

# KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE LARGER US CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS PROGRAMME

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# REPORT SUMMARY

In Autumn 2023, Larger Us delivered the 'Climate Conversations' training programme with four partners: Grapevine, UNISON, Tearfund and Parents for Future UK. Larger Us's central hypothesis is that if people talk about climate change more, this will help to create a different, broader climate movement. Larger Us and others argue that this is needed to demonstrate to politicians that there is a strong public mandate for the ambitious government action needed for the UK to meet its 2030 emissions reduction commitments.

Independent evaluation of the Climate Conversations delivered the following key insights:

- 1. There is demand for climate conversations training.** All of those who took part in the training shared a frustration about the efficacy of traditional campaigning and protests tactics. Many also reported having avoided climate conversations in the past because they had prior negative experiences of these. They wanted to develop skills to enable them to talk about climate change and to do so in such a way that doesn't deter them.
- 2. The programme delivered new skills and increased people's confidence** to have climate conversations as a result.
  - A. 85% of Workshop participants agreed that "I feel more confident to have conversations about climate change."
  - B. 97% of 6 week Challenge participants agreed that "I have more tools to build relationships and communicate with people about climate change."
- The programme has demonstrated that it is possible to enable climate activists to connect with a broad audience and use conversation to do that. The programme has proven that **where climate activists have adopted a more empathetic approach, they can succeed in bringing people into conversations on climate that wouldn't have occurred otherwise.** This is potentially huge for broadening the climate movement and for addressing its current image issue<sup>1</sup>.
  - A. 31 Challenge participants had 340 climate conversations that they reported wouldn't have occurred otherwise, an average of 11 conversations per participant in around 1 month.
  - B. There is clear evidence that participants reached beyond their group and talked to people they usually wouldn't interact with and approached the subject in ways they had reportedly never done before.
- The skill of 'active listening' was by far the most compelling part of the content** for participants. They became switched on to the idea that making progress on climate change might be as much, if not more so, about their ability to really listen to other people's views rather than their ability to get their own views across.
- Participants were convinced of why the skill of active listening matters.** Many reported that there is a change-making opportunity simply in making people feel 'heard' and creating a judgement-free space for people to express themselves about climate change and related topics.
- Participants did report some difficulties in having conversations, above all in finding routes into initiating them;** Larger Us should consider incorporating more material on this aspect in future versions of the training. Where conversations were difficult or did not go well, Challenge participants were able to bring these examples to their small groups, get support, and discuss tactics for improvement.

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## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.moreincommon.com/media/5pookoyf/aftershock-mic-uk-february-2022-compressed.pdf>

7. **There is an important distinction that needs to be made between the hoped-for impact of climate conversations at scale, and the purpose of individual conversations.** There is a tension between making people feel heard and participants' desire to persuade. This raises a question about how helpful it is to frame the broad public 'Persuadables'?
8. Participants connected with and recited back the evidence presented in the course that a large swath of the public is 'persuadable'. However, this led to a tension: **despite the programme's focus on making people feel heard, many participants continued to feel the need to persuade people** and to have 'comebacks' to objections or specific 'asks'.
9. Participants left the programme with an appetite to have climate conversations and feeling better equipped to have them. Research was conducted in a limited period of 2-6 weeks of the training programme ending (and the Christmas break fell within this period). Within this timeframe, **the research found little evidence of climate conversations continuing. However, some partners have reported that programme participants have continued to have climate conversations in early 2024**, have stayed connected with the small group they undertook the training with and have begun bringing others in their network into the practice.
  - A. Larger Us and its partners could look to determine if climate conversations occur over a longer-time horizon than this research has been able to consider.
  - B. It could also consider ways to continue support to participants beyond the end of the Challenge process.

# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report summarises key insights from the independent evaluation of Larger Us's Climate Conversations programme. It discusses the experiences of those involved in it, the impact it had on them and makes some evidence-based reflections about design which might be useful to Larger Us, should it run similar programmes and in partnership with others.

### What is a 'climate conversation'

What constitutes a 'climate conversation' wasn't strictly defined by Larger Us at the outset, nor was exactly what defines a 'constructive' one. The experimental nature of the training programme meant Larger Us was not overly prescriptive about what qualified as a climate conversation. Participants were simply encouraged to have conversations that related to climate change. They were also encouraged to talk to people who recognise that climate change is occurring but who are perhaps not thinking and acting on climate change in their everyday lives (this group was referred to as 'persuadable'. This term and its impact on participants are discussed in Chapter 3).

As to what a 'constructive' climate conversation might look like; this was the content of much of the course and so isn't duplicated here. At a high level, a 'constructive' conversation would take on board the following guidance from the training:

- Find out about the person, what they enjoy and what is important to them
- Make a link to climate action
- Stay curious
- Keep it relatable
- Keep it positive

### Why Larger Us is doing this project

Whilst it is widely accepted that climate change is happening and it is something the vast majority of the UK public say they are worried about<sup>2</sup>, more than half aren't talking about it much or even at all<sup>3</sup>. And it seems the less it is talked about, the more acceptable it is to not talk about it. Or to put it another way, if we don't start talking about climate change, talking about it will increasingly be perceived as out of the ordinary. This has been witnessed in the US where the number of Americans not talking about climate change has gone up from 57% to 67% between 2016 and 2022<sup>4</sup>.

Whilst climate change deniers are in the minority, too many people are taking too few measures to slow down the rate of global warming. People are worried but not acting. There are a number of reasons for this, many of them to do with our psychology, but there are others related to misunderstanding about the difference it is possible to make and about the personal and financial costs of change.

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#### REFERENCES

<sup>2</sup> 87% of the UK public say they are extremely, very or somewhat worried about climate change (2022).

See <https://climateoutreach.org/britain-talks-climate/seven-segments-big-picture/common-ground-differences/>

<sup>3</sup> 55% of the UK public say they never talk about climate change or don't often talk about climate change. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/climate-spiral-silence-america/> and <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/climate-change-american-mind-april-2022.pdf>

Breaking the silence is crucial to disrupting inaction at the individual and local level, but also to creating a context which is permissive of more transformational change at a systemic level. It has been argued that talking about climate change is essential to more people making more climate conscious choices and changes<sup>5</sup>. It has been argued too that as more people talk about it and adapt their behaviours (in whatever ways they can), the choices and behaviours of others can eventually become regulated by a new social norm being set<sup>6</sup>. There have been various attempts to define the 'tipping point' required for cultural change to result in the sort of change that 'catches on' (with estimates between 10-40% of the population), but most recent research puts it at 25%<sup>7</sup>.

Larger Us believes that a shift in public attitudes (or more particularly, the open expression of these<sup>8</sup>) and behaviours, could create the needed mandate for a shift of emphasis in political debate on climate<sup>9</sup>. The fact that much of the public say they are worried about climate change<sup>10</sup> seemingly isn't on its own enough to do this, nor does it make it a key voting issue (and it remains low on the list of issues the public see as most important, relative to other issues)<sup>11</sup>. In addition, whilst the UK government and its main opposition have climate change goals, delivering on these is regularly traded-off against other policy agendas.

## ABOUT THE CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS PROGRAMME

During Autumn 2023, Larger Us worked with 4 partners (see below) to offer their members/ network the opportunity to join a three-part training programme – Learn how to have conversations that matter about climate change. The programme was comprised of three components:

**Component 1: The Big Idea** – 1-hour online session to make the case for why conversations matter so much to the climate movement and how this training can help to overcome the barriers to talking about climate.

