

A report on the Happy Bin project completed in sixteen Powys Schools between January and May 2007

A summary of the contents of the document.

This is the third Happy Bin project (HBP) we have completed.

The previous projects have been successful but this project surpassed them.

- Nearly 2000 pupils and staff took part in the project.
- Waste was reduced significantly over the project in all schools but one (This remaining school produced very little waste from the outset.).
- Children's work shows that many pupils have made the link between carbon waste, consumption and environmental damage.

Messages from schools that took part in previous projects show that the project has continued to be developed and sustained.

The best evidence for the project's success can be found by:

1. Looking at the website <http://www.ecodyfi.org.uk/happybin/index.htm>
2. Reading the children's and teacher's comments appended to this document.

Future projects could be improved by:

- a) Using the recruiting strategy employed in this project;
- b) Making training a more compulsory element of the project. This could be achieved by a slightly different marketing strategy.

This project is simple but really works.

However unless we can find a secure way to fund it, sadly, the Happy Bin will die.

Background information

Sixteen schools responded to an invitation to join the project. They responded to a personal invitation made on the recommendation of Claire Davis (Recycling Education Officer for Powys CC), Sue Thompson (Glasu) or members of the Brecon National Park Education team.

Twenty one schools received the initial invitation.

The recommendation was mentioned in the invitation letter and we believe this personal endorsement:

- Made recruitment to the project easier than in previous projects;
- Probably caused a higher commitment to the project from participating schools.

In previous HBP it was very difficult to persuade schools to join the project. Bev Dimmock [ecodyfi] and I were “cold calling” schools like double glazing salespeople! We didn’t enjoy the experience

Monitoring the project

As far as possible the HBP is a paper free, low carbon project.

With the exception of the initial letter of invitation and the CD Rom (see below) all correspondence has been by email.

Email is obviously an efficient method of communication as long as:

- Computers remain efficient and working;
- The audience reads the message.

This did not always happen.

Schools are busy places. The HBP could be seen by some staff, especially those involved in waste management, as yet another initiative or burden.

So, evidence for the success of the project has been taken from:

1. Graphs and statistics displayed on the *Schools pages* and *Weekly Progress* sections of the website;
2. Children’s letters and work sent either to the website or Glasu;
3. Unsolicited comments about the project made by Teachers and children included in email correspondence. These are listed in the attached Appendix 1 comments file

The project has not been monitored by formal questionnaire. This may be seen as a weakness. In practice we wanted to keep the HBP efficient and focused on the school’s achievements.

Have the aims of the Happy Bin project been achieved?

- Key** 😊😊😊 Strong evidence from 90% or more schools
 😊😊 Clear evidence from 50% or more schools
 😊 Some evidence from a few schools
 😞 No evidence

The HBP had six distinct aims:

Aim	Achieved	Where is the evidence?
For pupils and teachers to recognise waste in some of its many forms e.g. household waste, industrial and commercial waste, carbon air pollution	😊😊	Website School pages. Children’s work plus Appendix 1 comments
To measurably reduce the amount of waste that a school sends to landfill sites or incineration	😊😊😊	Website graphs in weekly progress
To improve understanding of the need to develop different waste management strategies in a school from either landfill or incineration. There are environmental problems (<i>Pollution, Climate Change and Resource Depletion.</i>) with both strategies.	😊😊	Website School pages and Q and A page plus Appendix 1 comments
To promote alternative waste management strategies (<i>Basically refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle</i>) in the school and share them in the local community	😊😊	Website School pages and Q and A page plus Appendix 1 comments
To help pupils and teachers develop waste management strategies that could be sustained in the future	😊😊	Appendix 1 comments
The project tries to provide information in a “fun and accessible format,” but actively encourages innovation and decision making at a local “school level.”	😊😊	Website Q and A plus Appendix 1 comments

How the project was organised

There were five distinct elements to the HBP.

These were:

1. A training day at the Centre for Alternative Technology, in Machynlleth, for at least one teacher from each participating school;
2. A professional puppet show, delivered by Vagabondi Puppets, to introduce the project to children in the participating schools;
3. A set of cross curricular lessons to be delivered over a period of six weeks to reinforce the aims of the project;
4. A waste monitoring exercise, in which schools weighed their weekly waste over the length of the project. This information was promptly displayed on a website so

- that schools could compare their existing performance to both their previous achievement and that of other schools.
5. On the website, schools were encouraged to participate in developing their school page and the *Question and Answer* section.

