

Lancaster University and Save the Children UK

ESRC Urgency Project: *Children, Young People and Flooding: Recovery and Resilience (2014-16)*

Project Case Study: Environment Agency



The [Environment Agency](#) (EA) is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). A key aspect of their Environmental Management work in England is [Flooding and Coastal Change](#). The EA has engaged strongly with the findings of our research and now sees working with children and young people as essential to achieving flood resilience.

The Environment Agency (EA) has been involved with our project from the outset: Dr Jacqui Cotton (EA Research Scientist and Policy, Strategy and Investment Research & Development Theme Manager) was a member of the **project advisory board**, acting as a bridge between current research in flood risk management and our own work, and advising on how it could be of relevance for practitioners. Jacqui attended one of our project stakeholder events in summer 2015, along with other EA staff, who **pledged to take action** in response to the children's calls for change in emergency policy and practice. She then included our research findings in a presentation to the EA Board of Directors in 2016 on research into the 2013-14 floods and what had been learned as a result. She also shared our findings with Natural Resources Wales and reports that they have helped support the further development of its engagement work with young people. Our project has stimulated what Jacqui calls a '**change in thinking**' in the EA's approach to working with children, following our **research findings** that the aim should be 'not to educate children in the traditional sense but to raise their individual resilience' and 'include them as part of the whole community resilience and flood awareness raising activity.'

After Storm Desmond in December 2015 the EA asked our team to make a submission to the **Cumbria Evidence Commission on Flooding** (February 2016) following which the EA **ensured that children and young people were included in the [List of Actions](#) (Resilience Theme - Action 43) for the [Cumbria Flood Action Plan](#)** (June 2016). The EA also invited students we had worked with at The Magna Carta School in Surrey to **present**, alongside our team, at its [Flood & Coast 2016 conference](#) (Fig. 1). Andy Croxford (EA Deputy Director of Research) introduced the presentation by saying 'If you ever want to know why we need to do more work to protect people from flooding, then this is your

answer.’ Afterwards the young people met [John Curtin, Executive Director of Flood & Coastal Risk Management at the EA](#). As a result of the Flood & Coast presentation, Anne Wheeler (Chair, English Severn and Wye Regional Flood and Coastal Committee) **shared the Young People’s Flood Manifestos with the Committee members**. Following this we **submitted evidence to Defra’s National Flood Resilience Review** in April 2016.



Figure 1: Students from The Magna Carta School in Surrey presenting at Flood & Coast 2016

In September 2016, a number of EA staff attended the launch of our research report in London at which John Curtin gave a keynote address expressing strong support for taking the findings further within the EA. John has written that our project findings led to a **‘step change’ in the EA’s ‘awareness of the impacts of flooding on children and young people and the role that they could play in increasing resilience within their homes and across their communities.’** Following the launch, John brought the report to the attention of the EA Board, where it was discussed and received Board level support,’ At the EA, working with children is increasingly part of core engagement and flood awareness activities – helping to improve community flood resilience.

The EA has been active in following up on these statements of intent. Rachael McMahon (Flood Resilience Advisor for Lincolnshire & Northamptonshire and Engagement Advisor on the National Flood and Coastal Risk Management Engagement Team) attended the stakeholder event in South Ferriby and pledged to ‘help children understand what flood warnings mean when they are issued so they know what to do.’ Acting on this pledge, Rachael supported North Lincolnshire Council and Humber Local Resilience Forum who were developing a **children’s activity book promoting emergency preparedness, [Let’s Get Ready for an Emergency!](#)** With Dr Jatinder Singh Mehmi (Principal Social Scientist at the EA) Rachael also led a **meeting for the national network of Flood Resilience Engagement Advisors** in December 2016 to review how the EA was currently working with children and young people, assess the learning from our research and explore what more could be done. Rachael explains that the group discussed its objectives for working with children, considering both the importance of children’s own resilience as well as their role ‘messengers’ to their families and wider communities. They also explored opportunities to develop their work, both in the short- and long-term, locally and nationally, including a stakeholder analysis of key partners to work with.