**Component 2: The Skills** – 2.5 hour online Workshop introducing the basic skills needed to start and maintain a good conversation including how to dismantle barriers and set achievable goals.

**Component 3: The Challenge** – 6 x 1-hour online sessions with a small group where participants could share their conversation experiences, deepen their knowledge and improve their skills further.

### REFERENCES

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/katharine\\_hayhoe\\_the\\_most\\_important\\_thing\\_you\\_can\\_do\\_to\\_fight\\_climate\\_change\\_talk\\_about\\_it](https://www.ted.com/talks/katharine_hayhoe_the_most_important_thing_you_can_do_to_fight_climate_change_talk_about_it)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.behavioraleconomics.com/resources/mini-encyclopedia-of-be/social-norm/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aas8827>

<sup>8</sup> Given that people are already worried about climate change and think something needs to be done about it

<sup>9</sup> The relationship between public attitudes and what politicians say they will do (and what Governments legislate) is complex. The limited evidence shows that there are more examples of public opinion driving shifts in policy than the other way around. Where this has occurred, politicians responded to sustained shifts in public support for something (not short-lived shifts). However, examples do exist where policy change occurred, and public support then followed. Furthermore, there is a growing evidence base which shows the potential of political elites to lead public opinion. See: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1956018> and <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2053168019891380>

<sup>10</sup> In public opinion polling

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/ipsos-issues-index-december-2023>

## About the Partners

### UNISON

UNISON is one of the two largest trade unions in the United Kingdom, with over 1.2 million members who work predominantly in public services, including local government, education, health and outsourced services.

The union campaigns to improve working lives and defend working rights. Amongst its campaign efforts, UNISON is campaigning for greener politics, working with employers to make workplaces more sustainable, and informing members of global warming issues. It is establishing a 'Green Reps' Network, with a Green Rep becoming a formal position in each Branch with a remit to agree a joint approach to 'greening the workplace'.

### Grapevine

Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire is an award-winning charity. Grapevine was set up in 1994 as a project of Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency. It became a charity in its own right in 2004 but kept the co-operative ethos it had originally. It now employs a community organising methodology (building power in communities of place/ interest) to bring about change on the issues that matter to the people most effected by them.

### Parents for Future UK

Formed in 2019 by a small group of mums, Parents for Future is the biggest parent climate movement in the UK - and growing fast. With a network of over 30,000 supporters and 35 local groups, the campaigning organisation focuses on building resilient community, peaceful actions and creative communications for climate justice.

### Tearfund

Tearfund is a Christian charity with over 50 years of experience in international development. It works with partners and churches in more than 50 countries to tackle poverty through humanitarian response, community development and advocacy and influencing. Tearfund is interested in climate action and climate justice because it sees that the poorest in the world are/will be the worst impacted by climate change.

## ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

### Research questions

Across all Larger Us's programmes, independent evaluation has sought to learn whether participants find the content resonant, shareable and actionable.

#### 1. Resonance

- A. Do people feel personally engaged with the idea of larger us change-making?
- B. Do people find Larger Us content relevant to them and their change-making?

#### 2. Shareability

- A. Do people have enough of an understanding of Larger Us ideas to be able to talk to their colleagues and/or friends about them?
- B. Is there evidence that change-makers are amplifying Larger Us ideas?

## 3. Actionability

- A. Do people feel able to apply what they have learned in the sessions to their own activities?
- B. Is there evidence that Larger Us ideas are being embedded in organisations working for change or in social movement strategies?

The evaluation additionally addressed research questions that related to the Climate Conversations programme specifically. These are set out in the table below.

## Research questions for the Climate Conversations programme

### Participants

- What is participants' experience of the training? How did it compare to their expectations?
- Do participants feel like the content and level of the training was appropriate to them? What content landed best? What content didn't land?
- Do participants feel like the training equipped them to have conversations about climate?
- Do participants feel like they can apply what they have learned?
- Are there any differences in outcomes/ impact between LU/ host lead sessions?
- How are participants applying what they have learned?

### Partners

- What were their motivations for participating?
- What expectations/ hopes do they have for the impact of the programme?
- Has the process of working together resulted in a programme that they believe is fit for purpose?
- What are the key lessons about the process of working together to create the programme?

## Research approach

The research approach was made up of:

- Analysis of participation data at Pitch, Workshop, Challenges
- Survey<sup>12</sup> responses from those who participated in the:
  - Pitch
  - Workshop
  - 6-week Challenge
- 1 x focus group (online) with partners
- Interviews with the two partner hosts (UNISON and Tearfund hosted the Challenge component themselves with supervision support from Larger Us. Larger Us delivered the hosting component of the Challenge for Parents for Future and Grapevine)
- Participant interviews from each of the 4 partners (the aim was to achieve 3 participants for each partner).
  - Note that these interviews were with people who participated in the Challenge component.
- Watching and listening to recordings of the Challenge sessions, in which participants talked about the climate conversations they had and how they felt about these, as well as the conversations they weren't able to have and why.

### REFERENCES

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<sup>12</sup> The surveys were designed to capture participant learning outcomes and key indicator data on resonance, actionability and shareability. See annex for sample sizes and response rates. Note that each component had its own questionnaire. Some questions were repeated in the Workshop and Challenge component. Pitch participants were sent the link to the survey by email afterwards. For the Workshop and Challenge, participants were provided with the link to the survey at the end of the workshop in the 'chat' as well as sent an email with the survey link afterwards.



# PARTICIPATION

This section discusses partner and participant motivations to get involved and levels participation across the three components of the Climate Conversations programme.

## WHAT MOTIVATED PARTNERS TO GET INVOLVED?

- All partners were convinced of the power of conversation in change making at the outset and recognised that talking about climate change can be difficult.
- Getting better at talking about climate change was something that all partners were already very much interested in because:
  - they were conscious that some of their organisational “habits” or “style” might deter rather than encourage climate action or support for it, and/ or
  - they felt their membership/ network needed to build confidence in reaching outside of their own established group(s), and/ or
  - they already felt fairly well-versed in having ‘constructive’ conversations but wanted to learn more (and specifically about deep canvassing, perhaps owing to an initial misinterpretation of the programme’s focus).
- Partners were more able to talk about their aspiration for climate conversations generally than they were for their organisation, members/ network (this point is explored further under Actionability in the following chapter).
- Whilst all partners shared a belief in the power of conversation in bringing about change, they came at this from somewhat different positions. This perhaps reflects the difference in the nature of the organisations involved and the approaches to change they employ (like community organising, national campaigning, stimulating micro-local climate actions), but might also suggest a different analysis of what climate conversations might be most important for. For example:
  - Moving ‘persuadable’ people to a position of support or behaviour change
  - Undermining the potential for climate to become an issue that polarises, as is the case in the US<sup>13</sup>
  - Encouraging a climate election (specifically the forthcoming General Election) by increasing active/ more apparent public interest in climate action so that politicians respond by raising the profile of climate change in their manifestos and rhetoric.
  - Building the “power” (ability) of communities (of place) to influence climate change action in their area.
- Two of the partners felt that the climate conversations programme could impact, at some level, how their organisation/ members/ network approaches conversations on other topics that are also perceived to be uncomfortable to talk about. Immigration and the rights of transgender people were given as examples.
- The partners had differing levels of confidence in how good their organisation/ members/ network already is at having ‘constructive’ conversations – about climate or anything else. Again, this perhaps reflects the difference in the nature of the organisations involved and the approaches to change they employ. But it might be useful to hold in mind that, with respect to impact and expectations about impact, conversations training might be seismic for one organisation, and enhancing for another.

