



Natural Change psychology and sustainability

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Executive Summary /

The Natural Change Project was developed by WWF Scotland as a new and innovative response to the challenge of sustainability and to the growing evidence that current environmental campaigns are not resulting in the depth of behaviour change necessary to address this challenge. The project drew together seven diverse individuals from the business, charitable, arts, public, health and education sectors in Scotland. All were selected on the basis of being excellent communicators who were influential in their sector, but not particularly environmentally aware. The purpose of the project was to encourage this group to think deeply about sustainability, to communicate through their social and professional networks and to share the changes in their thoughts and attitudes more widely through the forum of internet blogging.

The approach was based on a series of residential workshops, which were held in natural environments and used eco-psychological activities. It was designed to engage the participants at the level of experience, values and identity, rather than the knowledge and evidence-based approaches commonly used to communicate about sustainability issues. As an innovative communications and behaviour change project working with the psychology of sustainability, Natural Change was also intended to provide an insight into the process of how individuals change.

An Action Research approach was chosen as the most appropriate method of gathering data and drawing conclusions from this project. Action Research gathers data through three tiers of evidence, interlacing personal experiences, group experiences and experiences of the wider world. The participants played a central role in the research process, asking and answering questions such as “What did I experience?”, “What did we experience?” and “What conclusions can we draw from this?”. In light of this, this report draws heavily on records made of the group discussions that took place during the workshops and on the content of participants’ blogs. The conclusions are drawn from what participants report they have gained, and the actions and changes which have occurred in their lives. The process as a whole and the questions and insights it provokes are also considered.

Evidence from participants’ testimony and discussions during the workshops shows the Natural Change approach to have been extremely effective among the participants in stimulating deep thinking about sustainability and about their own lives. The importance of a community of interest, providing support for personal journeys and critical reflection on sustainability was also clearly evident. This project has been extremely successful in causing the participants to communicate with their social and professional networks and a wider audience about these issues. What is remarkable is the honesty with which participants reported their, sometimes deeply personal, experience of the project, both in discussion and importantly in their blogs, touching others in a way that a mass-marketing campaign simply could not.

What has also been clearly emphasised by this project is that human beings are complex and their behaviour is shaped by many factors including the physical and social environments, relationships and the events they experience. This project has demonstrated that there is no quick and simple method of changing behaviour. However, having been part of the Natural Change Project, all the participants have expressed a clear desire to take actions that go beyond the ‘quick and painless’ changes advocated by many environmental campaigns. It is also clear that the participants are now motivated to take practical action to realise this desire both in their personal and professional lives. It must be accepted that the pace of change is slow and the longer term impact of the Natural Change Project will take time to emerge.

This project has created a replicable approach to building commitment to sustainability and it is likely to provide valuable approaches to behaviour change and environmental communications strategies in the future. The full blogs from the participants and facilitators on the Natural Change Project can be found online at www.naturalchange.org.uk

Welcome To Natural Change /

The beach glitters with mica schist in the pre-dawn glow. Waves from the Sound of Sleat lap the shore, Rum and Skye are starting to be etched out of the darkness on the western horizon. The group members are fanning out and walking away, in silence. Each has stepped through a threshold, a boundary marking their intention to spend from dawn to dusk alone in the landscape, taking the time to question themselves and their lives. Each person is alone, but shares a common purpose with the group. A close bond is being formed with wild natural places and with each other. They will bring a rare level of honesty and openness on their return to share their experiences. But for now they are on their own as dawn breaks in Knoydart.

This is the Natural Change Project—a process of personal transformation and reflection through nature-based workshops, disseminated through a unique website blog, which invites the wider world to experience the personal journeys of the participants. The participants have been invited to join the project as influential communicators from a variety of professions including education, health, arts, landscape design, student and charitable organisations. The group is going out on a twelve hour solitary encounter with nature during the first workshop on the Knoydart peninsula in the West Highlands, for most this 'solo' will be one of the most powerful experiences of the project—an anchor for the reflections and realisations which follow.

The Natural Change Project is a new and innovative response to the environmental and cultural pressures we face. It is a response to the growing evidence that while current environmental campaigns have been successful in raising awareness and concern about environmental issues, they have not resulted in the depth of behaviour change necessary to address these issues. The project was also designed to enable communication with new audiences not considered to be overtly 'green'.

The research aspect of the project was intended to provide an insight into the process of how individuals change in response to this new form of communication about environmental and sustainability issues. The project engaged the participants at the level of experience, values and identity rather than knowledge. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences with others, both within the newly formed community of the group, and through the open-access forum of blogging, with a view to stimulating deeper changes in personal and public responses to sustainability. As one participant said "The project created the space to have the conversations I always dreamed of having". This report details the process and the changes which occurred throughout the project.

Why Natural Change /

The current state of the global environment is not a comforting picture. Impoverishment of ecosystems and cultures continues.^{II} The self-stabilising and seemingly rational ‘invisible hand’ that governs global markets has evaporated into thin air and climate change clouds any picture of a healthy future.^{III} Despite overall growth in material prosperity in our corner of the world, issues of mental and physical well-being are increasingly urgent and are being linked to the health of nature.^{IV}

It is well recognised that a large-scale change in public and private behaviours is required.^V While ‘pro-environmental behaviour change’ has been on governmental and non-governmental organisation agendas for several years, there is often no understanding of the connections between the economic and the environmental, or the psychological and the physical dimensions of the problem. Both the terms ‘climate change’ and ‘sustainability’ risk being so overused and loaded with injunctions that they could do more harm than good. Furthermore, recent WWF research has shown that ‘selling’ the changes that need to be made for a healthy future to the general public, through lifestyle choices and small easy steps, is insufficient, ineffective and may even be counter-productive.^{VI}

Typical mainstream approaches to persuading people to make changes in their lives tend to focus on mass marketing campaigns to insulate lofts, buy energy saving bulbs, or change modes of transport. All these things need to happen. However, it isn't clear that an external exhortation, no matter how well communicated, will do the job of motivating sustained and sustaining lifestyle choices. Recent research shows that providing information on the state of the planet and expecting people to respond consistently with 'pro-environmental behaviour' is based on flawed logic.^{vii} We are complex beings with values, attitudes, identities and emotions and while these are not always internally consistent, we will act when all these facets are appealed to.^{viii} This further implies that campaigns focusing on practical changes without revealing the deeper reasons why people should adopt these practices are less effective. What is more, these campaigns will be more successful if they suggest positive reasons for change: increased well-being, a healthier sense of self, more cohesive community, rather than impositions on our lives to prevent future disaster.

