

## **Climate Ark Project Report**

**Timeline: 2021-2022**

**Fellow-Project Lead: Akshata and Zahida**

Climate Ark is a voluntary climate action community with over 20 members from more than six Indian cities. The community aims to make climate action tangible and accessible, with participation from all stakeholders. Akshata and Zahida as part of their fellowship project worked with Climate Ark as representatives of Pause for Perspective to provide well-being support to their thriving community, a community space for support, provide psycho-education and tools to work around the unique stressors experienced in climate action.

### **1. Why was this project important?**

- This collaboration aimed to create a sustainable well-being model for the organisation, and to build language around mental health and wellbeing while keeping the intention of climate action at the forefront.
- We saw this as a unique opportunity to engage with a community that would eventually have an impact on marginalised communities at the grassroots level. Our hope was to hold space and provide tools to support this group to achieve this goal.
- As the organisation was looking for ways to formulate a structural network to support each of the members in their work, we felt the need to create a sustainable space that allows for more conversation and reflection around mental health in climate action.
- Hence, we collaborated with the wellbeing team at Climate Ark to support climate action volunteers in including mental health and well-being in their organisational framework.

### **2. What impact did working on building mental health awareness within the community you were working in, do for the community and the context at large? (Get imaginative and explore the future impact of your intervention)**

- Through our interactions with the team, we were able to start conversations around staying with difficult emotions and allowing for spaces of support, which was Climate Ark's hope from our sessions. As our work progressed, the members gradually felt comfortable in sharing difficult experiences and feelings of hopelessness related to their volunteer work, along with stories of isolation due to their beliefs, both from family as well as professional peers. They also opened up about their aspirations as climate action volunteers and reflected on their hopes to continue this work.
- The hope of building such a community was to find support and attune to the needs of each other, and our role then became to allow them to use language around mental health, wellbeing and community support in ways that would enable the creation of the network that they hoped for.

- We believe that our work helped in building such language around mental health experiences and co-created a space where the volunteers felt a sense of community and found comfort in shared experiences.
- Since the intention of the organisation was to create programmes for and to spread climate change awareness among varying communities, our hope from supporting these open conversations would help in self-regulation in their subsequent work with marginalised communities, who are adversely affected by the negative impacts of climate change.
- We hoped that future collaborations with this group would also include deeper conversations around the impact and significance of climate change work, especially through a social justice lens, beginning by including concepts of RESPECTFUL model and intersectionality to bring in more accountability and less hopelessness.

**3. What obstacles came in the way of MHA delivery and how have you been working on this emotionally for yourself and also for the people? What unique struggles and challenges did the people you work with experienced (ex: Bharat deli: teachers but also Bharat deli team) and how and what means were they using to navigate these challenges. How were you supporting them in these challenges?**

**Challenges that Fellows faced**

- Our stance and their stance would often collide which put us in a difficult position.
- There were differences in how we approached the work/sessions - the well being team's expectations were to have experts give away advice and tools to the participants, while our approach/stance was that people are always responding and already have the know-hows, which we wanted to make visible in our sessions. The ask from the well being team was to be the experts in the room and give them generic advice and quick-fixes. Through our conversations (outside of the sessions) with them we reached a middle ground wherein we continued to hold our stance and in addition to that we shared resources and tools that might be helpful for the participants.
- Difficulty in forming intentions for their team as a wellbeing wing. Our intentions of working with them had to be reshaped after consistent communication with them. What started as a workshop series on working with climate change activists for their mental health, underwent many changes. Aligning our intentions was a difficult process. We, however, reached a mutual understanding - respecting both, what they want for their team, and our stance and commitment to support in ways we believe is ethical and fruitful.
- We also struggled with a lack of interest from the participants due to differing hopes from the workshops. To support them better, we would prepare our presentations with various activities, group discussions to keep them engaged and added resources post-sessions. We would also structure our sessions as such that the participants were able to take back new and unique learnings and experiences. For example, the concept of Window of Tolerance was a favourite with the participants, they felt that they could also use it in other aspects of their lives.