### REFERENCES

<sup>13</sup> Note that whilst climate change isn’t yet an issue that polarises in the UK, there is evidence that the potential for it to become one is increasing. For instance, in local polarisation around Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) or Labour’s decision to abandon its £28bn a year climate spending targets due to perceived fears of ‘culture war’ dynamics

## PARTICIPATION LEVELS ACROSS THE THREE PROGRAMME COMPONENTS

For reference, the table below shows the number of participants for each of the programme components and by partner. No points of comparison can be made, given the vastly different nature and sizes of the organisations and their respective memberships/ networks. Larger Us expected the number of participants to drop over the course of the training.

PROGRAMME COMPONENT	ALL	GRAPEVINE	PARENTS FOR FUTURE	UNISON	TEARFUND
Pitch	183	12	83	53	35
Workshop	103	21	31	25	25
Challenge	31	7	8	11 (across 2 groups)	5

There are a few points/ observations that it might be worth noting, at least for the record:

- Grapevine has neither a membership nor a network of supporters.
- Parents for Future felt they had a very predisposed audience, given their focus on climate. There was higher demand for all Programme components than could be accommodated.
- Tearfund anticipated a couple more people would have participated in the Challenge component than was the case.
- UNISON had wondered about the possibility of running three Challenge groups with Larger Us. In the end, there were sufficient numbers for two groups.
- A small number of people attended the Workshop component without having attended the Pitch. Those that didn't were asked to watch a recording of the Pitch before attending the Workshop.
- With a couple of exceptions everyone who took part in the Challenge component had attended the Workshop.

After the Workshop (the second component) almost everyone who had participated (94%) saw the value of the climate conversations and wanted to learn more<sup>14</sup>. Clearly there is value in having attended any of the programme components, as the following chapter illustrates. It wasn't possible to conduct interviews with those who had only taken part in the Pitch and/ or Workshop, so it isn't possible to know why some people didn't take part in the Workshop after having attended the pitch (as above, some level of attrition was expected), or why slightly fewer than initially aimed for went on to take part in the Challenge component. However, interviews with partners revealed that, overall, participation was broadly what they could have expected (as far as it was possible to predict, given the programme was a novel offer), and certainly wasn't disappointing.

It should be noted that participants were overwhelmingly volunteering their time - to the programme and indeed to the partner organisations. These are mostly people with jobs already, caring responsibilities (noting that 71% of participants overall are female) and fitting in the training at the beginning or end of their day or over lunchtime.

It should be noted too that Larger Us planned on groups of no more than 8 participants (plus one or two hosts) for the Challenge component, based on previous learning about the benefits of small group size for participants' experience and learning outcomes.

### REFERENCES

<sup>14</sup> Although this needs to be treated with caution. The base for 94% is 54 out of a possible 103.

With all of this in mind, there are a few observations which might be instructive in the planning of future similar programmes.

- Firstly, even when people enjoy the content and value it, they may not feel they can make the time to participate in the 6-week Challenge or feel they have learned enough from the Workshop alone. If (and it is only if) the most value comes from taking part in the Challenge, this is an issue for scalability.
- Secondly, and possibly most importantly, Larger Us might not have to ‘throw many stones to break a window’, which the above table might incorrectly imply. This programme was a pilot and couldn’t know how many people would participate. Larger Us did assume that numbers of participants would decrease as the time commitment increased. Based on the above table, Larger Us can expect to get anything between 71% and 37% of people following through from the Pitch to the Workshop and between 20% and 45% of people following through from the Workshop to the Challenge. Also, it’s entirely possible that those who attend the Challenge might have done so anyway, even without having attended the components before, because they are the kind of people who always try to find time/ are always busy (which the interviews with participants suggest), or, they are the people who had the time.
- The Pitch was just that, something intended to pique interest, not deliver learning outcomes. But despite 96%<sup>15</sup> of people seeing the value in climate conversations and wanting to learn more after it, 56% of people overall didn’t carry through to the Workshop (and it may have been unmanageable if they did). The Workshop was double the time commitment of the Pitch but was sufficient time to share theory and skills about having good climate conversations.
- So, if there is a question to answer about scalability it must concern what the value gap is between having done only the Workshop compared to having done the Workshop and the Challenge (see the following chapter for more on this).

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## REFERENCES

<sup>15</sup> Although this needs to be treated with caution. The base for 96% is 23 out of a possible 183.

## WHAT MOTIVATED PARTICIPANTS TO STAY INVOLVED?

- It rather goes without saying that all participants who stayed involved through to the Challenge component were highly motivated to encourage climate action. They were all passionate about doing something about climate change, although they had different stories about what brought them to climate activism. A common characteristic they shared was frustration. For some this was driven by the lack of sense of urgency they identified in other people. For others it was a result of feeling like they, or the groups they had been connected to, were failing to make a difference in the approaches they had taken (such as protest and sharing 'emergency' style messages).
- Many pointed to previous attempts to talk about climate to others outside of their group which had resulted in either acrimony or simply despondency on their part.
- Some reported that they already believed – prior to the Pitch - that they, and others like them, needed to get better at having conversations about climate. Some also reported that they already believed that conversation might be a route to creating change (especially community organisers, although conversation and listening in organising isn't done with the goal of normalising an issue).
- Mostly, however, they were persuaded by what they had heard in either the Pitch or Workshop. Key messages from the Pitch and Workshop components that stayed with Challenge participants who took part in this research were: the percentage of people who are not talking about climate change, and, the proportion of the UK public which is 'persuadable'.
- Some were attracted to conversation training generally – seeing that it could have cross over benefits to conversations on other topics that have felt awkward to them before. There is perhaps something valuable to note here, about some 'progressives' feeling that they are failing at talking to people who don't share their views, or whom they perceive to have different values to them.
- Finally, some people were also motivated by the offer of training, either because they wanted to grab any opportunity for professional/ personal development (and don't have many of them), or because they were attracted to the prospect of joining a small group and the chance for human connection. Indeed, in the survey feedback, some people identified the chance to work with like-minded people in a small group as the main thing they valued about taking part in the Challenge.

### Who participated?<sup>16</sup>

- 71% of Challenge participants were female, which it is believed by partners largely reflects their membership/ network
- Two partners were concerned that they may be an under-representation of people of colour. This research doesn't have data on partners' memberships/ networks to judge this isn't available. 71% of Challenge participants were White, 22% were people of colour with remaining 6% being Gypsy/ Romany or preferring not to say.
- Only 3% (1 person) was aged under 30. 35% were 31-45, 13% were 46-50, 39% were 51-65 and 10% were over 66 years of age. Again, the data isn't available to judge how closely this resembles the membership/ network of the partners.
- Most participants in the Challenge didn't know each other before taking part. The Grapevine Challenge group was the exception with 3 participants from the local authority who apparently knew each other. Two participants noted this and felt it may have influenced the group dynamic. From observing the groups, any influence this did have was not visible from outside looking in, although it may have impacted how some people felt. One participant felt these participants dominated somewhat.
- Whilst all participants shared an interest in climate change, some were more oriented towards climate action/ stimulating individual behaviour change, others more towards climate action AND climate justice (redress for climate impacts worst felt by the poorest in Africa and East/ South East Asia).
- Three participants, from across the partners, felt that the groups largely comprised people educated to University degree level.

