

Healthy Children, Healthy Communities: Co-Benefits of Children’s Action on Climate Change and Mental Health



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INTRODUCTION

- This study draws inspiration from children’s artwork depicting their vision of the world in 2050.
- Climate change is an intergenerational equity issue as today’s and tomorrow’s children will live in a world shaped by intensifying climate impacts.
- Globally, children report higher levels of worry, fear, and anxiety around climate change than adults. They will be disproportionately burdened by climate change across their life course.¹
- To date, the topic of climate change and mental health is an understudied area, especially in relation to children.

We aim to better understand:

- (1) If local actions on climate change produce co-benefits to both children’s mental health and community resilience.
- (2) Ways to empower children to design, implement, teach, and learn from community-based actions on climate change. These actions may help children develop climate resilience to respond to risks and disasters.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

School-age children and adults (healthcare professionals, educators, community members, and decision makers) residing in British Columbia.

PROCEDURE

Phase 1: Development of project partnerships and supporting collaborations.

Phase 2: Literature reviews.

Phase 3: Community-based actions on local climate change.

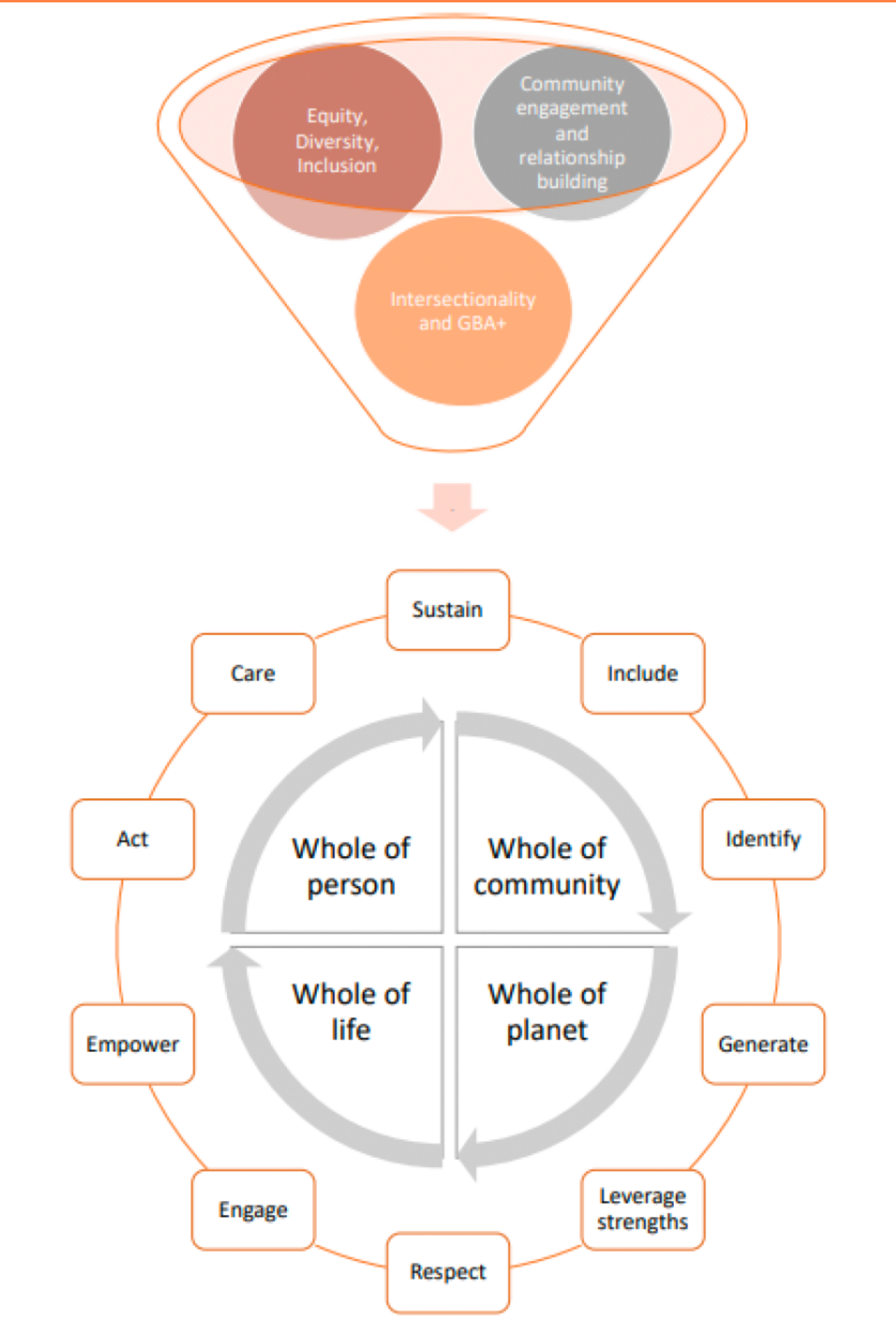
Phase 4: Knowledge to action, governance, and policy engagement.

Qualitative data was examined using thematic analysis over a five year period.

The whole of person, whole of community, whole of life, whole of planet approach can promote the health and wellbeing of children in the context of their own lives and communities.



