

Context for the environment focus in 2019

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) sets out an approach to protecting and enhancing the environment for the next generation. An important aspect of this approach is connecting people with the environment to improve their health and wellbeing. This includes encouraging more people to spend time in natural spaces and increasing action to improve the environment from all sectors of society.

The #iwill campaign will be focussing on youth social action for the environment during 2019 to coincide with Government's plans to make 2019 a "Year of Green Action" – this will be through our #iwill4nature campaign, developed alongside young people. Through partner organisations that have pledged to the campaign, will work to drive up participation by young people in high quality youth social action that has a double benefit - both to the individuals involved, and to the environment.

Making the case for environmental social action

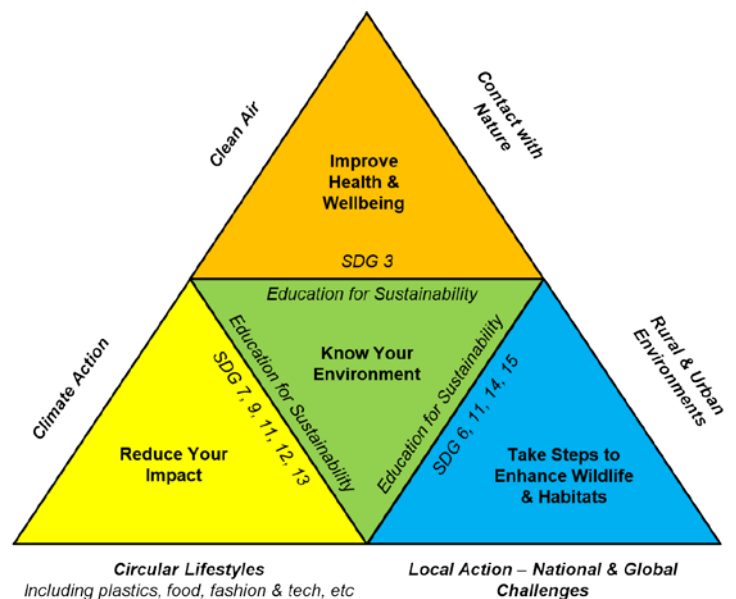
There are many benefits to involving young people in environmental youth social action. A study by the Forestry Commission found these to include increased well-being (physical, social and mental) spending more time outdoors, and gaining satisfaction from practical environmental activities. Moreover, resources published by the University of Essex for The Wildlife Trusts¹ looked at the benefits of volunteering in natural environments and it showed significant mental health benefits of environmental social action.

From the 2017 NYSA survey we know that 44% of young people who have not been involved in social action within the last year, would be interested in addressing environmental issues (including animal protection). This gives us a great opportunity to build on the interests and concerns of young people to help protect and improve the environment.

The #iwill campaign's strategy for the 2019 Environment themed year

The campaign is seeking to sustainably increase the number of young people, especially those from disadvantaged communities, taking part in environmental youth social action. As part of this, we want key organisations to understand the vital role that young people can play in supporting and improving the environment and subsequently to embed youth social action into their work and long-term strategies.

The campaign is connecting key cross-sector organisations through its new Environment Steering Group. This group of 25 environment and youth partners have developed an action plan centred on four themes which provide potential hooks for engaging young people in environmental social action (diagram on right).



¹ <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-report-links-volunteering-nature-better-mental-health>



#iwill campaign Environment Narrative

For each theme there are suggested topics, with *Education for Sustainability* a foundation topic across all themes. The themes and topics are not mutually exclusive and the language is still to be tested to ensure it resonates effectively with young people.

Theme 1: Improving the health and wellbeing of young people through connecting them with the environment

A recent study by Defra and the University of Exeter Medical School showed reasonably strong evidence that exposure to natural environments is good for our mental health and wellbeing, with reductions in stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. However, we also know that, in a typical 12 month period, 12% of children do not spend any time in the natural environment, and that children from lower socio-economic groups visit natural environments less than their counterparts with higher socio-economic capital². However, research indicates young people from the least affluent communities participate significantly less than their more affluent peers. By integrating environmental social action into the day-to-day lives of all young people, regardless of their backgrounds, we could see a significant improvement in their wellbeing and life chances.

Theme 2: Know your environment

Social action can create opportunities for young people to lead change, for example as 'environment champions'. By raising awareness amongst young people about key environmental issues, and by empowering them to find solutions to tackle them, we can improve the environmental awareness of young people and also that of their networks (peers, family etc).

Theme 3: Reduce your impact

We use more ecological resources and services than nature can regenerate. A circular economy is one that decreases single use and disposable products, and helps reduce the environmental impacts of our production and consumption in both the UK and abroad. This would not only support the issue of plastics, but improve resource efficiency as a whole and feed into the solutions for tackling air pollution. Young people are already getting involved in practical clean-up efforts, and also showing how their voice and leadership can influence consumer behaviour, businesses and Government Policy. We want to increase the opportunities available to young people to address these issues and to be actively involved, such as through increased recycling and influencing the behaviour of their peers and adults.

Theme 4: Take steps to enhance wildlife and habitats

It is estimated that we are currently losing species at a speed that is between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than the natural extinction rate. This issue affects us all and reduced biodiversity means millions of people face a future where food supplies are more vulnerable to pests and disease. Research shows that many young people are keen to help protect animals and that this issue could help to engage those not already involved in social action.

What can you do to be involved in #iwill4nature?

1. Join the #iwill campaign by **making a pledge**
2. **Creating new, good quality opportunities** for young people
3. Finding ways to **involve young people in the leadership** of your organisation
4. **Providing and sharing case studies**
5. Help to build momentum around our **key 'heartbeat' moments**

To get involved join our online group to be kept up-to-date - <http://bit.ly/iwill4naturebasecamp>

² Maxwell, S & Lovell, R. (2017) Evidence Statement