An exploration of what 'sustainability' means helps place change in a broader and more positive light. An ecological (or systems) viewpoint – seeing the relationships between things and events – shows that economic, social, psychological and environmental issues are linked.^{ix} At the centre of this approach is the understanding that the ultimate basis of economics is ecology, and that people cannot be healthy on a sick planet. Thus a change in our 'frame of mind' or our 'frame of being' is at the heart of movement towards healthier people and planet, and 'joins the dots' between sets of issues creating widespread effects.^x Seeing sustainability as the opportunity to be healthier psychologically and physically, and living in a community which has long-term viability, presents a view which encourages commitment. These considerations build up a picture that demands a radically different approach towards change. Natural Change is one model based on these insights, and has its roots in various educational and therapeutic methodologies:

Ecopsychology /

This growing area of theory and practice holds that, as environments become degraded, the ways of living that cause this destruction inflict parallel damage on the psyche. The practice that stems from this understanding involves a mixture of therapeutic and environmental activities aimed at developing emotional connections with the environment, increased environmental activism, and a healthy 'ecological self.'^{xi}

Outdoor Learning /

The cutting edge of this established educational approach involves time spent in the outdoors, exploring human-nature relationships and reflecting on the quality of these relationships in our everyday lives. It is a deeply experiential approach in which direct contact with environments and places is a fundamental motivator for change.^{xii}

Action Research /

Both a model for learning and for research, Action Research is participative: the group determines the content of the process and the ways in which it is recorded. At the heart of Action Research is the concern with practical action. This way of working tends to create groups with a common issue which they want to do something about. The group records its learning about the issue and about its actions.^{xiii}

A combination of these approaches is used in the Natural Change Project. There are further elements in the mix: considerable research suggests that 'significant life experiences' can trigger personal transformation towards ecological awareness. These can include outdoor experiences^{xiv} described as 'peak' or 'flow,' or sometimes as 'spiritual'.^{xv} Also involved here is a style of learning which engages the whole group in working towards practical outcomes, an ecological understanding of the problem of sustainability, and a method of differentiating between healthy and unhealthy ways of satisfying our needs.^{xvi}

It was decided that for the communications strategy to be most effective in changing people at a deep level, and for it to have a wide reach, the project would work with a small group of people who had influence—socially, culturally and professionally. The communications approach was based on professional and social, formal and informal communication networks. Traditional mass communication in the form of newspapers, posters, advertising etc were rejected in favour of personally describing the experience of the project via the website blogs, informal social interactions, articles in in-house publications, giving talks at conferences, emailing personal and professional contacts and using social network sites such as Facebook.

This approach is open access—participants personally and individually describe their experiences and choose the starting points for the network of people who follow the blogs. The blogs provide the chance to write about and explore the workshop experiences in a creative way, to describe how these experiences affect life away from the workshops, and to critically and openly examine the personal dimensions of change. This process is the key element which provides a bridge between personal change and the introduction of values, identity and spirit into the wider arena of sustainability. It is this combination of eco-psychological activities in the outdoors, action research and communications which sets Natural Change apart as a first.^{xvii}

The Project /

Natural Change consisted of three residential workshops—the first for five days in Knoydart, a beautiful and inaccessible peninsula in the West Highlands, the second for three days in Glen Tilt, part of the Blair Atholl Estate in Perthshire, the last just two days outside Stirling overlooking the North Third reservoir. The group met initially in Edinburgh in September 2008 for a day, getting to know each other and the plan for the project. The workshops were then distributed through the autumn and winter of 2008 into the spring of 2009 with a final evaluation day back in Edinburgh in March 2009.

The Team / Bringing facilitation, therapeutic, communications and research elements to the project, the Natural Change Team was very diverse.

The Participants / The ‘Natural Changers’ were chosen from the business, charitable, arts, public, health and education sectors in Scotland.^{xviii} They were selected on the basis of their being influential in their sector (and in future roles), excellent communicators and not particularly environmentally aware. One of the primary differences between this project and the few ‘similar’ courses that exist is that participants were invited and not self-selecting. The result, and one of the strengths of the project, was that it was not ‘preaching to the converted.’

The Team /

1 / Dave Key / Facilitator
Dave, founder of Footprint Consulting, designed and ran the workshops. He 'held' the space in which activities and reflections occurred, briefing and guiding the groups through the process.

2 / Jules Weston / Communications and Project Management
Jules, from WWF Scotland, created and developed the idea of the Natural Change Project and brought it to fruition. Managing the blogs and website, Jules dealt with all aspects of the communications and Project Management.

3 / Sam Harrison / Participant Researcher
Sam, director of Open Ground, was the participant researcher in Natural Change. His role was to be part of the group and record his own and the group's impressions and experiences, creating this report.

4 / Margaret Kerr / Psychotherapist
Margaret provided support both for the team and participants. Her presence was fundamental to create a safe space and provide emotional safety for what was sometimes a very personal process.

5 / Amie Fulton / Cook
Due to the intensity and busy nature of the workshops, Amie's role was essential. She allowed the group to make the most of their time in the outdoors, providing fantastic meals which facilitated the social side of the project.

The Participants /

6 / Emma Little / Learning and Development Officer / NHS Health Scotland
From Edinburgh, Emma runs development programmes ranging from leadership to promotion of physical activity. She says she enjoys change (a bit too much!).

7 / Louise Macdonald / Chief Executive, Young Scot / Chair of RSA in Scotland
Louise started out as a journalist before her conscience led her towards communications and working for voluntary organisations, especially with young people.

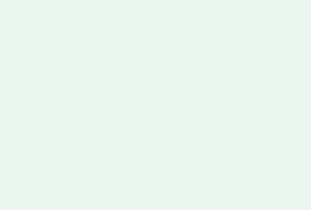
8 / Sarah Munro / Artistic Manager / Tramway Theatre
For the last 10 years Sarah has been the artistic director of a number of arts projects, recently taking up her role as the first head of Glasgow's international arts centre, Tramway.

9 / Roseleen Shanley / Principal Teacher / Bankhead Academy
Roseleen is committed to nurturing the involvement of young people in environmental and citizenship projects, and is often overwhelmed by their enthusiasm.