#### REFERENCES

<sup>16</sup> Based on data from the Challenge component

# LEARNING OUTCOMES / IMPACT

This chapter discusses participants' experience of taking part in the programme and the impact it had on them. It covers the experience of those who took part in the entirety of the programme (that is, those who completed the Challenge component), because this is what this research has the most data on, but also because the Challenge involved supporting participants through the process of having climate conversations. There is more to report here about the actionability of what they had learned, and there is more learning for Larger Us to take on about participants' ability and opportunity to have climate conversations.

It's worth noting here that interviews with Challenge participants were undertaken within 2-6 weeks of them having finished the Challenge. This research can't offer a more longitudinal view of impact, that is, whether those who took part went on to have many more climate conversations or if they are still having climate conversations now.

## RESONANCE

### Evidence from the survey responses

Looking first at whether participants felt personally engaged with the content and whether they felt it was appropriate to them; the survey evidence strongly suggests that participants were very much interested in the content and felt it was relevant to them. This is true across all programme components and partners.

Whilst the majority of participants were convinced of the importance of climate conversations after the Pitch component, this increased after having attended the Workshop. This suggests that the Workshop content might more successfully make the case for the potential of climate conversations to make progress on the issue<sup>17</sup>.

**“Since you have attended the climate conversations session, how important do you now think having conversations on climate are to making progress on this issue?”**

	I FEEL CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS ARE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT		I FEEL THE SAME AS I DID BEFORE		I FEEL CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS ARE LESS IMPORTANT	
	The Pitch	Workshop	The Pitch	Workshop	The Pitch	Workshop
All	74%	83%	26%	17%	0%	0%
Grapevine	67%	92%	33%	8%	0%	0%
Parents for Future	83%	74%	17%	26%	0%	0%
UNISON	67%	82%	33%	18%	0%	0%
Tearfund	75%	92%	25%	8%	0%	0%

REFERENCES

<sup>17</sup> See Annex for base sizes

After the Workshop component, 98% overall agreed that they had a 'deeper understanding of why it is important to talk about climate change' and 100% felt 'more motivated to have conversations about climate change'.

Following the Challenge component, a comparatively more nuanced survey question was asked on resonance, which sought to understand whether participants developed a better appreciation of how their approach to a conversation shapes its outcome<sup>18</sup>. This reflects the deeper learning about conversation skills and applying these to climate related conversations. Again, participants unanimously agreed, with around half agreeing strongly.

## Evidence from the qualitative interviews

The qualitative research explored what content really landed with people, what really stayed with them and had the most impact on them personally. The Challenge sessions weren't 'content' heavy insofar as the time spent together on Zoom didn't involve any presentations or 'taught' elements. Challenge participants had access to resources which spoke to the theme of the week. The table below captures at a high level what each week of the Challenge focussed on.

WEEK	SUBJECT	FOCUS
Week 1 Getting set	Preparing to talk	Getting to know other participants Acknowledging the barriers that might get in the way, and how to overcome or address them
Week 2 Relationship foundations	Building trust	Self-awareness: how we present and recognising our own biases Developing rapport. We don't listen to people we don't trust. Trust builds where there is mutual respect, value and appreciation - not judgement or blame. Setting matters - need to be open-minded, have time to talk, be comfortable. Can't be shoehorned into every context. <b>Skill:</b> Active listening
Week 3 Telling your tale	Personal storytelling	The role of information vs emotion. Using well-chosen facts sparingly to back your position up - weave in what you know. Telling a true, personal story about how you became engaged with climate change and why it concerns you. <b>Skill:</b> sharing a story that resonates
Week 4 Doing no harm	Knowing when not to have a conversation about climate change	Handling your triggers Recognising when to back off Avoiding burnout / emotional overload; recharging with friends and allies
Week 5 Bridging differences	Cultivating empathy	Cognitive vs emotional empathy The difference between understanding and agreeing. Intellectual humility and the role of curiosity; demonstrating respect for people's concerns, priorities and values. <b>Skill:</b> Open-ended questioning
Week 6 Ending with hope	Ending with hope	Sharing key takeaways Setting next steps: what now?

- Partners felt that all the programme content was relevant and landed well with participants but emphasised

### REFERENCES

<sup>18</sup> Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement: **"I have a better appreciation for how my approach to a conversation shapes its outcome."**

different aspects as most relevant. Looking more in-depth at the perspectives of the two partners involved in hosting the Challenge:

- UNISON emphasised that content on listening (week 2) and bridging difference (week 4) was especially relevant for them. Trade union campaigns often tend towards “heavy persuasion”, using anger/ outrage to mobilise a supporter base and to coordinate actions. This is the right approach for much union campaigning but, as a consequence, they feel that their members and staff might be less familiar with techniques which enable dialogue with a broad public<sup>19</sup>. This matters hugely to their ability to connect more people with their campaigns and the issues and causes they need to gain broader support for if they are to be successful in meeting their wider social and economic change goals.
- For the Tearfund host, the content they perceived to be most relevant was that which related to the importance of having conversations – which aren’t heated – simply for their own sake. They referred back to evidence from the Pitch and Workshop components about the ‘tipping point theory’ and the value of normalising talking about climate (irrespective of whether it changes that particular person’s view or behaviour) and making conversations about climate more common place and ordinary (ordinary in the sense that they are situated in the present, relatable to the life of the individual in the conversation and non-technical).
- For participants, again, all of the content was felt to be relevant and there wasn’t any that didn’t ‘land’ as such<sup>20</sup>. Participants generally felt that the programme delivered clear and convincing messages. There were some big messages that seemed to really land those who took part in the qualitative research.
- The skill of ‘active listening’ was by far the most compelling part of the content participants. They became switched on to the idea that making progress on climate change might be as much, if not more so, about their ability to really listen to other people’s views rather than their ability to get their own views across. As climate change activists or individuals who have made a range of climate conscious changes to their own lives, they had largely become accustomed to talking about the changes they had made, why they’d made them and encouraging others to do the same.
- Another key message that landed relates to ‘active listening’ but concerns why the skill of active listening matters. Many Challenge participants specifically mentioned that they had learned there is a change-making opportunity simply in making people feel ‘heard’. They learned how feeling heard can open people up to a meaningful and less defensive dialogue and bring them into the discourse about climate change which ‘ordinary’ people hadn’t thought was ‘for’ them – a discourse that has appeared to be for activists and scientists.
- The idea of listening ‘without judgement’ was also mentioned as a critical skill in having a ‘constructive’ climate conversation, although this was something that Challenge participants often reported struggling with in their weekly sessions. Being able to have a judgement free conversation was tied to avoiding shaming or ‘calling out’ people’s choices and actions that perhaps aren’t climate conscious. This point is returned to under Actionability, as often participants struggled to find a route into a conversation which wasn’t implicitly shaming.
- Challenge participants felt that they had learned that the goal of climate conversations was to make progress,

## REFERENCES

<sup>19</sup> This observation was made in the general sense and wasn’t directed at the participants in the group. Qualitative interviews with participants from Unison suggested that this group were no more or no less open to or able to take on the techniques covered in the training.

