



# Spotlight

## Youth Climate Advocates: Climate Emergency Training March 2025



It is crucial that climate action engages young people, not only are they most at risk from the long-term consequences of environmental decline, but they're also a significant force for change. By equipping them with the knowledge and skills to drive sustainable solutions we can create informed leaders of the future who will champion the fight against climate change for years to come. The active involvement of young people brings fresh perspectives, builds momentum and invests in a climate resilient future.

This is why we created bespoke, [Carbon Literacy Project](#) (CLP)-accredited, [Climate Emergency Training](#), specifically for those aged 11-24, focusing on waste and consumption in the context of the Scottish Highlands. Young people who completed the training became our Youth Climate Advocates in their local communities and were encouraged to take action on sustainable consumption, supported by the Highland Community Waste Partnership. This provided an opportunity to go beyond other Climate Emergency Training by focusing on the link between consumption habits and Greenhouse Gas emissions.



Ciara from Ardgay was the first Youth Climate Advocate to become certified.

## Creating the course

Using the Carbon Literacy Project [criteria for accreditation](#), and previous experience from within [Keep Scotland Beautiful](#), we were able to create a course that included both local and global context, linked consumption habits to climate change, provided up to date information on current policy progress and encouraged achievable, impactful actions. We produced a course that was:

- Fully funded – free to all participants.
- Appropriate for ages 11-24 years.
- Delivered online across three, two-hour sessions.
- Also available as a short course.

The course was delivered in two age groups: 11-17 and 18+. Only small adaptations were made to the course content itself, but the facilitation style was adjusted to suit the specific needs of each group.

Other considerations during development included adhering to necessary safeguarding policies, particularly for participants under 18, ensuring our facilitator received sufficient training through the Carbon Literacy Project, and enabling participant access to the Moodle platform for online learning.

## Promotion & engagement

To reach our intended audience, especially those who were previously unengaged in climate action, we collaborated with both youth organisations and the HCWP partners to develop a targeted outreach strategy. We promoted the course to their networks and audiences through multiple channels including, regional press releases, social media campaigns, newsletters and local engagement events.

Initially, we opted to deliver sessions to over-18s via [Eventbrite](#), following the model of our other Climate Emergency Training (CET) courses that are open to the public. However, this approach proved less effective than anticipated, as it failed to generate significant individual signups. In contrast, working directly with existing groups, such as local youth organisations, was more successful in building interest.

## Impact

Over the course of the project, **we delivered 8 courses to 52 young people. 15 of these gained CLP accreditation**, pledging to take action in their communities.

This project created a brand-new CET course accredited by CLP, a CLP trained facilitator, highlighted links between consumption and GHG emissions, linked young people to further Highland based opportunities, and it also gave us an opportunity to gauge the attitudes and perspectives of this age group first-hand.

Here's what some of our participants had to say about the experience:

"Since completing my training, I feel so much better informed about the climate emergency and the steps that we, as a society, need to take to achieve Net-Zero. As individuals we all have a responsibility to reduce our carbon emissions in our personal lives, communities and workplaces. The training has encouraged me to make my own lifestyle changes, such as growing my own vegetables in my second-hand greenhouse!" – **Ciara, Ardgay**

"As lead lecturer for "Introduction to Childhood Practice" at SCQF Level 5 I am always looking to make learning up to date and relevant. The Youth Climate Advocate training course was able to provide evidence towards the unit 'Contributing to Sustainability in the Community' and students were able to see connections to sustainability across their studies. It led to interesting discussions which we could use as a platform for further learning, while exploring sustainability in other class themes like play." - **Alastair Davidson, UHI**

"I found the lessons to be quite informative and useful in regard to learning how a circular economy functions."

"I'm a lot more aware of actions like changes in recycling and notice when it's not been done."

"I walk more to college and now that I can drive, I make sure that I car share, giving my friends a lift too."

"I haven't bought a lot in the last year, not as much as I would have previously – clothing etc."

- UHI students

## Learning

Engaging this age group is notoriously difficult, especially when individuals are out of mainstream education. In addition to this we have found that traditional communications channels have limited impact, and that environmental anxiety has shifted to fatigue and apathy. There are also unique challenges associated with working in the Highlands including low-population density, geographical diversity (Inverness vs Thurso) and fewer opportunities for young people overall.

In developing and delivering this course, we learned a lot about how to effectively engage young people around climate change. Here are some of our key learnings:

### Engagement partners

Engagement with the course was most successful when done via existing learner groups, e.g. University of Highlands & Islands, High Life Highland youth groups and local afterschool clubs. In some cases, this also allowed us to reach young people who may not have otherwise engaged with climate change. However, this also presented its own challenges. It's vital that facilitators working with such groups have the skills and training to best meet the needs and abilities of diverse groups or simply overcome a lack of interest.

Attempts to engage young people to sign up directly did not have high uptake, potentially due to a combination of online learning fatigue, as well as, not using the most relevant channels for promotion. Initial plans to collaborate with key youth organisations such as the [High Life Highland Leadership Programme](#) and [Highland Youth Parliament](#), did not prove possible, due to a lack of alignment with programme requirements e.g. volunteer hours. Additional incentives, monetary or experiential, may have also made the course more appealing to young people. This is worth addressing via programme design going forward.

### Communications

Traditional communication channels, such as newsletters, posters, or websites, are often ineffective at reaching a youth audience, as this no longer how young people typically consume information. Even some social media platforms may fail to engage them if the content is not crafted in a way that resonates with their interests and values. Crucially, the messenger can be just as important as the message; content delivered by trusted influencers or peers who align with their identity and interests is far more likely to capture attention and inspire action. Without leveraging the right platforms, formats, and voices, efforts to engage a youth audience risk being overlooked amidst the constant stream of competing content.

## Attitudes

We found that for many young people, the initial wave of climate anxiety has evolved into fatigue, apathy, and even distrust. Constant exposure to the overwhelming scale of the climate crisis, and limited action from global leaders, has left many feeling powerless. This sense of despair can lead to disengagement, where young people stop believing their actions can make a difference and distrust the motives of organisations advocating for change. It is essential that climate action is framed as achievable and impactful to rekindle hope and motivation. Furthermore, we need to understand where misinformation is coming from and meet their suspicions head-on.

## Content

As part of the HCWP the course needed to draw clear links between consumption habits and climate change, address both global and local climate contexts, remain optimistic and action-driven, whilst meeting the Carbon Literacy Project (CLP) criteria and appealing to a youth audience. Balancing these multiple requirements was demanding for the facilitator and learners, focusing in the course on fewer goals could have allowed it to be more in-depth and impactful. Delivering the course over three years also meant some of the content required regular updates to maintain its relevance. This ongoing process was essential to the course's credibility and impact, but it also added complexity to its development and delivery.



## Looking Ahead

Going forward, we hope that our YCAs will continue to build on the knowledge and experience gained through this programme to continue to take action on climate change in their communities and beyond.

To that end we joined forces with the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub's new, youth-led Youth Climate Network, which aims to provide "opportunities for action, giving young people the skillset and confidence to enter careers in sustainability" to engaged and support our YCAs going forward

Meanwhile, Keep Scotland Beautiful will build on the Youth Climate Advocates programme to expand our Climate Emergency Training offering across Scotland.

**See also:** [www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/our-training/](http://www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/our-training/)

### **The Highland Community Waste Partnership (2022-2025)**

Funded by The National Lottery Climate Action Fund, and coordinated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP) brought together eight community groups in the Highlands to reduce waste and promote more sustainable consumption.

**Learn more here:** [www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste/](http://www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste/)