**Tackling the Climate Crisis**

**A joint SCVO and ACOSVO event**

**18th November 2021**

*“Anything else you’re interested in is not going to happen if you can’t breathe the air and drink the water. Don’t sit this one out. Do something. You are by accident of fate alive at an absolutely critical moment in the history of our planet.” – Carl Sagan*

**Introduction**

With the climate crisis continuing to escalate and the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) having taken place in Glasgow this year, climate change and sustainability should be a topic on everyone's mind. Voluntary sector leaders are becoming increasingly conscious of the need to be more involved in tackling this crisis regardless of your organisation's cause.

This webinar aimed to raise awareness of why climate change is relevant to non-environmental organisations and open up discussion about what these organisations can be doing to respond to the climate crisis and mitigate its effect on their communities. It also aimed to identify some of the challenges facing organisations in adapting to the transition to net zero.

At the SCSN we have recently begun to think seriously about how the climate crisis might impact on community safety. Like many organisations, at first this issue seemed somewhat peripheral to our work. But as we began to explore it, we realised it has implications across vast swathes of community safety issues – e.g. road safety, rail safety, flooding, forest fires, water safety, mental health (including suicide & other deaths of despair), young people, community planning, place standards, green spaces, rural isolation, protesting & police powers, poverty & inequality and justice.

We recently ran a webinar titled ‘Climate Change & Community Safety’ where we brought together professionals from across the community safety sector to consider how the climate crisis will impact on our work – and what we can do to mitigate it’s impact and/or contribute to reducing emissions that cause global warming. We’ve also themed our November 2021 Safety NETworks newsletter on climate change. It’d be tempting therefore to say that compared with some voluntary sector organisations, we’re somewhat ahead of the game – if it weren’t the case that the entire world is desperately late in taking this issue seriously.

**Event Discussion Summary**

**Speakers:**

* Clara Walker, Chief Officer, [Forth Environment Link](https://www.linkedin.com/in/clara-walker-7a1ab738/?originalSubdomain=uk)
* Kevin Havelock, Regional Director for Edinburgh & East, Corporate & Commercial and Climate Champion, [Royal Bank of Scotland](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kevin-havelock-ba30a1157/?originalSubdomain=uk)
* Jacquie Winning MBE, Chief Officer, [Forth Valley Sensory Centre](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jacquie-winning-mbe-84281bbb/) (SCVO Climate Conscious Finalist)
* Professor Iain Black, Professor of Sustainable Consumption, [University of Stirling](https://www.linkedin.com/in/iain-black-b40963/)

The webinar brought together a cross-sector panel of individuals who are leading the way on climate action in very different ways to discuss first steps voluntary sector organisations could take.

*“It’s not about behaviour change, it’s about systems change. You cannot grow an extraction based GDP economy in a sustainable way. It’s not what the science says.” – Prof. Iain Black*

The contributions of Professor Iain Black were particularly thought provoking and perhaps crucially important given much of the prevailing discussion around the climate crisis and the recently concluded COP26.

Professor Black was clear that the situation is so urgent, we now require governments to ditch a focus on economic GDP growth and replace it with a focus on Wellbeing Growth – so not simply also think about wellbeing as well as GDP, but instead of, as ever increasing economic growth is not sustainable.

He warned against being misled by or joining in the adoption of meaningless terms such as ‘net zero’ or ‘carbon offsetting’ – which either don’t work or are simply not sufficient to address the problems we face, urging us to speak truth to power and avoid getting sucked into government ‘happy talk’ on targets. He urged voluntary organisations to be leaders within our organisations on the climate crisis and be strong about who we choose as strategic partners – watching out for ‘greenwashers’.

He added that in efforts to tackle climate change ‘localisation is key’, with many of the structural impediments we already battle being part of the solution to the climate crisis, including inequality, access to land and a legal system that works not just for the rich.