- We faced genuine timing issues due to the overload of work that members experienced from their other jobs, which created more helplessness and feelings of not doing enough to support the organisation on an individual level. Here, we tried to bring them back to their self-care needs and initial intentions of being a part of their organisation for them to feel less distressed with their contributions.
- We were very glad with our supervision meetings - they supported us very well, as we were able to make sense of and stick to our intention at all times. Learning to use tools, understanding the stance that was needed to be taken in our facilitations and keeping our role clear in sessions was enabled by thorough supervision.

#### **Challenges that the participants faced**

- Often, the wellbeing team struggled to collate their ideas and build an ask from Pause in terms of their hopes. This in turn had an impact on how the sessions were conducted and received respectively.
- All the participants came from privileged backgrounds. Their challenges were mostly individual in nature and the cohesiveness of the group did not impact their experiences outside of climate change work.

#### **4. What psychological awareness and tools did you use for yourself while doing this work and were those tools incorporated into what you wanted to share within your communities?**

- We used a number of tools to ground ourselves and shared them with the community to support them. Some of them are listed below:
  - Mindfulness based tools and concepts: Meditation, What do I really want?
  - Using picture books to help build language around experiences
  - Anchoring, grounding techniques, Goblet exercise, simply listening practice, Window of Tolerance, psychoeducational tools around anxiety.
  - Resources - books - on equipping oneself with information, communities and ways of being during climate change. (How to turn climate anxiety into action | Renée Lertzman: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f52LJJFBCLc&ab\\_channel=TED](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f52LJJFBCLc&ab_channel=TED) )
  - 5 skillful habits was something we hoped to share with the group, but could not do so. We were able to use these habits in understanding our limits while working with Climate Ark, in that we knew what our strong hopes were for working with Climate Ark. While there was confusion over what our roles in the space would be, 5SH helped us to stay away from what initially looked like an expectation to build structure and foster rigid expectations in a hierarchical sense within the organisation, something that we did not want to do and had no means to either.

**5. As an MHP what MH challenges were you seeing in the context and how were you breaking barriers (of time, lack space and stigma) and opening access for MH and well-being?**

- The participants did not come from marginalised backgrounds. Conversations around support for marginalised communities (which are the most vulnerable in terms of climate change) became difficult, especially due to the lack of acknowledgement from the participants' end. This made it harder for us to place mental health work in the systems of intersectionality, thereby making it more difficult to navigate conversations around it.
- We were able to notice patterns of guilt being a motivator in their work, which made topics like accountability and community support very tricky to speak about. We tried our best to provide resources and initiated multiple conversations about intersectionality, marginalisation and adverse impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities.
- A lack of acknowledging various social and political identities, hierarchies present within the organisation made it difficult to hold conversations about distress in any form.
- Stigma around mental health: As MHPs we found it challenging to explore mental health issues in depth because of the presence of stigma around it. It acted as a barrier to build the supportive space we were hoping for. We were able to introduce ideas of acceptance and kindness towards the self and one's emotions, although the ask was often around dismissing or wanting the feelings to go away. This was a hope towards being more productive and getting work done, not usually for the intentions that these participants had for themselves.
- We were able to initiate conversations around locating the issues of helplessness and isolation that they articulated, outside of them, in the systems that they belonged to. We also began having conversations around why the support of the community became important in their work, and how they could use the network that they aimed to create for the same, although we were unable to have our final conversation with them, as they never reached out.

**6. What work in progress design did you implement as a result of all of the above!**

- **Workshop 1 - What does it mean to be a climateer?**
- **Date - 4 July 2021**
- The first workshop in the series was an engaging, open-to-all discussion about what it is to be a climate action volunteer, including hopes, goals, motivations, unique stressors, and challenges
- **Workshop 2 -**
- **Date: 25 July, 2021**

- This session focused on activities and reflective exercises around the ideas of being a climate change activist. We looked at the ideas of perfectionism which creep into volunteering work - mostly thinking about the stereotypes around what an ideal volunteer looks like, and the pressure that puts on people. This can show up in different ways, feeling like you're not doing enough, or that you don't know enough. Sometimes feeling like others in your team are not as well equipped as you, thus putting more pressure on yourself to get work done; lots of other ways!
- The aim was to externalise these feelings - making sure that the pressure we're putting on ourselves isn't coming from a place of internal guilt or a sense of supporting everyone else with your exclusive knowledge.