10 / Gurjit Singh / President / NUS Scotland
Gurjit attended Strathclyde University and was elected president of Strathclyde Student Union before becoming president of NUS Scotland. He lobbies on green and access issues.

11 / Gavin McLellan / Head of Christian Aid Scotland
Gavin grew up in Renfrewshire and started out in the commercial sector before pursuing his passions in global justice campaigning.

12 / Emily Peel Yates / Senior Landscape / Architect Halcrow
Emily has worked as far afield as Russia and the Isle of Man, working closely with communities at grassroots level from design through to completion.



Research Methods

A key part of the Natural Change Project was engaging a participant researcher to record the process, and to ask whether and how it worked. An Action Research approach was chosen as it was felt to provide the most suitable structure for recording the participative group processes in the Natural Change Project. At its heart Action Research is based on a cycle of taking action, recording what happened, reflecting on why it happened, drawing lessons on what would be done differently next time, deciding on future action that incorporates the 'lessons learned' and beginning the cycle again.^{xix}

One of the distinguishing features of Action Research is that it is research by the participants rather than on the participants—the role of the participant researcher being to collate and present the data and conclusions of the group rather than to generate the data and draw conclusions as an outside observer. The Action Research gathered data through three tiers of evidence interlacing personal experiences (recorded in personal journals) group experiences (recorded by the researcher and scrutinised by the group) and participants' experiences of the wider world (recorded in blogs and workshop discussions). Sometimes these are referred to as first, second and third person research. The participants played a central role in the research process, asking and answering questions around; "What did I experience?", "What did we experience?", "What conclusions can we draw from this?".

In light of this, the report draws heavily on records made of the group discussion that took place during the workshop and on the content of participants' blogs. The conclusions are drawn from what participants report they have gained, and the actions and changes which have occurred in their lives. The process as a whole and the questions and insights it provokes are also considered.

What Does This Mean?

Consideration of the wider impact of the process—what new understanding do our experiences imply?

What Are We Doing?

New Actions / Values / Identities
Through the workshops or at home—
modelling sustainable values and behaviour?

Action

Understanding

Reflection

What Has Happened?

Reflection during workshops or at home—
have ideas of self and world changed?

Reflection: Process and Participant Experiences /

We are in the hills above Blair Atholl, snow is lying on the ground, the River Tilt roars down the glen. Walking out to our shelter in the wood with glossy magazines in hand, some Natural Change participants are looking around them quietly—some are animated and chatting. What might someone think if they stumbled across us now: what are these people doing in the hills, in deep discussion, no backpacks on their backs, not trying to get anywhere? And would they see that we are not quite equipped like the hillwalkers and hunters who frequent the glen—the boots are new, there are bright colours among our scarves and hats, and then there are the magazines...

Facilitation /

The group is about to look at the way in which advertising shapes messages and understandings of our culture and lives—hence the magazines. The Natural Change Project presents a new way of working, which inspires revision of some of the ways in which we see change for sustainability. The facilitation techniques and style were developed through long experience by Dave Key. This approach is characterised by the understanding that psychological processes can lead to wider change. The process of 'framing'—or how activities are set-up—can be as important as the content itself, and a considerable amount of time was spent by the facilitators preparing for the sessions, and deciding what to put in and, of equal importance, what to leave out. The focus was on transformation through an open, honest style of facilitation: Dave asserts that "to achieve long-term, deep-seated change, facilitators need to work with personal and cultural psychology." Examples of some of the exercises that made up the Natural Change process are given opposite.

Activity/

Introductions/ Choose a picture (from a range of pictures of natural places and human situations) which calls to you and introduce yourself and your calling to the group

The Check-In/ Relate what you have been doing and how you are feeling prior to starting the workshop or activity

Mandala Mapping/ Explore the area and find objects which attract you, come back and create a circular 'map' of the area

Co-counselling/ In groups of three, rotate through roles of speaker, listener and observer. Each speaker has some time to speak about a chosen topic. Reflect on the roles as a group

Slow Walk/ Walk through the landscape, slowing down, and increasingly become aware of the all the sights, sounds and smells around you

Identity Mapping who we are/ Draw a diagram (not an illustration) of yourself

Goldfish Bowl/ Three or four chairs are placed in the middle of the rest of the group, a discussion occurs between the speakers on the chairs who can leave or join when there is space. If you want to speak you must go into the 'goldfish bowl'

Ecology of a Cup of Coffee/ Explore all the different elements, substances and processes which go into a cup of coffee

Mirroring/ With a partner, investigate an area of the environment until one place calls to you, describe it to your partner, swap

Meta-narratives/ Examine a variety of magazine adverts and discern their content and their underlying message

Dystopia/ Utopia/ Draw two pictures of a familiar place as they might be in the best and worst of possible future environmental scenarios

Rationale/

Moving the group towards seeing emotional connections with places and people rather than rational, technological or political connections

Allows people to ground themselves in where they are and what they are about to do, and creates a sense of community

Exploring different ways of seeing and representing places, and creating a shared picture

Provides the opportunity to speak without interruption, listen attentively, or observe this process. Develops a deeper level of communication and strengthens trust and openness in the group

Enlivening all the senses and taking the time to notice elements of the environment. Developing a different way of being in the outdoors

Looking at the different parts of ourselves, our different personae, and how this fits into understandings of the world

Provides the chance for a group discussion on a manageable scale in which a large group can participate—not everyone need speak, but everyone has participated

As above, developing an understanding of the interdependence of phenomena

To hone sensual and emotional engagement with the landscape, and find ways of expressing this

To re-evaluate everyday messages with regard to dominant understandings of how people are supposed to act and be

To develop a contextualised understanding of the process and possibilities of change

The Solo/

The 'solo' was the pivotal experience in the workshops, with a dawn till dusk experience at Knoydart and shorter solos during the subsequent workshops. Developed from an ancient and multi-cultural history^{xx} it involves a silent journey alone into the landscape, finding 'your place' and staying there for an extended period of time. The time spent alone and reflecting can be very powerful and requires sensitive facilitation to allow the participants to tell their stories and rejoin 'normal' time. During the Natural Change Project, extensive time was given for personal stories to be told, group and individual support was provided, and the content of the stories remained confidential: no research notes were taken during these sessions.