<sup>20</sup> With the exception of one participant who, after reflecting on the training after it was finished, wasn’t “sold” on the need for a cultural tipping point to make real progress on climate change, or conversation as a route to achieving this. There might be something to consider here about whether everyone who takes part in deeper training is truly there because they want to operationalise the climate conversations as a route to change and truly play an active part in that.

not secure victory. There's a bunch of complex thoughts and feelings that sit under this key-takeaway for participants, and this is evidenced in their experience of having climate conversations (see section on Actionability). At the most basic level, it landed with participants that having a climate conversation was not about 'winning the argument' on climate change (as a phenomenon they should care about more/ vote on).

- However, it also really landed with participants that there is a vast swath who are 'persuadable'. This has resulted in a sort of cognitive dissonance for participants. They are aware they aren't trying to 'win an argument' but they also hold in mind that people can be persuaded to change their mind or behaviour, that they can be brought over to 'their side'<sup>21</sup>. The problem might, in part, arise from the word 'persuadable' which naturally suggests that the goal is to, well, persuade.
- In addition to the above main messages that landed with participants, here are some others that participants were able to say made an impression on them, had stayed with them and which they thought were important for them personally.
  - Finding common ground/ interest between them and the person they are talking to, and then developing a climate angle to apply to the conversation from that.
  - Keeping the conversation relevant, either by focusing on what is interesting to the person they are talking to, focussing on local matters, and keeping climate conversations in the now.
  - Focussing on how people feel, rather than what they think or do.
    - » Relatedly, some participants had become really mindful of their own feelings, and the need to manage these in climate conversations and especially where disagreement surfaces (note that more emphasis on feelings (which are neither 'right' nor 'wrong' but just what they are), and on being judgement free leaves less space for disagreement (which is more about what people think and do).
  - Staying positive, avoiding the narratives which are about emergency, threat and catastrophe. Focussing instead on possibility and opportunity. This is potentially more compelling than 'hope', given its antonym is 'despair'.
    - » Connected to the above is something potentially important about grief and loss. Some participants were mindful that climate change and its impacts on life are a terrifying prospect and that many respond by avoiding thinking about it because of the pain (fear, grief) this causes. Some participants had taken from the programme content the importance of avoiding striking fear in people, because of the potentially paralytic effect it can have. In the practice of having climate conversations, a few participants learned that grief and loss that relates to climate change is also about what people (think/ fear/ actually) lose for themselves and/or of their way of life and what they enjoy. Although this wasn't an explicit part of the programme content, there is perhaps a theme here about what it is that people could gain, that the story of climate action isn't just one of self-sacrifice and loss.
  - Finally, some participants cited the idea of 'staying curious' as having really landed with them, finding out about the person they are talking to. In practice, however, it seems some participants treated their conversations as a sort of mini research project. Whilst it might be useful for them to understand more about what people feel (or think), there is a (small) potential risk that the person on the receiving end feels that they are being surveyed.

## In summary

Lots of content landed and landed well. Participants got something valuable from it and there's a lot of evidence that it has impacted them usefully and positively. But the evaluation (this one and the cumulative learning of all evaluation for Larger Us to date) highlights that resonance is complicated. That something resonated with participants isn't necessarily the same thing as them taking away the intended meaning or message. From a content design perspective, it might be useful to do some cognitive testing<sup>22</sup>.

## REFERENCES

<sup>21</sup> Some participants (and one host) even said that the goal of their conversations was to persuade. Although others didn't explicitly say this, it was evident in how they described what landed with them and also their description of the climate conversations they'd had.

<sup>22</sup> Research that looks at whether people take from the content exactly what you'd meant for them to.



## ACTIONABILITY

### Evidence from the survey responses

- The survey administered after the Pitch didn't include any questions relating to actionability, given the nature of the content. The Workshop survey touched on actionability by asking if participants' confidence level to have climate conversations had improved as a result of taking part. It also asked if they had acquired a practical skill that would help them to have climate conversations. On both measures, the Workshop was positively impactful. The vast majority reported that they had acquired a new skill and that they felt more confident about having climate conversations.
  - Participants from UNISON felt less confident than participants from other groups. This research hasn't been able to confirm any reasons for that. It is possible that this group had the most to gain/ a greater journey to travel with respect to using conversation as an approach to change and reaching beyond an existing supporter base (see earlier point on page 15 about trade unions and campaign style and purpose).
- Intriguingly, agreement on the confidence measure was lower than the measure on learning a practical skill (85% compared to 93%). This is a small sample<sup>24</sup> so it is unwise to draw definitive conclusions from this. That said, given the level of consistency on all the other measures, it is possible that having learned a new skill about how to have a meaningful climate conversation doesn't match how confident they feel about having climate conversations.

### Workshop results

**"I feel more confident to have conversations about climate change."**

	STRONGLY AGREE / AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE / DISAGREE
All	85%	13%	0%
Grapevine	84%	11%	0%
Parents for Future	84%	16%	0%
UNISON	72%	18%	9%
Tearfund	100%	0%	0%

#### REFERENCES

<sup>23</sup> As a reminder, Unison co-hosted with Larger Us. Tearfund hosted alone (with supervision). It would seem hosting was not the driver of the difference.

<sup>24</sup> Note that and the 13% who neither agreed nor disagreed with the confidence statement only amounts to 7 people.

## “I have learned a practical skill that will help me to have meaningful conversations about climate.”

	STRONGLY AGREE / AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE / DISAGREE
All	93%	7%	0%
Grapevine	91%	5%	0%
Parents for Future	95%	5%	0%
UNISON	91%	9%	0%
Tearfund	91%	8%	0%

- Looking at the measures on actionability from the survey administered after the Challenge component, participants unanimously (100%) agreed with the statements ‘I have had acquired more tools to communicate about climate change’ and ‘I feel more able to have climate conversations.’
- The difference observed above, between agreement with having acquired skills and level of confidence to have climate conversations, isn’t as apparent following the Challenge as it is the Workshop . It is possible that the Challenge component gave people more skills, or a greater depth of understanding of skills, and this resulted in them being even more confident.
- Returning to the question of scalability and the value gap between the Workshop and the resource-consuming Challenge component (raised in the previous chapter); it seems confidence in people’s ability to have climate conversations is improved by 15% (overall, across partners, from 85% to 100%) because of participating in the Challenge – an increase from an already high level of confidence.

## Evidence from the qualitative interviews

Looking at the qualitative data, there are two aspects to the picture of actionability with respect to the Challenge component. One relates to the experience of Challenge participants trying to have climate conversations during the Challenge period and the other concerns what those who took part in the research said about the conversations they have been able to have afterwards. As mentioned in the introduction, this research has little evidence to draw on to understand the lasting impact of climate conversations programme and so, what follows speaks mostly to the climate conversations had during the Challenge<sup>26</sup>.

## Actioning climate conversations

- Firstly, participants had climate conversations! Lots of them – 340, in fact. This works out as an average of about 10 per person over the 6-week period of the Challenge, and about 56 per week. UNISON had the most conversations but, Grapevine weren’t far behind and with fewer participants. That’s 340 climate conversations that, based on what participants said in the interviews, wouldn’t have occurred otherwise.
- There is clear evidence that participants tried to reach beyond their group and talk to people they usually wouldn’t, perhaps beyond a ‘hello’.
- There is clear evidence too that they tried to apply the skills and ideas they were acquiring.
  - Many reported in interviews that they felt, without the training, had they broached a climate related conversation with someone who didn’t share their views, it would have gone very differently (badly).

### REFERENCES

<sup>26</sup> The conversations that participants were tasked to have. The primary purpose of the Challenge component was to develop participants’ skills and confidence in having climate conversations by actually having them and reporting back how they went, what went well/ less well and provide peer support.