For Session 3: Changes made to the intentions of the workshop series

- After a detailed conversation with the wellbeing team at Climate Ark, we made some changes to our intentions for the workshop series. However, our stance remained reflective in nature with a structure which included elements of neurobiology and mindfulness. We structured our sessions to include check-ins, different tools and activities. The larger idea was to model the use of these resources that you want you to be equipped with, and to take them forward as the organisation grows in the future.
- The themes we suggested for future sessions were as follows:
  - Eco-anxiety
  - Presence and purpose
  - Community

- **Workshop 3 - Eco-sensitivity and Management**

- **Date: 5 Sept 2021**

- This session introduced the concept of window of tolerance, mindfulness practice - goblet practice for self compassion and shared resources to explore the impact of eco-anxiety and tools for grounding.

- **Workshop 4 - Purpose and Intent**

- **Date: 26 Sept 2021**

- This session focused on building presence, looking at what obstacles come in the way of staying mindful of your presence, and what takes us away from it.
- Using this presence to build on the idea of Intention - why is it necessary to centre ourselves around intentions and how can we use this to continue our work around climate change?
- These questions were discussed through activities, reflection work and shared resources as takeaways.

## Appendix

### Presentations:

#### **What does it mean to be a climateer?**

- [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/18\\_BvVbjuvunbQz\\_grCLzZdwHJpfkLUZYE0H11GkWHFo/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/18_BvVbjuvunbQz_grCLzZdwHJpfkLUZYE0H11GkWHFo/edit?usp=sharing)

#### **Eco-sensitivity and Management**

- <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1W6yiuX33GL63ee5lYqTDSrL1bx7bkyzGj84xWZq7PC0/edit?usp=sharing>

#### **Purpose and Intent**

- <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1pj33UUDtBKx7Ms-yH4jWdGhBJS42VuQwI6Dx8hurt4g/edit?usp=sharing>

### Resources:

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Posters used in the workshop series:

1.

AARATHI SELVAN'S  
Pause for Perspective

CLIMATE  
ARK

# IGNITE

## CULTURE BUILDING WORKSHOP - I

### What Does It Mean to be a Climateer?

*In Partnership with Pause for Perspective*

Ignite is a workshop series to collectively understand and build upon a Climateer's *purpose, hopes, and challenges*, and help you make sense of your own experience in this fulfilling yet tumultuous journey.

Date: Sunday, 04th July 2021  
Time: Please vote for your preferred slot.  
What to bring: Just your whole selves

2.



AARATHI SELVAN'S

Pause for Perspective



# IGNITE

## CULTURE BUILDING WORKSHOP - II

### What Does It Mean to be a Climateer?

*In Partnership with Pause for Perspective*



Ignite is a workshop series to collectively understand and build upon a Climateer's *purpose, hopes, and challenges*, and help you make sense of your own experience in this fulfilling yet tumultuous journey.

Date: Sunday, 25th July 2021

Time: 11:00 AM- 12:30 PM.

What to bring: Just your whole selves



**3.**



**IGNITE**  
**CULTURE BUILDING WORKSHOP-III**

**ECO-SENSITIVITY AND  
MANAGEMENT**  
**IN LIGHT OF THE IPCC REPORT**

*In partnership with Pause for Perspective*



**5 SEPTEMBER, SUNDAY**  
**11:00 AM- 12:30 PM**  
**WHAT TO BRING: JUST YOUR WHOLE SELVES**



4.



**IGNITE**  
**Culture building workshop-IV**

**PURPOSE AND INTENT**

An exploration of what brings us to and keeps us  
in Climate Ark

*In partnership with Pause for Perspective*

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Date : Sunday, 26th September  
Time: 11:00 AM- 12:30 PM  
What to bring: Just your whole selves