Group responses to the project /

Resistance /

An inevitable part of any group's negotiation of meanings and relationships is 'resistance' to the process. This is part of testing new roles, developing an understanding of where participants fit in the process and challenging power structures.^{xxi} Initial resistance to the approach and activities in Knoydart was strong and featured in participants' reflections in the workshops and blogs—this was important in challenging, understanding and placing themselves in the Natural Change Approach. The group soon developed a cohesive structure, with various different roles and with a degree of openness which allowed continued positive, but challenging, questioning throughout the project.

Nature /

This played a crucial role in the experience, and some of the urban-based participants' approaches to, and comfort levels in, the outdoors changed radically through the project. Initial focus for some was on their new purchases of boots and waterproofs, and the issues of how to cope outside. Another starting point for members of the group in their relationship with nature was the desire to get to the top of mountains, or across rivers to other places. These technical, consumer and combative approaches to nature soon gave way to a more reflective and symbolic understanding. This deepening relationship featured strongly when participants reflected on their experiences after the first workshop, for example:

"I imagined cutting the tree down and counting its rings. Its thickness suggested several decades, I fancied it, like me, being about 40. How had our lives compared? What seasons, weather, colours had it seen pass? How many birds had visited and taken rest in its branches? Straining towards sunlight, pushing roots in tight gaps for nourishing soil, scattering seeds? Whose life was the more life affirming?"

Gavin

Place /

The group's understanding of nature was rarely abstract or generalised, each different place visited had its own character, history and features which the group keenly discussed. This is expressed eloquently by Louise who writes that the second workshop had raised various questions: *"About a sense of place, and what does that mean; to the tensions between us imposing ourselves on the land and the land imposing on us; on tumult versus serenity and calm. That last one has come from the amazingly powerful river—the Tilt—which is flowing alongside us. It's this incredible mass of energy and power, in full spate and the sound of it is almost like white noise. In places it seems to bubble up, rather than flow, and we've all been drawn to it in different ways."* Louise

This theme of 'place' has been important to participants in various ways: one of which is the role of places 'away from it all'. The benefits of going away to 'wilderness' were clear, but is it sustainable to travel so far?

"My boyfriend and I took a trip up to Aberdeenshire the other weekend... But I kept on feeling guilty because we'd driven up there. What we learn from nature is key to the future of the human race, but being in nature is detrimental to the future of the human race—vicious circle—no?" Emma

This problem was resolved through acknowledging the privilege of being able to go to these places and have a transformational experience, but the importance of bringing something back to everyday life:

"I'm more aware—it's like the volume has been turned down on some things and turned up on others. Trees will never just be trees again; I notice the day every day and hear the birds singing. I'm tuned into the beauty and interconnectedness of wildness—even in the middle of the city." Louise

For many of the participants the way they brought wilderness into their everyday lives was through walks, and the re-enlivening of their senses:

"I have discovered a row of rowan trees behind my house, bordering the road, and I needed to go to the last wilderness of Scotland to notice them. I've lived a decade in ignorance of the natural world around me." Gavin

Language /

However, experiences such as these are not easy to express:

"The language thing is still my big issue—trying to explain what I've been doing to people has been tough, no getting away from it." Louise

As the project developed, participants were challenged to answer the question "What is Natural Change?" for themselves in different ways:

"... having just finished my second 'solo' experience I'm finding it difficult to find the words to describe it." Emma

This struggle to communicate and to find appropriate language manifested in different ways, some people blogged about it—some people didn't blog as much. Another factor which added to the difficulties of expression was the nature of the long process, in the middle of which it was not always clear to participants what the whole thing meant:

"This needs to be an honest process. This is not easy stuff to get into words. I am not used to presenting my chaotic personal thought process through the world wide web." Sarah

There is no simple method with which to communicate the essence of such an experience to someone who hasn't had it—of course writers, poets and artists have been trying to do this for centuries.

Home /

The difficulties the participants in Natural Change had when talking about what happened when out in nature were thrown into strong relief by the transition of returning home.^{xxii} In different ways, all the participants felt the difficulty of 're-entry' into home life:

"I still feel the experience of that first weekend so strongly. I've not lost it, despite the 'blankets' of daily life—but it does feel, if not diminished, then not powerful enough, on its own, to change things..." Louise

Returning home, and more importantly to work, put things into a new perspective for many of the participants:

"This time together is so out of the norm of rushing around, deadlines, targets, outputs, relationships, responsibilities. It is such a privilege to have been given permission to slow down and reflect but it's a big mental shift." Emily

The juxtaposition of work and workshop, showed how personally unsustainable some elements of modern life are:

"I went from a fabulous weekend of being wonderfully nurtured both physically and mentally within a stunning peaceful and safe environment back into my real life where I feel so much more vulnerable." Emily

Psyche /

These elements create personal psychological space and point to the need for personal change; the participants bravely explored the relationship between the health of our psyches and the planet:

"This shift in big stuff, global change that's been going on over the last five weeks has been kind of paralleled for me on a very personal level. Alone all day I kicked ass out of some stuff that had been bothering me for a long time. I found a place to confront grief; that place gave me back a deep sense of connection." Sarah

It is this element of personal healing, a strong undercurrent in the Natural Change Project, which is often left silent in discussions of sustainability. During the workshops a great deal of time—with supported and structured opportunities—was provided to explore this, and while the details are obviously confidential, the testimonies above reveal the importance of the psychological elements of sustainability:

"Being honest to yourself is like opening up the floodgates and letting go of all the joys and woes that live deep inside. Bring them out and deal with them, be honest and feel in control." Gurjit



















Understandings: new perspectives and insights/

A newness has been thrown into the now, that will affect almost everything from this point. I find that a little bit exciting. We may be in uncharted water but that doesn't mean we're going down. Who knows where we could go if there was enough will for something better?

—Sarah

Human Sustainability /

The participants' reflections on their deeply personal experiences, illustrated above, developed into an understanding of the emotional and psychological dimension of sustainability^{xxiii} :

"...What the people who have responded to these blogs have shown, it is the emotional side of things which touches them, which moves them: comments on personal testimony, on pictures, on poetry, are clear enough signs of that. Is that the path to natural change?" Louise

This understanding of the deeper dimensions of change is well put by Roseleen:

"By drawing from this spiritual base peoples affinity and passion for change is driven more directly than by more conventional ways such as 'telling people how best to approach change'."

