



# **PATHWAYS TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

**Encouraging, Supporting & Recognising  
lifelong-lifewide action & learning on behalf  
of nature, the environment and sustainability**

**APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2023**

*“lifelong learning is a journey of lifelong becoming, which is nothing other than learning how to live and be on this tiny planet”<sup>1</sup>*

**Unfortunately, as a species, we are not doing very well in achieving this goal and this initiative is for those who want to try to do better!**

## **Global context**

Science tells us that our resource intensive consumptive and wasteful habits (we are using nature 1.8 times faster than our planet’s biocapacity can regenerate), and continuous economic growth, are causing us to exceed key planetary boundaries<sup>2</sup>. Economic/ technological prosperity for some societies, has been achieved at the cost of destabilising the systems – like our climate and oceans, that enable all forms of life to flourish. We need to change the way we live if we are to have a future and that involves changing the way we think about ourselves in relation to everything else and achieving this difficult transition is a key challenge for lifelong-lifewide learning and education.

We can look at our current situation in despair – why have we brought ourselves to the edge of destruction? Or, we can look at our situation with optimism – the transition we have to make is a necessary part of our evolution as an intelligent species. A significant part of the wicked problem of our future survival is framed by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup> which sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Education has its own goal – SDG#4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”<sup>4</sup>. SDG#4 gives education a new role – to encourage behaviors that will support the achievement of a sustainable future. An important part of this new role is to educate ourselves into new ways of understanding and behaving, which actively embrace learning as the core regenerative enterprise of living our life.



## Integrating learning and living for a more sustainable future

Lifelong learning has many meanings but one that is particularly relevant to trying to enact the SDGs at a personal level was provided by Arne Carlsen, former Director UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, who said *'lifelong learning is the integration of learning and living, covering lifelong (cradle to grave) and lifewide learning for people of all ages, delivered, undertaken [and experienced] through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands.'*<sup>5</sup>

This seems like a sensible proposition. Learning to live a certain sort of life, then learning through the experiences that emerge as we live that life, is the most complete and useful relationship we can recognise between our learning, our daily activities and actions and ourselves. We learn in order to live a certain sort of life in a particular environment(s) and our learning emerges, whether we like it or not, as a result of participating in that life. This is why the lifewide-dimension of lifelong learning is essential to understanding how lifelong learning can contribute to the SDGs at a personal level and it underpins our experiential inquiry into how we might learn to live a life that is more likely to help nature and the environment and contribute to a future that is more sustainable.

## Why pathways?



Learning to live a certain sort of life is a journey involving the creation and co-creation of lots of actions and activities towards some sort of goal or vision through which we gain experiences and learn in the process. In effect we are creating not just one but many pathways towards something that we may not fully comprehend. We are using the idea of pathways as a way of representing both the sense of direction and the process and transformations required to move towards a more sustainable future and create versions of ourselves that are more in harmony with this goal.

## Action and Learning for Nature, the Environment & Sustainable Futures

“Implicit in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Agenda is the notion that environmental sustainability is intertwined with, and underpins, the 17 Goals. Yet the language of the Goals, and their Targets and indicators is blind to the myriad ways in which nature supports people’s health and wealth – which we argue represents a key impediment to progress.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the 17 SDGs are set at the highest level of action. They are designed and intended to make policy makers, Governments, large organisations and institutions take notice of the urgent need for change.

At the level of an individual it can be a challenge to interpret what a particular SDG might mean in the their contexts and circumstances. This is where we can all make a distinctive contribution by interpreting the SDGs in the contexts of our own everyday lives and creating actions that have meaning and impact in



those contexts. By sharing our interpretations, experiences and the results of our efforts and the learning we gain, we can collectively advance understanding.

The question arises as to which SDGs we might connect the idea of helping nature, the environment and sustainability. The answer of course is that all of the SDGs have the potential to be connected to these concerns<sup>6</sup> and it is for us to decide which of them have particular meaning and relevance in our own contexts and circumstances.