- More generally, most participants embraced the ethos of climate conversations and demonstrated this by approaching the subject with other people in ways which they reportedly had never done before. As mentioned in Chapter 2, some participants had either given up talking to other people about climate change and related topics or were feeling frustrated and despondent by their efforts to do so.
- There were some conversations which participants felt hadn't gone well. However, they were able to bring these examples to the group, get support and discuss tactics for improvement.
- Some climate conversation attempts didn't go well because the Challenge participant had inadvertently struck up a conversation with a vehement climate change denier or someone who was openly adversarial. There are examples of where the Challenge participant was able to draw on and apply learning about leaving the conversation gracefully, managing their emotional reactions and easing the extent to which they were personally injured by the exchange.
- Mostly, however, participants felt that their conversations had: done no harm (in the sense that this was outlined in the programme – see table above), that they had tried to practise active listening, had offered a judgement free space for people to offer their feelings about climate related matters and possibly even 'planted a seed' about being more climate conscious in the mind (or heart) of the person they spoke to.

## Challenges in applying skills and putting theory into practice

Participants experienced several challenges in applying the skills they had acquired. They also experienced difficulties in finding opportunities to have climate conversations, and most especially with 'persuadable' people who are outside of their close network. The point of the Challenge sessions, as mentioned earlier, was to provide an opportunity to surface these. The discussion that follows captures these and those that were raised in the interviews. It offers too some analysis of the relationship between the content, how it landed and what participants did as a result.

- Participants knew that the point of climate conversations was not to 'win the argument', as mentioned above. They knew too that rebuttal and the use of technical arguments and 'proof' of why people should care about climate change and act on it, isn't the way to make people care more or to make them demonstrate this by making climate conscious decisions and adopting climate conscious behaviours. However, in practice, many continued to want and look for lines of argument, to have 'comebacks' for people's inaction, and/or a list of suggestions of what they could do.
  - Some participants felt that they needed to prepare for conversations by having information that they could call up and drop into their conversations.
- This ultimately comes back to what participants understand about the reason to have climate conversations. It relates to whether the point of a climate conversation is to provoke action and make people look at their choices/ behaviours, or simply give space for reflection and discussion. There is an important distinction between making it normal/ common place to have climate conversations and making the content of conversations more normal by allowing it to be neutral.
- Many participants faced challenges in finding a 'route in' to talking about climate. They were looking for a hook that was about climate – like using a car instead of walking, switching lights off in offices, how well workplaces and sectors deal with waste and non-biodegradable materials, etc. Many of these conversations reportedly went well insofar as the people they talked to were open to considering making these sorts of changes. It is possible, but unknown, that they went on to make these changes or at least thought about them. But finding these sorts of routes-in made finding the opportunities for climate conversations tricky. It also implicitly begins the conversation with a view, or worse, a judgement about what people should be doing. This is especially true where the climate conversation occurred in response to having spotted a behaviour that isn't climate conscious<sup>27</sup>.

### REFERENCES

<sup>27</sup> For example, 'if you walked to the gym instead of driving, you would get even more exercise – and actually, if you walked more, you wouldn't need to pay for a gym membership' (paraphrased from a participant interview). There are many others, like 'not sending Christmas cards would be good for the environment and save you time and money'.

- This is more problematic still for those participants who are known to others (even though they are not close to them) as someone who is climate aware/ conscious. The other person already knows that they are talking to someone who is climate aware and acting on it.
- Some participants wanted to learn more 'conversation starters' and, more particularly, conversations starters for different kinds of people. Relatedly, they were interested to learn conversation strategies that played well with different segments of the 'persuadable' group.
- The content on empathy, which is about demonstrating respect for people's concerns, priorities and values, might usefully include empathy too for people's sense of bewilderment about how they as individuals can make any difference to a problem that seems huge – especially when people fail to see the relationship between small local action and the planet (some participants reported that they came across this a lot). This is less about people's priorities and values (again, polling tells us that it can be taken as read that people are worried and they care), and more about recognising and even validating their ambivalence. If an ambivalent audience is to feel heard (the power of feeling heard is mentioned above), then the route into the conversation, and even the conversation itself perhaps concerns and should be understanding of people's ambivalence. This could be done in a third-party sense, so the conversation is ostensibly about other people – not the two people in the conversation<sup>28</sup>.
- Participants often used the opener of 'how do you feel about climate change/ a climate related impact (like floods, electric cars, etc)', reflecting programme content on focussing on feelings, not opinions. This sometimes felt contrived, like they were shoe-horning the question in<sup>29</sup>. It also perhaps goes against the advice of starting with where people are (given that people are mostly burying their heads/ avoiding it<sup>30</sup>).
  - An alternative route in might be to acknowledge ambivalence and people's sense of bewilderment about how to make a difference. For example, "it's hard to know what to do, isn't it? Even though we are all told how important it is". 'I've heard that some people are doing this' (taking the conversation initiator's views/ actions out of it altogether and removing the need for evidence, proof, examples of what they could do). This may create the opportunity for an entirely neutral exchange and give the ambivalent/ persuadable person a chance to identify climate actions that are possible for them and talk about what they want help with. Validation could be offered by closing with how much the conversation has made the initiator think. This strategy allows people's ambivalence to be heard and leans into tactics intended to bring out the best in people, leaving them feeling good about themselves – and maybe, more welcome in public debates on climate<sup>31</sup>.
- Some participants felt frustrated at what they felt were attempts to "de-politicise the conversation", despite none of them going as far as the above suggestion. There is a tension between them feeling they have compromised their own values and having a judgement free, and perhaps non-directive, conversation. Again, this comes back to why it matters to normalise the practice of climate conversations and to make the content of conversations about climate accessible and non-threatening.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>28</sup> In third party questioning, people are asked to describe what other people are thinking, feeling or doing. By projecting in this manner to a third-party, people can express views that they feel may not be politically, socially or intellectually correct.

<sup>29</sup> For example, the school doesn't have enough recycling bins...How do you feel about climate change? (paraphrased from a participant interview).

<sup>30</sup> Behavioural science explains that this is a common response to things that are a) overwhelming in their importance and b) complex, like pensions. The higher the stakes are, and the more we need to understand to make the 'right' choice, the less likely we are to do something about it. Thus, automatic enrolment, as a fiduciary duty response after multiple public education and other interventions failed. There was public consent for this because people were worried about their retirement and did want to act.

