

THE ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Girlguiding UK is the largest organisation for girls and young women in the United Kingdom. Around half a million girls and young women take part in our dynamic, informal learning programmes and benefit from time spent in a safe, girl-only space. For 100 years the organisation has adapted and moved with the times to remain relevant to each new generation of girls. Now, at the start of our Centenary year we have completed our largest piece of research to date. For the first time, we have broadened our scope beyond surveying our members and have instead undertaken a comprehensive study of the attitudes of girls and young women across the UK to the world around them. In doing this, we are not only providing a platform for girls' voices to be heard, but also ensuring that as a youth organisation we continue to remain relevant to the needs of girls today. Find out more about guiding today at www.girlguiding.org.uk.

All the results from the *Girls' Attitudes Survey* can be found on a new interactive website, where you can search the results by theme, region and age group, access spreadsheets of individual datasets, as well as read in detail about the research methodology and download pdf versions of our reports. www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes.



Research findings

Climate change

When presented with a series of statements about climate change and asked to rank them in order of importance, the majority of 7- to 11-year-olds showed some concern for the various issues, with only one in eight claiming that none of the statements worried them. By far the biggest concern for girls of this age was humanitarian. 27 per cent were concerned about the humanitarian crisis resulting from 'African countries such as Somalia not having enough water for people to drink and wash with'. A further one in six said they worried about the following: the destruction of the rainforest, Bengal tigers facing extinction, and flooding in Bangladesh. Girls worried least about the scenario which potentially affects them the most – 'oil and gas becoming too expensive in this country, so people won't be able to drive cars and use central heating' – with only 10 per cent citing this as their top concern.

Personal behaviour

When questioned about their own behaviours, almost all girls aged 7-16 said they regularly do something positive to help the environment. Among 7- to 11-year-olds, 69 per cent turn off lights when they leave a room and 58 per cent make sure their TVs

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and computers are turned off overnight. Over half recycle as much as they can and reuse shopping bags, and 51 per cent walk or cycle rather than travel by car. However, only 27 per cent say they would put on a jumper rather than turning up the heating – by far the least popular action.

These results were echoed across the upper end of the age group (11-16 years), where again the two most popular options were turning off lights when leaving the room (74 per cent) and turning off their TV/computer (62 per cent). As girls get older and independence increases, walking or cycling instead of going by car becomes more popular, with 57 per cent claiming to do this. And a similar number reuse their shopping bags. However, recycling falls slightly in popularity, with only 50 per cent of 11- to 16-year-olds claiming to recycle as much as they can. Again, the jumper remains the least popular action, with only 35 per cent saying they would put one on rather than turn up the heating.

What actions would girls take to save the planet?

Having established what girls and young women already do as part of their daily routines, we then turned to finding out what actions girls would consider taking in order to protect the environment. We focused these questions on the older age groups (11-21 years) on the basis that they are more likely to be in a position to make personal choices and are less dependent on the preferences of the adults in their lives.

Among 11- to 16-year-olds, 61 per cent claimed to be willing to do something further to actively help the environment. This increased significantly among those in the 16-21 age group, 84 per cent of whom responded positively to the same question. Of the options presented, the most popular across the entire age group (11-21 years) was to keep their mobile phone handset for longer, with 38 per cent of 11- to 16-year-olds and 59 per cent of 16- to 21-year-olds choosing this option first. Not purchasing air-freighted food was the second most popular option across the entire age range, chosen by 27 per cent of 11- to 16-year-olds and 54 per cent of 16- to 21-year-olds.

Among girls aged 11-16, 20 per cent would give up some of their pocket money each week, 13 per cent would give up the family car and only 10 per cent would give up having a foreign holiday to actively help the environment. Among 16- to 21-year-olds, 20 per cent would not have a car and 15 per cent would give up their foreign holidays. Giving up some of their allowance or wages was the least popular option for the oldest girls, with only 12 per cent prepared to do this.

Girls' choices resemble those of the adult population of England¹. When asked, the majority of adults had a positive attitude towards recycling (71 per cent said they were 'recycling more rather than throwing things away and intended to carry on doing so'). However, flying less frequently was the least popular way to take action against climate change, with 32 per cent saying they didn't really want to.

Environmental policy

We asked the oldest girls (16-21 years) what they felt would be the most effective policies for protecting the environment. The most popular choices were 'green taxes' on bigger cars/SUVs (69 per cent) and fines for failing to recycle (68 per cent). Over half of girls supported the idea of limited carbon allowances (55 per cent) while 44 per cent also supported both increased reliance on nuclear power and congestion charging in cities.

Conclusions

The girls in our survey group have largely grown up with the environmental issues that are at the centre of current social and political debates. Our findings show that girls and young women take a practical view towards issues surrounding climate change and are already familiar with many ways in which to lead more environmentally friendly lifestyles. Even more encouragingly, a significant number are prepared to

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make added changes to their lifestyles in order to protect the planet. This enthusiasm should be nurtured and opportunities created for young women to actively make a difference to the world around them.