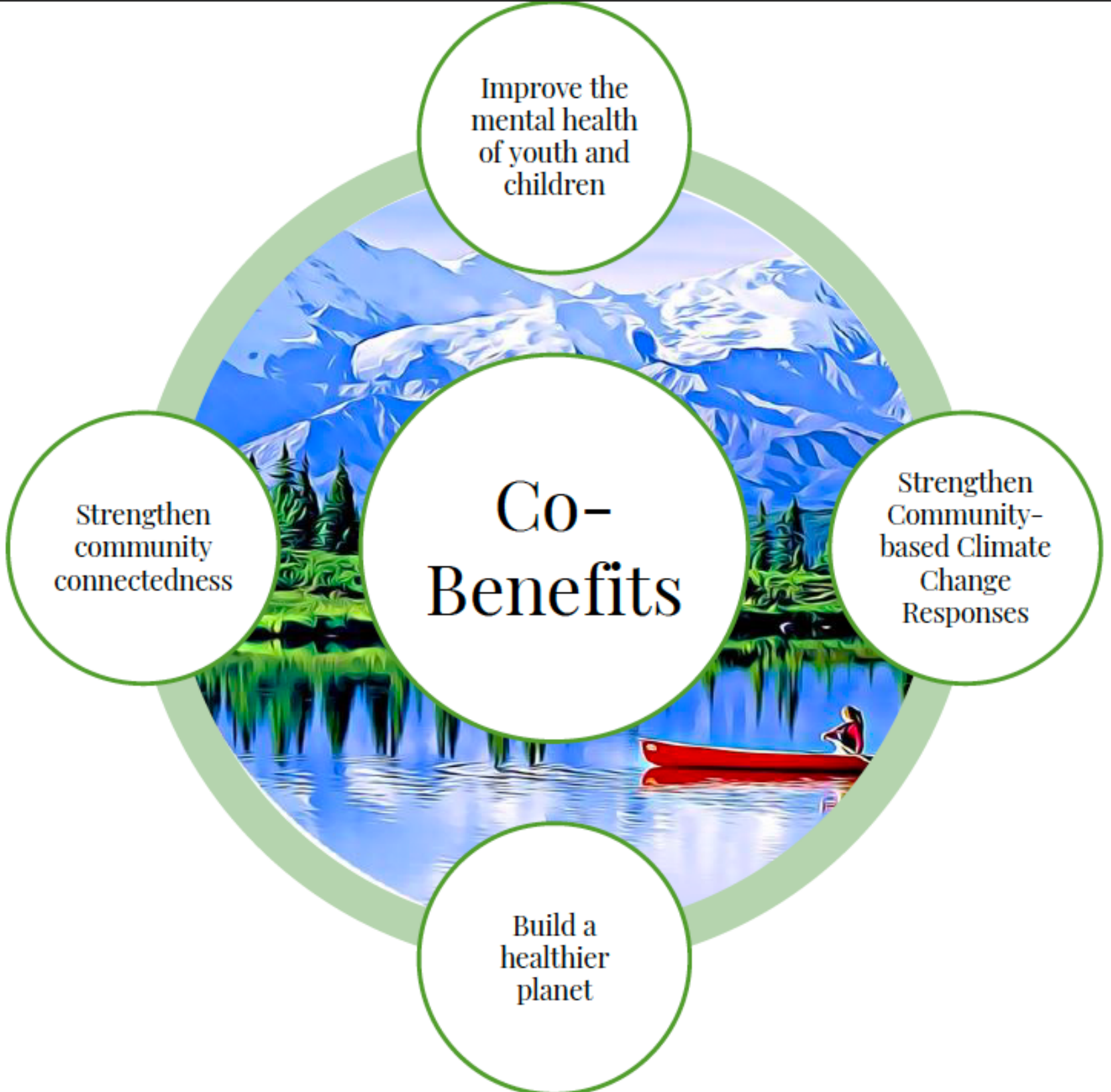
Children’s vision of the world in 2050



Whole of person, whole of community, whole of life, whole of planet approach



Most frequent words in the literature reviews



Co-benefits of children’s involvement in climate change responses

RESULTS

- Children’s engagement will help build transformative approaches in climate change action. This engagement will improve their health, create healthy communities, and foster intergenerational climate justice.
- The *whole of person, whole of community, whole of life, whole of planet* approach reflects Indigenous insights into wellness, which underscore the importance of relationships with self, family, community, nature, and spirit.
- The *heads, hearts, and hands* approach can create tangible projects that enable children to observe the problem and identify actions for positive change.

DISCUSSION

- The conditions for children’s participation should be designed alongside policymakers with attention to three systemic conditions:
 - (1) Cultural attitudes to encourage youth participation.
 - (2) Political, legal, and administrative structures to ensure rights to participation.
 - (3) Economic and social conditions that enable young people to exercise their rights.
- Children’s participation can create co-benefits by strengthening their leadership and autonomy in other areas of their lives.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

Please see the Research for Eco-Social and Equitable Transformation (RESET) website for more details and recommendations for communities, families, and policymakers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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REFERENCES

1. Vergunst F, Berry HL. Climate change and children’s mental health: A developmental perspective. *Clin Psychol Sci*. 2021;10(4):767-785. doi:10.1177/21677026211040787

Scan for more information on the RESET lab website!

