frustration over people's inability to make consistently environmentally sustainable choices. People explained that this leads to feelings of guilt and conflict, particularly around consumption and lifestyle decisions.
- People also mentioned a feeling of powerlessness in the face of systemic issues and a sense that individual actions are insufficient to address the scale of the climate crisis.

## **Disconnection and the need for reconnection**

- People expressed feelings from disconnection from nature, from each other, and from systems of power.
- We heard a desire to reconnect with nature, and to foster a sense of community and collective action to combat feelings of isolation.

## **The importance of slowing down**

- Despite the urgency of the climate crisis, people highlighted the importance of slowing down and embracing a more mindful approach, rather than giving in to the pressure to always “do more and faster.”

## **Inequality and access to agency**

- Attendees raised concerns about inequalities in access to resources and information, and so on people’s ability to engage in climate action.
- The concept of agency was questioned, with discussions around who has the power to effect change and how to empower marginalised communities: “Who speaks? Who listens?”

## **The role of language and framing**

- People emphasised the importance of language in shaping perceptions of the climate crisis.
- We heard a desire to reframe narratives around scarcity and resilience to better promote engagement from and avoid discouraging action.

## **The interplay of individual and systemic change**

- Many people grappled with the tension between individual responsibility and the need for systemic change.
- There were calls to challenge the narrative that places the burden of addressing the climate crisis solely on individuals: “systemic burden co-opted as individual responsibility.”

## **Connecting climate change to lived experience:**

- We heard about the vital importance of connecting climate change to the lived experiences of communities.
- People explained that this includes understanding how climate change impacts daily life, health, and wellbeing, and incorporating the knowledge and wisdom of communities who are already experiencing the impacts of the climate crisis.

## **The need for climate justice**

- Searching questions were asked about climate justice, reflecting on who benefits from climate action and how to ensure that it addresses existing inequalities.
- Crucially, there were calls to move beyond superficial solutions and address the root causes of the climate crisis.

## The next chapter in the story: making lasting change

This item explored how communities can build skills and support for long-term climate and mental health action. Participants split into groups, which included those already involved in climate action and newcomers. People discussed their current resources and needs, and how groups and organisations could better collaborate. Ideas were recorded creatively on posters, followed by a whole-group feedback session to reflect on what people in the room are doing now with and for communities, and what's needed for lasting impact.

Some key themes emerged from this the discussions for this item, which are covered in a summary and analysis below.

### Current challenges and realities

- **Funding hurdles:** People repeatedly mentioned the difficulty of securing funding for community-led climate action. This covered:
  - **Chicken and egg problem:** Funders often want detailed proposals, but communities need funding to identify community needs and design projects that respond to these. As one attendee put it, *"Hard to get funding in to come up with the question [e.g., on what communities need]."*
  - **Reluctance to fund process:** Funders are more focused on tangible outputs than the relationship-building and co-design process, which are crucial for effective community engagement: *"funders being reluctant to support process rather than just outcomes."*
  - **Seed funding limitations:** Organisations struggle to sustain momentum on small seed grants, making it hard to achieve long-term impact. One note highlighted the need for *"platforming funding + partnerships."*
- **Co-design gaps:** While co-design was recognised as vital, people saw a current gap between rhetoric and reality. Local governments and other institutions may talk about co-design but often don't genuinely share power with communities. An attendee questioned, *"What does co-design look like?"*
- **Measuring impact:** People said that measuring the impact of community-led climate action is challenging, especially when it comes to capturing the softer outcomes of community engagement and empowerment. A key question raised was, *"What actually matters to people to measure?"*
- **Information overload/misinformation:** We heard that an abundance of (online) information on the climate (and mental health) crises, coupled with misinformation, makes it difficult for people to know where to focus their efforts and what actions to take. This concern was reflected in notes on *"Mis/disinformation impact"* and *"Education – where + how?"*

- **Need for connections:** Attendees noted that organisations and individuals working on climate, environment, and mental health action recognise the importance of collaboration and networking, but that building and maintaining these connections can be difficult. One key theme was *"contrasting sectors collaborating gives more innovative + stronger results – experts in different fields."*
- **Equity and inclusion:** There was a clear focus on the need for inclusivity, diversity, and representation in climate action work, with a note emphasizing *"Inclusivity + Diversity. Representation amongst all."*
- **Existing assets and initiatives:** Attendees' notes on posters highlighted existing assets and organisations, including [The Conservation Volunteers](#) network, [Greener and Cleaner's](#) upcoming open-source document on applying for funding as a community organisation, and initiatives like London Wildlife Trust's [Nature in Mind](#) project and local grassroots groups such as [Sustainable Thornton Health](#). A visual map of organisational connections was created, featuring other groups such as *"Culture Declares Emergency, Climate Museum UK, and the Women's Environmental Network."*