<sup>31</sup> 47% of Britons don't think the climate is welcoming of people like them. <https://www.moreincommon.com/media/Spookoyf/aftershock-mic-uk-february-2022-compressed.pdf>

- There is scope to remind and reassure participants that normalising climate conversations doesn't compromise the climate movement but supports it.
- Some climate conversation attempts never got on to the topic of climate or anything to do with it. It was recognised by participants and Challenge hosts (from Larger Us and partner organisations) that spontaneous climate conversations with people that aren't known well to the participant can feel unnatural and so laying the groundwork to a future climate conversation has real value. This surfaced in Challenge group discussions.
  - In a different iteration of a climate conversations programme, where a regular small group might not feature, it might be important to emphasise that climate conversations might occur later and as a result of a precursor conversation. It might be important to emphasise too that there is intrinsic value in reaching out beyond one's usual group. The act of 'bridging' is powerful in itself because it brings people who are active on climate change closer to those who aren't.
- Finding opportunities to have climate conversations was more difficult than participants first imagined. There's a bunch of reasons for this, including working from home and life events that changed usual routines. But additionally, some realised that a) they don't have much reach outside of their own group (of people who think and feel similarly to them), b) some of the people they know who don't think and feel similarly to them are family members (and broaching the subject felt inappropriate) and, c) it's hard to identify who the 'persuadables' are.
  - Some participants found it helpful to look ahead at their week and identify opportunities where it might be possible to approach people and possibly initiate a climate conversation. This highlights the need to be actively thinking about when and how to have climate conversations in order for them to happen, that is, at least, until they become more routine and integrated in the everyday. It highlights too that, whilst research shows that activists are the most likely to talk about climate<sup>32</sup>, they aren't used to talking beyond the base.
  - There were a few examples of participants approaching strangers (in supermarkets, on public transport). Whether this is a good or useful thing to do, this research is agnostic about. There is little to suggest that these exchanges went badly but the programme steered participants more towards people who they have a degree of familiarity with or are in their 'orbit' in some respect (a familiar face at school pick-up, for example). It perhaps just highlights that some participants found it especially difficult to find people to have climate conversations with.

## Future actionability

The above concerns the conversations participants had during the Challenge, but what about the conversations that occurred afterwards?

- 100% of Challenge participants agreed with the statement: "I will continue to use what I've learned to have conversations about climate change in the future", with the vast majority strongly agreeing<sup>33</sup>.
- The qualitative follow-up found little evidence of climate conversations continuing. A few participants (based on the interviews) have continued to have climate conversations, and some found they are applying the conversational skills they acquired to other topics. One participant reported having a climate conversation weekly. But mostly participants reported that climate conversations had fallen off their radar, though they felt that they "should" have had some.
- It was Christmas shortly after the Challenge component concluded. Many Challenge participants felt that the festive period side-tracked their plans to have climate conversations immediately after the programme and limited the opportunities they usually have to come into contact with people to have climate conversations with.

## REFERENCES

<sup>32</sup> <https://climateoutreach.org/britain-talks-climate/seven-segments-big-picture/common-ground-differences/>

<sup>33</sup> Strong agreement was lowest for Parents for Future (63%) and highest for Grapevine (86%).

- A few participants mentioned in interview that the Israel/ Hamas war (or the genocide in Palestine, as they referred to it)<sup>34</sup> has meant that they have been less focussed on climate change, that their 'headspace' has been filled with this war instead.
- Some partners have reported that programme participants have continued to have climate conversations in early 2024, have stayed connected with the small group they undertook the training with and have begun bringing others in their network into the practice.
- The 'targets', or rather 'goals', that participants set for themselves during the Challenge kept climate conversations top of mind. Following the Challenge and without having targets and a group to report back to, it seems it is easy to quickly get out of the habit of trying to have climate conversations. As mentioned already, interviews with participants were conducted within 6 weeks (and some of them just 2 weeks after) of the Challenge concluding, so there isn't a long timeframe to account for. But if the immediate period afterwards is any indication of lasting impact (it might not be), it seems that the content of the programme stayed with participants, but the practice element didn't.
- The Challenge component, it seems, is not critical to learning outcomes (for example, having developed skills to have climate conversations. See above discussion on resonance). It may well be possible to achieve learning outcomes in much less time, and without doing small group work. However, the Challenge component acts as a catalyst to conversations, as well as a route to peer support, and ultimately a mechanism for accountability.
  - Some participants felt that establishing a small group, within their organisation or organisations membership/ network, with the explicit intention of keeping climate conversations going, would be useful and important. There was a genuine keenness expressed for this. But based on the experience of other small group courses that Larger Us has run since it began, these are unlikely to occur unless someone takes the role of coordinating them and 'leading' them. Larger Us doesn't have the resource to play this role itself on a continuing basis. However, partner organisations potentially do.

## Actionability at Organisational Level

This research hasn't been able to capture much evidence on what the impact of the climate conversations programme has been on the partner organisations involved. It is understood that Larger Us has been looking at future potential work with partners and what the programme has meant for them. This research has been able to identify the following, however.

- Partners feel there is great potential to catalyse climate conversations amongst their memberships/ networks. However, they are unclear about how this can happen, unsure about the appetite of their memberships/ networks for it and especially if it requires the kind of time commitment that the Challenge component entailed.
- Where there are local groups who meet already (like Parents for Future, Tearfund and UNISON (via its branches and Green Reps), there may be a ready framework for peer support accountability, and ongoing engagement, like that which the Challenge component provided.
- There is some appetite for a one-off, larger scale event/ workshop that can cascade the key messages required to have good climate conversations (and why). There is also an interest in the cross-over benefits of learning about judgement-free conversation skills (and why they matter).
- Given the partners' different remits and reach, they are interested in applying climate conversations in different ways. Grapevine's aspiration is for its organisers and network (noting that not everyone on the programme were community organisers) to build more confidence in bringing climate into the conversations they are having anyway. UNISON is interested in continuing to build the capacity of its reps to make climate relevant to workers rights', conditions and prospects. Tearfund and Parents for Future are interested in building the potential of climate conversations to bring forward the debate and action on climate justice. Parents for Future is also generally interested in building on the potential of its network to play a role in normalising climate conversations and preventing it from polarising people at a local level. They are already doing courageous conversations work and are excited to build on that.

### REFERENCES

<sup>34</sup> The author of this report doesn't know how to label it.

## Overall Remarks on Actionability & Impact

- Larger Us has grappled with what constitutes a ‘constructive’ climate conversation and has set out, based on evidence and its experience of delivering this programme, guidelines for having one.
- Naturally, Larger Us (and others like Climate Outreach) don’t wish to catalyse a sea of conversations that alienate people even more from climate discussion. So, making climate conversations common place only has value if they bring people in. This feels like an obvious point to make but, it’s perhaps worth emphasising it in climate conversation training. The key point to bring forward may be that climate conversations work is less about growing the existing climate movement and more about changing it, or rather, it being changed by it being made up of lots of different sorts of people – beyond activists and scientists.
- Climate conversations, by bringing more people and different kinds of people in, have the potential to change the nature and tone of the debate on climate. This potentially takes the content on ‘doing no harm’ in a different direction from its current presentation in the programme. Doing no harm isn’t just about handling triggers, recognising when to back off and avoiding emotional burnout. Doing no harm - to the climate movement and its agenda - is about not shaming people’s choices/ behaviours, not using technical language, avoiding counter arguments and the presentation of evidence (to prove why someone is wrong)<sup>35</sup>. This shifts the emphasis from moving people from ambivalence to support, to just bringing them in, as they already are – because they are already worried and already support action (even if they aren’t taking any).
- Participants generally found it hard to judge if their conversations went ‘well’. This is because they were trying to assess whether their conversation had an impact on people’s future behaviour. There is perhaps a need to underline and reassure participants that this isn’t the point. Simply having an open and judgement-free conversation that touches on climate in some way – and as outlined above, permits ambivalence and empathises with it – is enough (and plays a role in undermining forces that could make climate an issue that polarises). Future conversations with the same person might build out from that and may result in discussions about climate actions/ behaviours but trying to provoke behaviour change in one conversation is both too ambitious and potentially damaging.
- Larger Us and others are looking at the political impact of climate conversations, and the potential for them to have political impact<sup>36</sup>. There are a number of ways of coming at this.
  - One of them relates to the tipping point theory, which is about cultural change and its knock-on impact on what politicians and governments say and do.
  - The other way of looking at political impact relates to the impact of ‘constructive’ conversations in doorstep canvassing. Evidence shows that one to one conversations are more effective than TV adverts or posters in bringing people out to vote and how they vote<sup>37</sup>. However, the goal of normalising talking about climate is different to the goal of canvassing – which is about influencing votes and/ or putting climate in the minds of voters at election time. In this scenario, more targeted conversations work would be required, perhaps in strategically important constituencies/ marginal seats where there is a real opportunity to make climate action a major theme of an election in that area<sup>38</sup>.