Observations on the five elements

1. The training day at the Centre for Alternative Technology, in Machynlleth, for at least one teacher from each participating school

This was held on a Friday a few weeks before the project began in schools. All schools were supplied, prior to the event, with a CD rom containing the material and plans for the lessons (3 above).

In previous HBP there has been some difficulty in persuading schools to attend the training day. It was not possible for Glasu to fund the costs of employing a supply teacher, so schools had to find this from their own resources. For some schools this was impossible. However, more than half of the schools managed to manipulate their resources in order to attend.

Glasu minimized the carbon cost of the day by providing a bus, from Brecon, for participating teachers.

Although there is no objective way of monitoring what was learnt by teachers on the training day what rapidly became clear from results was:

There was a high correlation between the schools that attended the training day and those which reduced their waste by the largest amount.

At the very least, the personal rapport, friendship, understanding etc. developed on the training day, seemed to promote both involvement and commitment to the aims of the project.

We had noticed this correlation in previous HBP but this was very evident in this project.

We suspect that many schools would make a bigger effort to attend the training day if in marketing the HBP to schools we stressed:

- The link between this project and Climate Change. i.e. That the HBP is a practical and achievable method of reducing a school's carbon footprint. I believe many schools are looking for practical ways to reduce their footprint;
- The reduced costs of future school waste disposal would potentially cover the cost of a supply teacher for one day;
- Supply teaching costs could legitimately be met from existing school staff training budget. The project has equal or greater value than training on literacy, numeracy or science.

2. A professional puppet show, delivered by Vagabondi Puppets, to introduce the project to children in the participating schools

Twelve shows were performed; eight of the sixteen participating schools agreed to pair up and share a performance.

Many of the schools commented positively on the show. Glasu's staff attended several performances and commented that each was professional, purposeful and enjoyable.

3. A set of cross curricular lessons to be delivered over a period of six weeks to reinforce the aims of the project

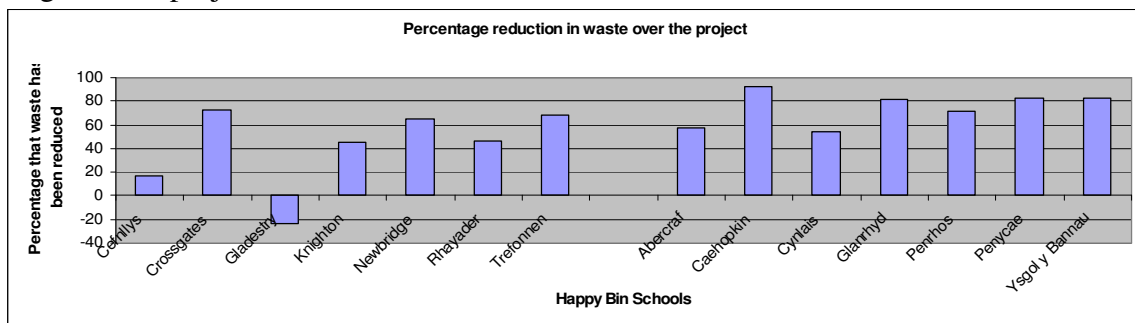
We don't have evidence that all schools used the material provided by the HBP. However there is clear evidence from the work of the children displayed on the website and the comments from teachers that, where the material was used, it stimulated environmental awareness, purposeful age appropriate activity and enjoyment. There is also evidence from some Powys schools, using the material in previous projects, that it is both useful and reusable. (Appendix 1: Comments)

4. A waste monitoring exercise, in which schools weighed their weekly waste over the length of the project

This is the most compelling evidence for the success of the project.

Fourteen of the sixteen schools that saw the puppet show agreed to take part in this section of the HBP. Two schools (Cwmdu and Llangynidr) decided, after the puppet show, that they would not take part in this process.