### What people want to see change

- **Flexible funding:** Attendees expressed a desire for funders who are willing to support the co-design process, relationship-building, and the evolving nature of community-led work.
- **Genuine co-design:** We heard that people want institutions to truly share power with communities and value their expertise. As one note questioned, *"How to fix the issue?"* referring to the lack of meaningful collaboration.
- **Clearer impact measurement:** Several people mentioned the need for better ways to measure and communicate the impact of community engagement, including the less tangible outcomes: *"Ensuring people + communities involved in work benefit + hear back about the impact."*
- **Improved information-sharing:** People want it to be easier to access reliable information about community-led climate action and understand what actions they can take. A key question was *"What can people actually do?"*
- **Stronger networks:** Facilitating connections and collaboration between organisations and individuals working on climate action was flagged as important. The idea of *"bringing together assets and organisations: resources + knowledge"* was a recurring theme.
- **Greater equity:** There was strong agreement that climate action work must be inclusive, diverse, and representative of the communities it seeks to serve and support. Notes also referenced *"gender and racial justice lens"* as crucial considerations.
- **Leveraging existing assets:** A common topic was the importance of building on the work of existing organisations and initiatives rather than reinventing the wheel. The need for *"connecting to policymakers"* was also raised.

- **Community benefit:** Everyone seemed to agree that communities involved in climate action work must directly benefit from it, and that this doesn't always happen currently.
- **Education and upskilling:** People want to provide education and training opportunities to empower communities to act independently. Some suggested practical approaches such as *"Fixing things tutorials"* to upskill communities on repairing broken items rather than having to buy new ones.
- **Safe spaces:** Many organisations want to create more safe and inclusive spaces for people to come together to discuss and work on climate, environment, and mental health action. Someone wrote that *"Safe spaces are key."*

**Collaboration, empowerment, and systems change** emerged as key themes linking current challenges to future aspirations. Strengthening partnerships was felt to be essential, with agreement that empowering communities to lead climate action is crucial for long-term impact.

Crucially, we heard that addressing systemic barriers, such as restrictive funding models and power imbalances, is required to enable sustained, community-driven solutions to the climate, nature, and mental health crises.

## Lunch & Learn

We heard brief (5-minute) presentations from some Forum members about their organisations' work:

Speakers & Key Highlights:

- Sacha Wright – [Force of Nature](#)
  - Force of Nature is an organisation dedicated to empowering young people to address the climate crisis through mindset transformation and actionable programs. Their key initiatives include:
    - Empowering youth: Providing workshops and training to help young individuals transform climate anxiety into proactive agency.
    - Supporting educators: Offering resources and training sessions to equip educators with the tools to address climate topics and support students effectively.
    - Challenging business norms: Facilitating intergenerational collaboration by training young people to advise business leaders, fostering innovative approaches to climate action.
    - Amplifying young voices: Platforming young changemakers and thought leaders on global stages to inspire and catalyse climate action.
  - Force of Nature aims to shift feelings of powerlessness into actionable change, fostering a generation equipped to tackle environmental challenges.

- Jess Newberry Le Vay – [Climate Cares](#)
  - Operates within Imperial College London's Institutes of Global Health Innovation and Climate Change and the Environment.
  - Studies the mental health impacts of climate change.
  - Generates research to inform policy and practice.
  - Creates resources and interventions to support mental wellbeing.
  - Collaborates to build resilience against climate-related distress.
  
- Tia Harrop – [Greater London Authority \(GLA\) Environment Unit](#) & [ClimateEd](#)
  - Social justice in accessing waterways – Currently, older retirees are the primary users, but efforts are needed to make access more inclusive. Tia will share her email for further engagement.
  - ClimateEd's work – Teaching climate literacy to children in schools from a young age. They are actively seeking funding, volunteers, and training support.
  
- Zoe Macalpine – [Climate Outreach](#) (see slides)
  - Changing the narrative of climate change – Ensuring climate communication reaches beyond traditional environmental groups.
  - Climate visuals & storytelling – Using research-backed strategies to engage diverse communities.
  - Britain Talks Climate – Encouraging community-trusted messengers to foster climate action.
  - Practical engagement work – Supporting communities in adopting air-source heat pumps and other sustainable solutions.
  - Policy engagement – Working with parliamentarians and policymakers on the upcoming government public engagement strategy.
  - All work is grounded in research to maximize impact.
  
- Chantelle Lindsay – [Nature in Mind](#) project, [London Wildlife Trust](#) (see slides)
  - Nature-based well-being groups at Walthamstow Wetlands, run by London Wildlife Trust & Newham CAMHS.
  - Supports neurodivergent 5-17-year-olds with mild to moderate mental health challenges.
  - Mix of forest school & therapy, improving stress, confidence, and social skills.

- Activities: Nature walks, conservation, mindfulness, art, foraging, and outdoor skills.
- Proven benefits: Reduced anxiety, better social interaction, and increased nature connection.
- Challenges: Funding, transport, and adolescent engagement.
- Project award-nominated for sustainability & green care.
- Zarina Ahmed – [Women's Environmental Network \(WEN\)](#)
  - New WEN strategy development – a two-year process that has enhanced collaboration but posed communication challenges; the process of developing the strategy was as important, or not more important, than [the finished strategy](#).