### REFERENCES

<sup>35</sup> All of this already exists in Larger Us’s programme as guidance for having a good conversation.

<sup>36</sup> More detailed work on this has been commissioned by Larger Us. Discussion here is intended as supplementary.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2014/11/13/7214339/campaign-ground-game>

<sup>38</sup> Note that charities are required by law to be non-partisan, though they may champion issues and policies.

- Relatedly, good climate conversations could play a role in bringing down the political temperature in an area where there is division/ disharmony on local matters that relate to climate change/ climate action and which political candidates might exploit to secure their own victory. Recent research highlights the importance of climate activists/ climate movement enthusiasts managing their reputation with the broad public, and the political opportunity their current image problem presents to candidates who might prefer not to have a climate focussed election (local or national)<sup>39</sup>. Local climate related matters might be both routes into climate conversations but also be sources of local division. This begs the question as to whether the goal of the conversation is to gain support for the ‘green’ side or to take the heat out of the issue.
  - A few participants mentioned talking about local climate related concerns (like how regularly the council cuts grassed areas) that have become hot topics in the area and have pitted people against one another.

## SHAREABILITY

Whilst Larger Us is interested in general in the ‘shareability’ of its content, this wasn’t a particular focus for this project. The research did pick up the following points, however, on this theme.

- The evaluation of previous Larger Us training programmes found that many participants felt unsure about their ability to share what they had learned, sometimes failed to recall key messages from the training and/ or worried that they wouldn’t be able to call-up the language to explain key concepts they had been exposed to in ‘layman’s terms’. This isn’t the case with the climate conversations training programme, perhaps reflecting Larger Us’s learning about how it communicates key concepts and messages, but perhaps more especially reflecting the focus of this programme.
- It seems that participants’ confidence in their ability to share what they have learned from the programme with others falls somewhat after having taken part in the Workshop, the second programme component. This might be because they learned more in the Workshop and were exposed to more detail. Nonetheless, the content rated highly on shareability.

### We are interested to know if you might share anything you heard in the Climate Conversations Workshop with others.

	I'M QUITE LIKELY TO TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT WHAT I HEARD AND FEEL ABLE TO DO SO		I WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT WHAT I HEARD BUT I WOULD STRUGGLE TO FIND THE WORDS / KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN IT		I'M NOT LIKELY TO SHARE WHAT I HEARD WITH OTHERS	
	The Pitch	Workshop	The Pitch	Workshop	The Pitch	Workshop
All	83%	78%	17%	22%	0%	0%
Grapevine	100%	92%	0%	8%	0%	0%
Parents for Future	83%	79%	17%	21%	0%	0%
UNISON	83%	73%	17%	27%	0%	0%
Tearfund	75%	67%	25%	33%	0%	0%

- Those who took part in the Challenge component also felt confident in their ability to share what they had learned with others who might be interested, and the majority reported already having done so.

#### REFERENCES

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.moreincommon.com/media/5pookoyf/aftershock-mic-uk-february-2022-compressed.pdf>



Please tick the statement that best describes how likely and able you are to talk to others about what you have learned.

	I HAVE SPOKEN TO OTHERS ABOUT WHAT I HAVE LEARNED AND FELT ABLE TO DO SO	I INTEND TO TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT WHAT I HAVE LEARNED BUT MIGHT STRUGGLE TO FIND THE WORDS TO EXPLAIN IT	I'M NOT LIKELY TO SHARE WHAT I HAVE LEARNED WITH OTHERS
All	77%	23%	0%
Grapevine	71%	29%	0%
Parents for Future	88%	13%	0%
UNISON	73%	27%	0%
Tearfund	75%	25%	0%

- Again, the survey data reveals a gap between stated intention and practice. The interviews looked at resonance and actionability more deeply than shareability. However, all of those who took part in an interview were asked if they had shared any of the ideas they had picked up from the programme with others. Not many reported having done so.
- This doesn't seem to be because they struggled to know how to explain it. Quite the reverse, in fact. As mentioned under 'resonance' above, participants felt the programme had landed some really clear messages with them. They felt the knowledge they gained was easily transferable, because it wasn't technical and so the idea of sharing wasn't a daunting prospect for them.
- Some said that the easiest way for them to explain it to others would be to simply describe a climate conversation they had and the idea of increasing the amount that climate related themes are discussed generally, because they aren't discussed in the mainstream currently.
- Some mentioned to immediate colleagues and those in their household that they were taking part in the programme and broadly described what it was about. A couple of participants mentioned that they had covered their participation in the climate conversations in a newsletter (one which was for a church congregation and another that went out to a union branch).
- Mostly, participants didn't feel driven to 'spread the word' and hadn't sought to do so. On asking about shareability in the interviews, some mentioned that they liked the idea that sharing might have a 'ripple effect' in their own network.

## OVERALL REMARKS

- Overall participants were glad they took part and felt that the training was relevant to them and was of value to them personally. Many said that they looked forward to the weekly sessions and genuinely enjoyed being part of their group.
- At the end of the training, participants felt that they were better at having climate conversations, but not 'experts' in the craft. They had been on a learning journey and anticipated that this would continue, as they gained more practice and with more experience of initiating and holding climate conversations.
- Learning outcomes were observed across all partners and there was no discernible difference in outcomes or participant experience between Larger Us hosted sessions and those which involved the partner in a hosting role (the following Chapter covers Partners views on working with Larger Us on developing and delivering the training).
- Whilst participants believe in the potential of climate conversations and intend to continue to have climate conversations, the research found limited evidence of them continuing in practice. However, the time of the research meant that there was a very narrow window for course leavers to have had climate conversations. It might be useful to follow up with course leavers to get a true read on if and how they have made climate conversations a feature of their lives.
- Although content 'landed' with people, insofar as they understood it and enjoyed learning it, it has been difficult for some to put it into practice. A key problem seems to be with finding a route into talking about something climate related that doesn't touch on what the person they are talking to isn't doing 'right' or where they could be doing better in the eyes of someone who lives by their climate change awareness.

# APPENDIX

## SURVEY RESPONSE

PITCH	ALL	GRAPEVINE	PARENTS FOR FUTURE	UNISON	TEARFUND
Possible response	183	12	83	53	35
Response	23	3	6	6	8
Response rate	13%	25%	7%	11%	23%

WORKSHOP	ALL	GRAPEVINE	PARENTS FOR FUTURE	UNISON	TEARFUND
Possible response	103	21	31	26	25
Response	54	12	19	11	12
Response rate	52%	57%	61%	42%	48%

CHALLENGE	ALL	GRAPEVINE	PARENTS FOR FUTURE	UNISON	TEARFUND
Possible response	31	7	8	11	5
Response	30	7	8	11	4
Response rate	97%	100%	100%	100%	80%

COMPONENT	RESPONSE	POSSIBLE RESPONSE	RESPONSE RATE
Pitch	23	183	13%
Workshop	54	103	52%
Challenge	30	31	97%
Total	107	317	34%