The use of the word 'spiritual' is interesting here, and some other participants found themselves expressing similar ideas:

"All of us on the project have had powerful spiritual experiences that have stretched and taken us beyond ourselves. The beginnings of inner change that needs released to lead into personal action and societal change." Gavin

Connections /

The combination of personal experiences and discussions on the wider issues of culture and environment, gave participants an understanding of the interconnections between issues: the flows of meaning and matter which connect us into the wider world. This contributed to the fundamental importance of the idea of 'connection' for the group:

"If people just simply stopped thinking on an individualistic level and started to see more connectedness to everything around them including what is happening outdoors then surely the world we live in would be a better place." Gurjit

This understanding of connection resonated with the global events that occurred during the project:

"Sometimes things happen that have such an impact they cause major social, political paradigm shifts. Obama's election shifted American politics and society generations overnight; the financial meltdown shifted our confidence and the unquestioning inevitability of the global free market within a near 24 hour period. To see that speed and depth of change, a process that could easily have taken half a century to reach, happen overnight, shakes us up. That can be scary. However a newness has been thrown into the now, that will affect almost everything from this point. I find that a little bit exciting. We may be in uncharted water but that doesn't mean we're going down. Who knows where we could go if there was enough will for something better?" Sarah

Moving Forward /

The progression through the workshops started to focus the group on the future. One participant was starting to look for ways to "untangle things a little bit, and be clear about the way ahead." A group understanding of how to work towards a better future developed: seeing the need for positive motivations and an integrated yet radical approach:

"[I need] to kick back against giving in to the prevailing cultural structures that push us too hard to provide. I need to reposition myself in the economic and ecological landscape, much closer to family and keeping work in line of sight, in calling distance." Gavin

In finding ways to apply this to school education, Roseleen writes:

"Environmental Education cannot be effective if it is not bringing a change in attitude which results in life long care and participation at a personal, neighbourhood, local, national and international level."

As the group looked to the future, imagination became important to envision what a better future might look like:

"As I pedalled, I started to drift away, imagining what it could be like in the future. What if, in the future, our roads became the life channels around our cities? Since the infrastructure revolves around our small communities, people don't have to travel so far within the cities. They walk and cycle when they need to because commuting has almost become a thing of the past. People work from home much more, only getting together at work for necessary meetings. We don't all need our own cars, because there are car pools on the outskirts of cities and high speed public transport services." Emma