Reflecting on the role the voluntary sector can play, Clara Walker, Chief Officer of Forth Environment Link, said talked about the role we can play in putting pressure on local and national government, and business, to do more. There was discussion around how it’s our job to be the voice of the communities we work with – but also to recognise that many of the communities we work with are those who’re struggling, often financially. The climate crisis is also a class issue. It’s important that we think about how we engage with people and that recommendations we make to communities or individuals on what they can do are realistic.

Adding to Professor Black’s assertion that this is about systems change, not individual behaviour, there was discussion on applying nudge theory by creating environments in which making climate friendly choices are the easiest or most desirable choices is crucial.

*“We’re in the heart of communities and have their trust. We can provide honest feedback. The voluntary sector is also freer to be more creative, adaptable and less bureaucratic.” – Jacquie Winning*

Jacquie Winning, Chief Officer of the Forth Valley Sensory Centre, talked about the tools and capabilities of the voluntary sector to work with communities to make positive changes.

**Barriers to voluntary sector organisations getting involved in climate crisis efforts**

There was some discussion about barriers that some people had experienced when raising the issue of the climate crisis. Some reported having struggled to convince staff or board members that the climate crisis was relevant to the work of their organisation. Organisations may already be struggling for capacity and time in core funded work.

Solutions may be difficult, but part of the solution may just be to have staff and board members to give this deeper consideration and ask whether the work they do might be impacted by climate change – or whether the work they do can even continue if our environments become unliveable.

We offered the example of the thought SCSN has given to this as well as quoting how climate change may be relevant to organisations for which it might not immediately seem to be.

For example, increasing temperatures are projected to increase suicides, and climate anxiety is already affecting many people so there is relevance to mental health charities. If suicides (deaths of despair) and mental health issues are likely to increase, then perhaps it follows that alcohol and drug use and/or deaths might increase – with all attendant health and social burdens.

**Top Tips for Voluntary Sector Organisations to play a part in battling the climate crisis**

*“Regularly ask, at board level, ‘How does my organisation impact on climate change?’ and ‘How does climate change impact on my organisation?’ – Clara Walker*

The importance of raising the issue of the climate crisis at board level was emphasised. A summary of other tips included:

* Use position within communities to provide honest feedback and be the voice of those communities
* Speak truth to power – do not get sucked into government ‘happy talk’ on targets if they are not being met
* Influence local and national government and businesses to do more
* Be conscious and responsible about who you strategically partner with
* Watch out for ‘Green Washers’
* Conduct organisational audit/reviews for impact on climate

**Other useful reading/documents**

Among other useful documents and reading shared were:

* [‘Third Sector and Net Zero’ – Senscot Survey](https://senscot.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SenscotSCVONetZeroSurvey.pdf)
* [Compare Your Footprint](https://compareyourfootprint.com/difference-scope-1-2-3-emissions/)
* [Why Net Zero and Offsets won’t solve the climate crisis](https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/48180/why-net-zero-offsets-wont-solve-climate-crisis/)
* [10 Ways to Confront the Climate Crisis Without Losing Hope](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/18/ten-ways-confront-climate-crisis-without-losing-hope-rebecca-solnit-reconstruction-after-covid?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

Following the event, the SCVO has now created a [‘Climate Crisis’ page](https://scvo.scot/policy/campaigns/climate-crisis) with useful guidance and research for voluntary sector organisations on how to start taking action.

**Twitter Accounts to Follow**

Peter Kalmus – NASA Climate Scientist - [@ClimateHuman](https://twitter.com/ClimateHuman)

Clara Walker, Clara Walker, Chief Officer, [Forth Environment Link](https://www.linkedin.com/in/clara-walker-7a1ab738/?originalSubdomain=uk) - [@Walkerbynature](https://twitter.com/walkerbynature)

Jacquie Winning MBE, Chief Officer, [Forth Valley Sensory Centre](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jacquie-winning-mbe-84281bbb/) - [@WinningJacquie](https://twitter.com/WinningJacquie)

Climate Scotland - [@Climate\_Scot](https://twitter.com/Climate_Scot)

Scotland’s Climate Assembly - [@ScotClimateCA](https://twitter.com/ScotClimateCA)