Well-publicised campaigns around personal contributions such as recycling, reusing carrier bags and turning electrical appliances and lights off when leaving a room appear to have had an impact on girls' actions. Future campaigns could be targeted at reducing the use of central heating as this option consistently scored poorly across the age groups.

Interestingly, the youngest girls were most worried about the impact of climate change on people. This could be because of an increased focus on this by campaigning groups and the prevalence in recent years of media reporting on disasters exacerbated by climate change, such as the 2005-06 food crisis in Niger and flooding in Bangladesh in 2007. This demonstrates the vital role of the media and campaigning organisations in informing girls and young women about the most pressing global issues.

When it comes to taking personal action to save the planet, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the girls' responses. It would be simplistic to conclude that the girls are most comfortable taking action that has little personal cost, especially as significant numbers of the youngest girls claim to take reasonable action consistent with the limitations of their age. However, across the age range, girls preferred to take action rather than donate money. As the effects of the credit crunch continue to be felt, it is arguable that this trend will persist and the key to engaging girls and young women on this topic will be to find new and innovative ways for them to take action rather than to focus fundraising efforts on this group.

When asked to comment on possible policies to combat climate change, the oldest group again demonstrated a practical approach with each of the possible options scoring moderately well.

Finally, it is encouraging to note that in some areas girls' attitudes and behaviours are more positive than those demonstrated by the adult population of England¹. For example, over 50 per cent of girls regularly reuse their shopping bags, compared to just 26 per cent of the adult population, and whereas only 32 per cent of the adult population felt there would be any environmental impact in buying locally produced food, 54 per cent of the 16- to 21-year-olds we surveyed chose this as their preferred way to actively assist the environment.

The way forward

A panel of young women aged between 15 and 24 from within the guiding movement came together to review the findings of the survey and to make their recommendations to both Girlguiding UK and other interested audiences.

What girls said...

- Where retailers have already adopted good practices, eg paying for plastic carrier bags and using recycled labelling on goods, these should be replicated and extended across the sector.
- Food purchasing was identified as an area where changes in consumer habits could make a significant impact. Girls thought that schemes to inform and enable consumers to make eco-friendly choices, eg environmentally-friendly versions of recipe cards in supermarkets and food-labelling systems like Sainsbury's Wheel of Health, would encourage positive action.
- More should be done to encourage people to holiday within the UK, but providing more accessible methods for individuals to offset their overseas travel would be more realistic. Like the girls surveyed, the girls on the panel supported the idea of a carbon allowance that could be both credited into and debited from. However, the panel stressed that we need to recognise that adults dictate the choices of younger



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children and that young adults can benefit from the opportunities presented by overseas travel and shouldn't be prevented from enjoying these experiences.

- Charities should be encouraged to provide more opportunities for young people to take humanitarian action rather than fundraise.

Methodology

Girls' Attitudes is a survey of girls from across the United Kingdom aged 7-21 years exploring their attitudes towards key social, political and economic issues.

The survey consisted of five categories, which girls within the guiding movement had previously identified as the most interesting areas to question their peers on:

- education, training, skills and careers
- the environment
- family and relationships
- health and wellbeing
- society, culture and community.

The cohort was divided into three age groups: 7-11, 11-16 and 16-21 years, with an age-appropriate questionnaire devised for each. Certain common questions were also asked of all groups. The girls surveyed form a representative sample of girls and young women across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and were not chosen specifically from within the membership of Girlguiding UK. Booster interviews and data weighting have been employed where necessary to adjust imbalances during fieldwork.

Fieldwork took place between 11 May and 15 July 2009 through 1,109 questionnaires predominantly completed online by the girls.

44 per cent of 16- to 21-year-olds think we should rely more on nuclear power.

GIRLS IN GUIDING CHANGE THE WORLD

This year Girlguiding UK is celebrating 100 years of guiding, and in September 2008, as one of our Centenary projects, we joined forces with 19 charities, including Friends of the Earth, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and The Woodland Trust, to launch a year-long project called Changing the World. Each charity partner created its own unique project, challenging our 575,000 members to raise money, raise awareness and take direct action for the charity of their choice. Amongst many other things, girls could choose to become climate change researchers with Friends of the Earth, plant as many trees as possible for The Woodland Trust, or reduce their impact on the environment in WWF's One Planet Challenge.

The final tallies are impressive – overall 296,591 girls and young women took up the challenge, 32,000 reduced their consumption as part of the One Planet Challenge, 2,000 planted over 50,000 trees for The Woodland Trust and nearly 4,000 researched green solutions for Friends of the Earth.



Endnotes

- Defra (2007). '2007 Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours Toward the Environment'. Defra National Statistics Publications. Crown Copyright.
- Defra (2007). '2007 Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours Toward the Environment'. Defra National Statistics Publications. Crown Copyright.

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