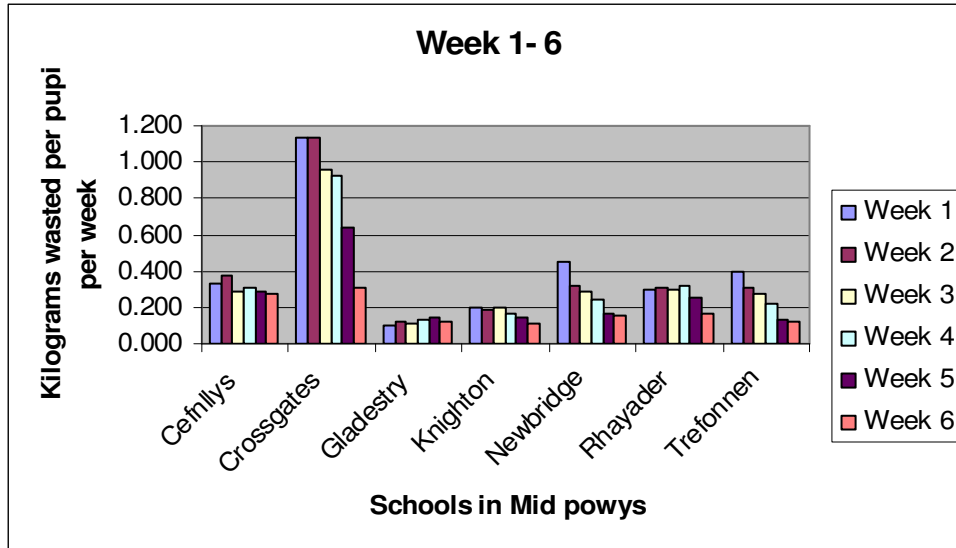
The following graph shows the percentage reduction by participating schools over the length of the project.



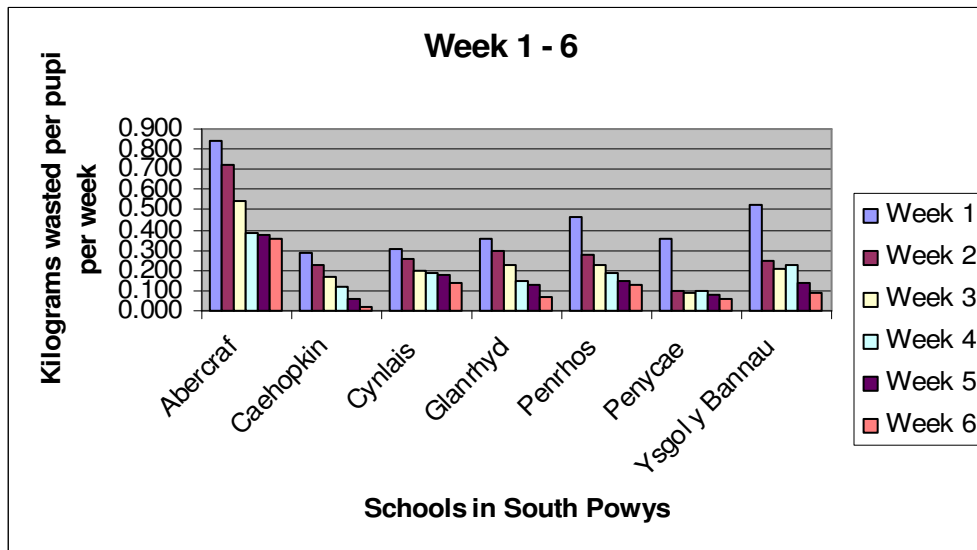
All but two of the schools reduced waste by significant amounts. (42-92%). Half of the schools exceeded 70%

One school, Gladestry, appears to have increased waste. However when comparing the school with its neighbours, it is obvious, from the graph below, that from the start of the project:

- The school was wasting far less than others;
- It was a “benchmark,” showing other schools what could be achieved;
- The scope for reducing its waste was far less than in other schools.



Many of the schools in the Mid Powys group were unable to attend the training day. In contrast most of the schools in the South Powys group were represented. The comparative graph to that above is interesting.



All of these South Powys schools generated high percentage reductions in waste and a progressively downward trend.

5. On the website, schools were encouraged to participate in developing their school page and the *Question and Answer* section.

At this stage of the report it would be best to look at some of the school pages on the website.

Active participation in the website and high levels of waste minimisation seem to go hand in hand. E.g. Caehopkin 92%,Penycae 82%, Penrhos 71%, Cynlais 54% and Abercraf 57%

Sometimes, in trying to add sophistication to what is basically a simple project, it is possible to miss the obvious.

A teacher at Knighton (45%) wrote “Kids are thrilled to see themselves on the website!!”

The *Question and Answer* section of the website was well used...mainly about one intractable problem *What do we do with non recyclable milk cartons?*

The project was too short to find an answer to this classic example of, what for schools is, unnecessary packaging. Hopefully there is enough momentum for children to persevere and persuade politicians to change the arrangements.

Funding the project

All of us involved in the HBP are very grateful to Glasu for funding this project. The notional cost was in the region of £8K of which about £1.5 K was donated “in kind.”

When a project “works” there is probably good reason to “leave it be!” but if the project is to continue we need to review how we spent existing funds and how we might secure future funding.

Both these processes are under way.

Ian Mitchell

May 2007