During 2017 the EA increased its flood resilience work with children, young people and schools. For example: in April the EA ran a [workshop for pupils at Kilnhurst Primary School in Sheffield](#), which was flooded in 2007, about the importance of being prepared for flooding and how to minimise flood risk; and in May, members of the Flood Resilience Team in York led a **series of sessions on flooding for pupils** which was reported in the Yorkshire EA newsletter (Figure 2).

Pupils hear from York team



Church Fenton flooding during 2015

Members of the Flood Resilience Team at York visited a local school in Church Fenton to tell pupils and teachers how to prepare for flooding. Officers attended Kirk Fenton CE Primary School and prepared a series of sessions for pupils in years 3 and 4. They spoke about floods, how they happen, and what to do in order to be safe. Each pupil was also given a pack of information for their parents, together with a survey and information on how to sign up for flood warnings. The school has agreed to provide information to each new family when starting at the school, and to encourage them to sign up for flood warnings on the spot.

As part of our arrangement, the school has taken a flood plan template and the EA will be helping them prepare it. It is envisaged that the local parish council will be encouraged to do the same. The sessions were deemed a great success and these will be promoted in the school newsletter and shared across a further 17 schools that are part of the local STAR Teaching School Alliance.

Figure 2: Report on flood resilience engagement schools' work in York, May 2017, Yorkshire Environment Agency newsletter

Emma Crofts (EA Engagement Advisor, Kent, South London & East Sussex) worked with Surrey County Council's Emergency Team and Save the Children to run a **lesson on flooding for two Year 5 classes** at Kenley Primary School in Croydon in June 2017. This session focused on flooding and its associated risks, warnings systems and what children and their families can do to prepare for and respond to a flood incident. The children **led a school assembly** to present what they had learned and created **leaflets** to share with their families and others in school. Emma and her colleagues worked with the London Resilience Team (representing the London Resilience Forum) and the Greater London Authority Environment Team on a Thames Barrier Open Day in September 2017, including interactive activities aimed at young people, focusing on what you can do to help your family. Liz Fowler (EA Engagement Advisor, West Midlands) is **using our [Flood Project film](#) at community events** and shared the link to our project, **'as a resource for engagement of children and their families,' on the Knowledge Hub Group for Warwickshire and Staffordshire County Councils**, to reach those working

in water and emergency planning. Community Engagement Officer, Sarah Pearce, led [assemblies at schools across Cleveland](#), also in September 2017, which aimed to help 800 pupils better understand flood risk and know what to do in a flood.

Our team trained Flood Resilience Engagement Advisors in how to facilitate our [Flood Snakes & Ladders](#) interactive game. This uses our original research data with children and young people to raise awareness of the social effects of flooding and the lengthy recovery process. These Engagement Advisors [tried the game with groups of young people as part of the 2017 Flood Engagement Campaign](#) (Figure 3).



Figure 3: EA Engagement Advisors trialling Flood Snakes & Ladders, Oct 2017

Alison Baptiste (EA Director of Flood and Coastal Risk Management) reports that our research has **‘underpinned the Environment Agency’s approach to engaging with children about flooding,’** providing ‘a clear steer not only why to engage but also how.’ During the Flood Action Campaign the EA ran engagement events in England with schools, youth organisations, universities and family centres during which, she notes, our research recommendations have been ‘practically appl[ied].’

As part of this ongoing partnership, our team has involved the EA in an **educational initiative to promote flood awareness in schools** in conjunction with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, the Met Office and the University of Worcester. We are now members of the EA/Defra [Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management Stakeholder Forum](#) and led a discussion at the July 2017 meeting about the role of children as ‘flood citizens’ for flood adaptation, preparation and recovery.

Reflecting on the ‘journey’ of the EA’s engagement with our project, advisory board member, Jacqui Cotton, describes the change in direction at the EA brought about by our research as a **shift from ‘education’ to ‘participation.’** Emma Crofts adds that the EA now views **children ‘as an asset, not a vulnerability.’** Jacqui says that our project ‘highlighted for the first time the scale and nature of impacts that flooding has on children and the detrimental effect of excluding children from discussions about flood risk. The research found that **‘children are an important part of the community whose inclusion in flood risk planning and response will help improve their individual and community’s resilience.’**