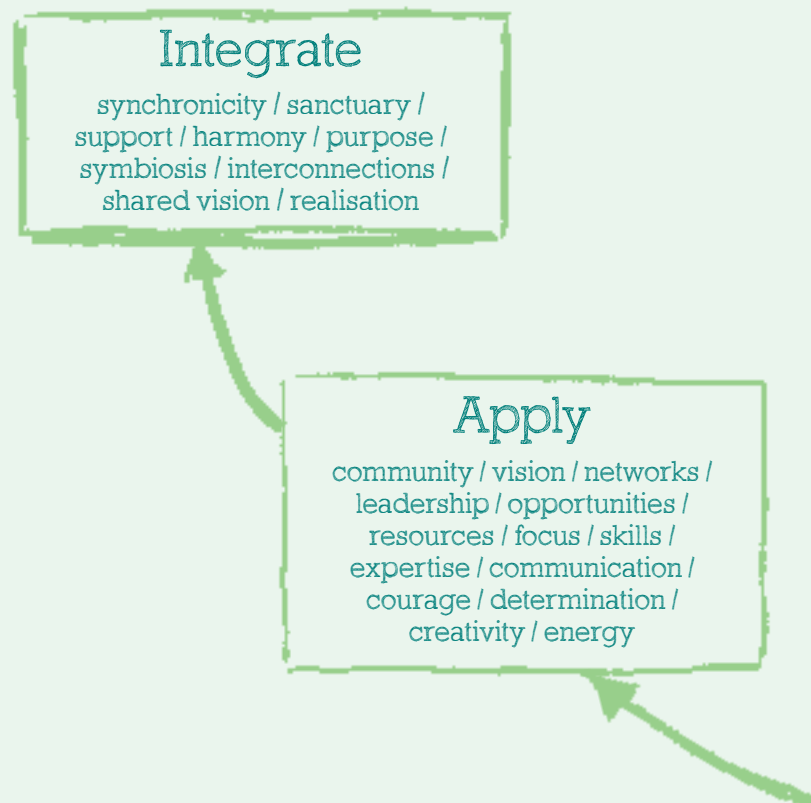
Models For Understanding /

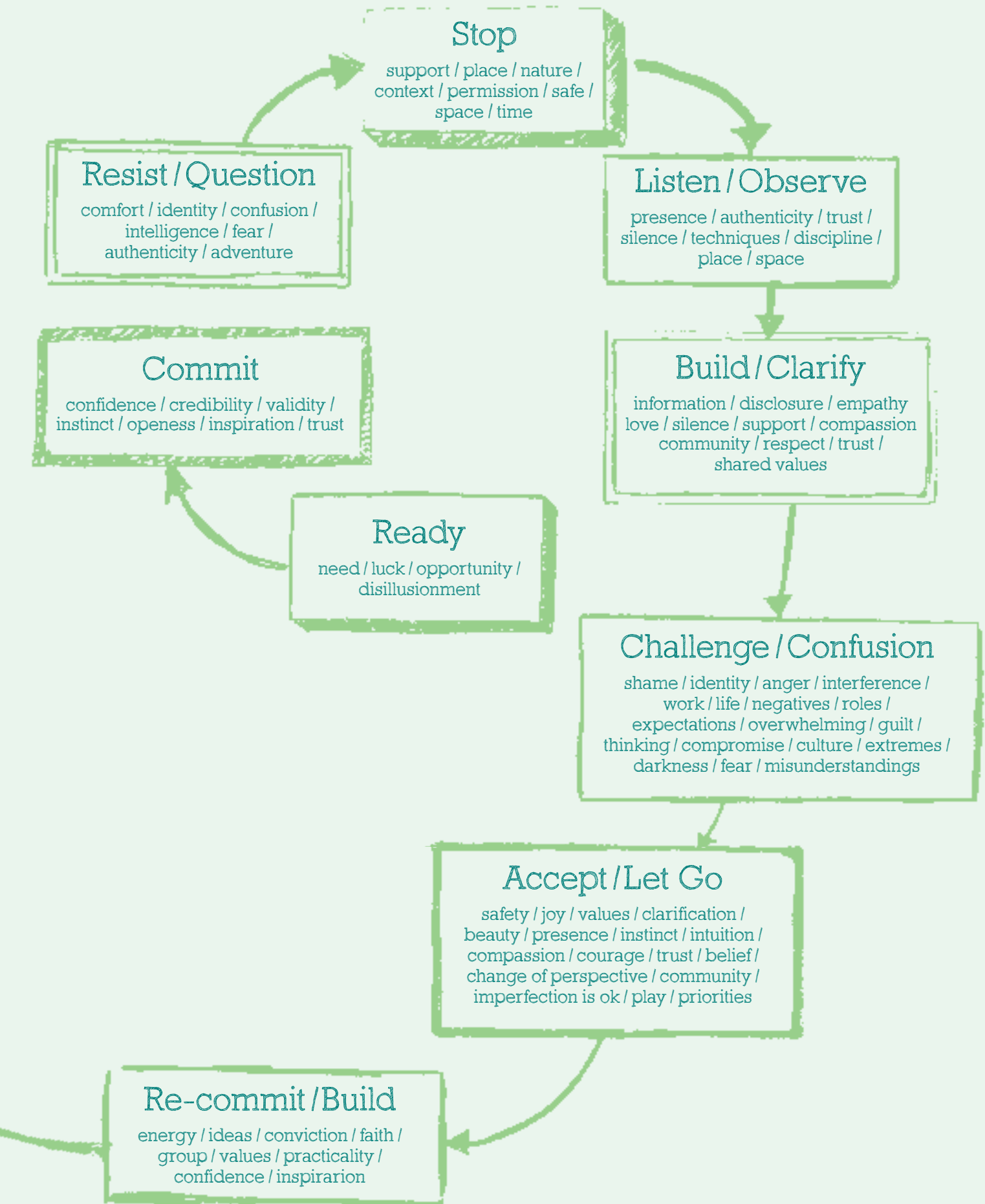
Several models^{xxiv} of the 'ecological self' and 'fundamental human needs,' were provided by the facilitators, allowing the group to develop shared meaning and conceptualise their experiences into a bigger picture:

"...if nothing else, this project is making me think big, prompting questions far beyond "is my washing up liquid environmentally friendly?" Any exercise which starts by making you look at your own values and needs will do that." Louise

The group also developed its own model for its experience of Natural Change. During the last weekend workshop at Stirling the group was asked to find the common themes in their experiences of change during the workshops and negotiated the various ingredients into a diagram. The spiral depicts the onward journey of development and change, and represents the participants' own understanding of the developmental progression of the workshops involving personal, interpersonal, and human ecological foci.

The model captures the complex and shifting layers through which the participants have been, and further deepens the Action Research process of action / reflection / understanding / action. The model highlights the internal focus required at the beginning through 'commitment' and 'questions' and the movement towards external elements such as 'practicality' and 'communication' in the later stages. However there are also important external factors at the start such as being in the right place ('luck') and internal factors at the end, such as 'courage' and 'determination.'





Changes:
personal and professional/

There is a definite will that
didn't exist before, which
now comes from my
heart, not just my head.

—Louise

Actions and Next Steps /

Beyond revealing the processes of personal change and reflecting on values and identity during the six months of workshops, it is the aim of the Natural Change Project to motivate actions in the participants' wider lives. Clearly the awareness achieved by the group, as described in the previous chapters, is leading towards this, and it involves mutuality between inner and outer change. Change takes time, and despite the fact that this report is written directly after the last meeting with the group, many things are already visible. A follow-up research session after six months will record further changes which have taken root over a longer period of time.

Senses /

The quote below reflects the powerful way in which the 'solo' experience invited the group to sense the world: *"We all felt an amazing sense of connection with the land around us—using the sun to navigate and tell the time by; cloud watching; feeling a sense of place and ancestry; the time to focus in detail on the small miracles in this spectacular nature all around us; a sense of just being one small part of the whole living, breathing planet in amongst these mountains. Colour and sound, and the chance to really see it, and really hear it."* Louise

This re-engagement of senses proved to be very powerful when taken home, with one participant commenting: *"I had never really appreciated what was around me."* Most participants confirmed the way in which their senses had been re-enlivened by the workshops and said they have found ways to bring that into their lives.

Community /

Another element of the workshops which spilled over into home life, was the group dynamic which has been developed through the project: *"The group seems to have this real connection and bond that I have not felt in other groups or in other settings. There is a complete aura of honesty with oneself and it feels right because of the respect and compassion that exists."* Gurjit

This quality of relationship has been a very important factor in the changes reported here. One participant made use of such an approach when back at work, using it in a meeting: a colleague commented that they had *"the best team meeting ever."* As this example implies, the importance of building a close group, as manifested in Natural Change, goes beyond the project itself and implies a way of working for change on a broader scale. Roseleen points this out, *"Supporting people to live in a more sustainable way through a model for change really inspired me. Vital to this I thought, would be the ethos and relationships within a community of people who sought change. Like the Natural Change participants who had built up strong and trusting relationships."*

Self /

Through the culture of openness and trust in the group, changes in sense of self have taken place; as Gavin put it, *"We've left some old self behind and now find a newly-hardening self forming."*

This is often thrown into relief by the contrast between workshop and home life. One participant commented that after returning home from the first workshop *"It seemed I was more me,"* while the friends of another commented on them, saying *"You look really relaxed, you look completely different."* For some participants however these changes and transitions were difficult to deal with, and prompted some 'big questions': *"What is it about the human condition which means we allow greed and evil to 'win' so much? So many of the traumas we face as global citizens stem from this, not least our destruction of the planet."* Louise.