### **‘Helping’ Nature and the Environment**

The basic proposition underlying our inquiry is that we can all do more to live on this tiny planet in ways that : a) are less harmful to the environment and the life it contains and b) make a positive contribution to the understanding, appreciation, and where possible, the sustainability and regeneration of the world we inhabit.

In a general sense we are talking about taking action to improve the health of our environment. We can achieve this by being more aware of our environment and the living things within it and of the effects we are having, and where possible develop habits and practices that minimize any adverse effects.

We can go further by adding new activities and projects to our life through which which we are able to make a positive, regenerative, difference to our environment and or influence others so that our effects are amplified. There are many ways in which we can do this through the roles we perform for example as parents/grandparents, partners, friends and colleagues, teachers, gardeners, artists and many other relationships and ways of being.



Underlying our proposition is another proposition – that by connecting to and ‘helping’ nature we are helping ourselves. There is much research that demonstrates the beneficial impacts of being connected to nature in terms of improving our own physical and or mental health. There are benefits to our health from exercise as we experience nature through walking, running, swimming and many other activities but there are also benefits to our mental states. Contact with nature is associated with increases in happiness, subjective well-being, positive affect, positive social interactions and a sense of meaning and purpose in life, as well as decreases in mental distress<sup>7</sup>.

It would be very interesting to explore these reciprocal relationships between the actions we take to improve the health of our environment and the beneficial effects on our own health as we interact in different ways with our environment.

### **Finding Inspiration – in nature and the environment and working for a sustainable future**

Without ‘will’ nothing will happen but we all need to discover the motivations to change what we do or add new activities to an already busy life. Sometimes we are inspired by the very idea of trying to help someone or something, sometimes the something inspires us or perhaps there is something in the process, our relationships or what emerges that sustains our actions. Perhaps also simply by interacting with other people who share our beliefs and values can be helpful. Our aim is to understand the nature of the motivations that encourage and enable us to commit to pursuing our pathways to a more sustainable future.

## Pathways to a more sustainable future

is intended for anyone of any age or background who is concerned about the damage we have inflicted on our planet and the threat this poses to the future of all forms of life. Our aim is to encourage people to challenge themselves to act in ways that make a positive contribution to nature, the environment and sustainability in line with any of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> that they choose.

The outcomes from this process are both personal e.g. learning how to live a life that is more in tune with the needs of our tiny planet and in the process creating a better version of ourself, and communal e.g. we are a village to help each other learn.

Lifewide Education will award a **Certificate of Participation** to those who would like to receive recognition for their commitment and effort to change the way they live in ways that are more likely to help nature, improve their local environment and live a life that contributes to a more sustainable future.

## Culture, Ethos & Expectations

We want to nurture a learning community through which we encourage, support and learn from each other. To participate in the Pathways Community and collaborative inquiry we expect participants to:

- 1 Join the Pathways Community on the Linked In platform
- 2 Participate in a Zoom launch meeting on Monday April 3<sup>rd</sup> 19.00 -20.00 BST (UTC+1).
- 3 Reflect on the life you are living and, with reference to the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), identify aspects of your life where you could act on behalf of nature, the environment and sustainability.
- 4 Select one or more of the SDGs that will form the focus for new ways of living and try to enact these changes. You can build on something that you are already trying to do. Alternatively, you might challenge yourself by creating entirely new goals and activities. Your focus may be big or small, transformational or incremental, individual or collaborative.
- 5 Keep a diary (eg word, blog, notebook, scrapbook, audio or any other format) and make a weekly entry relevant to your action for nature, the environment and sustainability project describing activities and experiences, and what you have learnt.
- 6 Visit the pathways community space on the Linked In at least once a week to read and comment on what others are doing and learning.
- 7 Share your experiences and learning by making a post in the last week of each month on the pathways community space
- 8 And try to participate in a once a month zoom event (during first week of every month) to connect to and share with other participants in the pathways community.
- 9 At the end of the action learning process, create a short digital story to share with the community, that captures what the experience has meant to you and what you have gained from it. Guidance will be provided on how you might create a digital story.

The results of our action learning experiment will be shared through an October issue of Lifewide Magazine.

**If you have questions please share them in the pathways community or email me Norman Jackson**

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## Sources

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