The group provided ongoing support and a listening ear which adds further weight to the structural importance of several workshops over a period of time. The changes in self and identity also manifested outwardly through changes in patterns of living: many participants have blogged about a reduction in consumption. For instance, Emma writes: *"What's happening to me? I don't want to shop any more. I used to shop for enjoyment and this Christmas was different. I didn't go into town once. When I did go into a shop, rather than feel overwhelmed at all it had to offer, I felt overwhelmed at all the crap. When I told my friends this they said "but Emma, you love shopping!" That's definitely one of the things that has changed during this project."*

Furthermore, the testimonies of the participants show that it is possible to bring wider elements of ourselves to our public lives: *"... there is a definite change in my motivation relating to all things 'eco'. I'm still coming to terms as to what is the potential scale and scope of the changes I can make, both personally and 'professionally', but there is a definite will that didn't exist before, which now comes from my heart, not just my head."* Louise

Voice /

The confidence to 'come from the heart' when discussing emotions and values, represents the participants' developing concern with authenticity: *"I am thinking about starting a one woman mission to encourage people to be themselves in all situations and try and resist the pressure to conform to what we imagine is expected."* Emily

Elation goes with you /
Yet layers will come slowly /
Like blankets / Layer on layer /
But expect / Do not fight them /
Accept / But take something
with you / Totemic not
tokenistic / Source of the story /
Reservoir of the passion /
Touchstone and talisman /
Anchor to the authentic
—Gavin

The question of authenticity is complex, as is shown through the blogs. The difficulty of finding a voice and of negotiating the difference between private and public spaces has been a strong theme in all the workshops. Some participants have found blogging easier than others. However, the process of taking their experiences to a wider audience has engaged all the participants in a valuable process. As should be clear from the quotes, one of the main strengths of the project has been the level of honesty and clarity of voice developed. And while the Natural Change Project aims to inspire changes outside the sphere of blogging, the blogs shouldn't be underestimated as both a record of the process and as a piece of activism. The quality of expression is often remarkable. The blogs on the website clearly resonated widely with others, for example: "I read your post, with great interest, and felt compelled to write... You got me thinking about some of the amazing experiences I have had in nature and the impact that they had on me, and how my interest in the outdoors has endured. To me, it seems clear that there is a link between experiencing the raw beauty of nature and wanting to try and live as sustainably as possible." And: "Thank you for sharing your story with us. It seems like it was a truly valuable and positive experience that made me question why I do not create time for such things. One day; how many days do I spend wasting away in Edinburgh, filling with unsatisfying things like TV and shops. One day is not too much time to commit to making this time for myself. I am inspired! Thank you."

Action/

The Natural Change Project was designed to facilitate personal and social change through an exploration of values-based change towards sustainability. Indeed, beyond the developments in self-concept, and the honesty and openness revealed in the blogging, the approach has inspired the participants to make changes. The links between public and private change are strong and explicit:

"But what next? There's lots of levels—personal (I am starting to volunteer again and hope to bring what I've learned here with me) professional (I'm deciding what I can bring into my job at Health Scotland) and external (is there an opportunity to use this approach to change with the wider health improvement workforce?). There are so many opportunities and links appearing, maybe all I need to do is trust my instinct and follow the path that appears in front of me. One thing I know is that this definitely isn't the end." Emma

The people involved in the Natural Change process have participated in various events and are planning further projects, stemming from their experiences: Roseleen spoke at the Scottish Government's UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development conference about her experiences and their links to teaching. Gurjit addressed the National Union of Students talking about his experience during the solo in Knoydart. Emily states, "Personally, I would very much like to see Natural Change taken into inner city regeneration areas. I am putting out the feelers and waiting to see what builds."

Roseleen also said,

"On my return to work I wrote a paper for my Head Teacher on my thoughts on how we could build school community partnerships within the school neighbourhood to promote life long learning and active citizenship. My mind has been racing with ideas. Many brought on by the Natural Change Project but also by its relationship to the Curriculum for Excellence initiative in schools."

Roseleen has also moved to a new school campus and is investigating the possibilities of collaboration with the John Muir Trust and local businesses, and writing about Natural Change for Learning and Teaching Scotland. Margaret plans to use similar approaches in continuing professional development for psychotherapists, and will be giving a seminar about the project to NHS psychiatrists. Emma wrote articles about her experience for health publications and states: "My energy for Natural Change has been refreshed... I'm optimistic about exploring this approach in the field of health and well-being."

During the evaluation day, the group agreed that themes such as 'optimism,' 'empathy,' 'communication,' and 'passion,' which stood out during Natural Change Project would help continue to make links between different perspectives and value-positions in their work. There is a real resolution within the group to work together again on a project, maintaining contact and cohesion as a community. This project might relate the experiences of the group through various media, or events, or involve creating an organisation to foster further collaboration using the Natural Change Approach. As Louise states, "The project has acted as a catalyst for all kinds of ideas and actions, both personal, professional and as a group. I think the phrase might be "watch this space", as our biggest challenges may be yet to come!"

Conclusions /

Looking back on the initial aims of the Natural Change Project, it is beyond doubt that the Project was extremely successful in causing a group of 'light green' individuals to think deeply about sustainability and to communicate their thoughts widely through their social and professional networks. It is also clear that these communications have connected with individuals beyond the participant group in a way that more traditional environmental 'campaigns' have not.

What is remarkable is the honesty with which participants reported their, sometimes deeply personal, experience of the project, both in discussion and importantly in their blogs: this method of communication should not be underestimated. In the first two weeks of the project there were 4,827 unique page visits to the Natural Change website with a total of 16,409 unique page visits recorded over the six month period of the project, amounting to 22,098 total views. The eloquent testimonies seen in this report show that the Natural Change Project has had a profound effect on the participants and has led them to think differently and more intensely about sustainability and about their lives. However, whilst the Natural Change Process is regarded by the participants as a significant event in their lives, change is a complex process and it is not possible to link concrete features of participants' lives in a simple, causal way to an activity:

"Change happens—the world changes and you change with it, the product of a whole host of complex and interwoven influences and drivers. But I'd be prepared to say that a lot of the change that has happened—in particular in relation to me really exploring my values and how I relate to the world has its roots in Natural Change." Louise

This fits with the understanding put forward throughout the project of human beings as complex, and interdependent on environments and events around them. Many of the participants state that they are still processing what they have learned and are beginning to find ways of bringing this learning into their lives—meaningful change is long term and subtle. However, participants have expressed a strong desire to continue exploring the process of change—following the Natural Change Project they seem motivated to follow through on this desire with practical action that goes beyond the 'simple and painless' steps often advocated by environmental campaigns. The follow-up research after another six months will contribute significantly to this report.

Key elements of the participants' experience are as follows:

- Undergoing the Natural Change process was a challenging and sometimes uncomfortable, but ultimately very rewarding, experience
- Time alone in nature, led by skilled facilitators had a profound impact on participants' thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards the natural world and their own lives
- The group developed strongly as a community and provided support for powerful personal journeys
- Exploration of deeper social and ecological issues opened up the space for participants to 'be themselves', and question the ways in which personae are created
- Participants developed a conceptual understanding of ecological and social systems which helped them grasp the interconnection of current global challenges
- The process was neither quick nor simple; time and effort was invested in creating the physical space, the 'diary space' and the 'mental space' for it to take place. Change takes time and it was important for participants to have time between workshops to reflect on and 'digest' their experiences
- All participants have been active, or are planning events, in their professional lives, inspired by their experiences of Natural Change
- The techniques used in the project are now part of the participants' professional tool kit

As Louise puts it, "This project is making me think big, prompting questions far beyond 'is my washing up liquid environmentally friendly?'"

It is obvious from this report that the Natural Change Project has reached deep into people's lives, and in a way that an advertising or mass marketing campaign could not. Beyond the participants' experiences, this research implies wider conclusions:

- The accounts of participants going through a values-based process are a very effective demonstration of change
- The emotional, personal and psychological dimensions of sustainability are fundamentally important, both to people involved in a change process and in reaching out to others
- The values-based approach of Natural Change affects self-identity and attitudes creating a strong desire for change: the participants want to do things differently and are now in a position to further develop how they might go about this
- Spending time in natural environments and building a strong community of interest are pivotal elements in the process of revealing the mutuality between social and ecological issues

Recommendations /

The Natural Change Project stimulates discussion of the role of values and identity in promoting sustainability and well-being, calling for a shift in approaches to motivating behaviour change. In light of this we recommend that any future behaviour change programmes should:

- Focus on personal values, group/community action and an ethical approach
- Take account of human complexity and the complexity of the factors that shape our behaviour
- Programmes should not be based on the false belief that there is 'one simple thing' or 'a few basic steps' that will inspire long term changes in behaviour but need to engage with the fullness of what it means to be human. Humans shape and are shaped by the places and people around them. The model created by the participants (p21) provides a revealing picture of such a process
- Acknowledge the importance of time spent in natural surroundings

The activities and techniques described here are replicable, given a sensitive approach and an appropriate level of training; offering the chance to bring Natural Change into a variety of situations. As the mix of venues implies, value-based work does not have to be exclusively carried out in remote settings, and the personal and group-based elements could arguably be transferred to an urban context. As a strategy for change, Natural Change shows the value of working with a small number of influential individuals who disseminate their experiences via various formal and informal networks. Meeting people 'where they are' and building on existing social capital to create change has the capacity to humanise sustainability, to give it relevance to daily life and to reveal a depth of passion which large-scale communications will struggle to achieve.

The Natural Change Project has identified replicable approaches that can be used with groups of people to explore values and identity as a stimulus for transformation in their lifestyles. Taking the Natural Change Approach into the future should develop the techniques and approaches used in the project further. Initiatives could either be targeted at specific sectors or could aim to create a common language between different sectors, as has been the case with this project. Further recommendations include:

- Engage professionals with a wide sphere of influence creating swift communication through word of mouth and networks
- Use values-based and experiential approaches to reach 'pale green' audiences at a motivational level
- Develop quality face to face relationships during workshops which can overcome barriers and support inspirational leadership

WWF Scotland is exploring how the Natural Change Approach can be used with decision makers to develop their leadership skills in the face of the often competing demands of sustainability and other political and economic agendas. The Natural Change Project participants are exploring ways in which these approaches can be developed and used within their own sectors. Many of the outcomes of this project are in development and will be revealed in the future. As Gavin put it after Stirling, "Natural Change will also live and grow in our testimonies. There will be untold impacts, as yet invisible, person to person, seed to seed." The participants have developed a "clarity and intent" which will ensure that the seeds sown widely by Natural Change will flourish.

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^{XXI} It should be noted that a couple

of earlier selected participants, at the eleventh hour, were unable to join the project due to personal reasons but due to the lateness of this we were unable to “replace” them. This was unfortunate as everyone who was initially approached about this project was very interested in being part of it.

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About The Project /

The Natural Change Project was created, designed and project managed by Jules Weston of WWF Scotland. The Project came from a desire to create a unique value and identity-based behaviour change 'campaign' by inviting a group of influential 'pale green' individuals to take part in a process of deep change, using a process that became known as the Natural Change Approach (designed by Dave Key). As far as we know, the Natural Change Project is unique in the way that it combines communication methods (particularly group blogging), facilitation approach, group selection and research. There are plans in development for future projects using the Natural Change Approach. Jules Weston can be contacted at julesweston@msn.com or scotland@wwfscotland.org.uk www.naturalchange.org.uk



Footprint Consulting /

The Natural Change Project workshops and Approach were designed and facilitated by Dave Key of Footprint Consulting. Dave has developed this method of catalysing cultural change to more ecologically sustainable ways of living from over ten years experience in outdoor education and group psychology. He has an MSc with distinction in Human Ecology, co-leads the UK's only post-graduate course in Ecopsychology, and is founder of Footprint Consulting which works with organisations on strategy and culture-change for ecological sustainability. Dave Key can be contacted at dave@footprintconsulting.org www.footprintconsulting.org

Support and Research /

In the Natural Change Approach, and in examining deeper values-based change in a group of people, the importance of working with a qualified psychotherapist as a facilitator should not be underestimated. In the Natural Change Project, Margaret Kerr provided this support to the entire group and was invaluable in helping to design some of the workshops. www.margaretkerr.com

The Natural Change researcher and report author, Sam Harrison MA, MSc runs Open Ground, specialising in research and consultancy on environmental issues and place-based education programmes. His focus is on ways of working in the environment which are grounded in the rich history and ecology of specific places. www.openground.eu

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“People do not resist change, they resist having change imposed on them.”
—Fritjof Capra

The Natural Change Project was developed as an innovative response to the challenge of sustainability and to the growing evidence that current environmental campaigns are not resulting in the depth of behaviour change necessary.

Using a pioneering values-based approach to inspire a diverse group of individuals, the project incorporated ideas from eco-psychology, personal development, outdoor education, mentoring and leadership skills.

This report reveals the process of change that took place for the Natural Change Project participants, the workshop approaches used and makes valuable recommendations for future behaviour change campaigns.

The mission of WWF is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- Conserving the world's biological diversity
- Ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- Reducing pollution and wasteful consumption

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