

Research Project for the New Findhorn Association

*AMPLIFY voices of young adults*  
*How Can Young People Thrive at*  
*Findhorn EcoVillage?*

By Owen Jarvis and Tessa Brock

## **Research Questions:**

This research project sought to explore two areas:

What are the experiences of young adults at Findhorn Foundation, NFA and its communities?

How might we create an environment that attracts, supports and retains young adults across the community at Findhorn Foundation and NFA?

## Research Background:

Resources: NFA community funded the project £500 towards time and costs of research, carried out largely by volunteering between May – September 2017

Methodology: interview 25-30 young adults/adults (18-40) mostly 45-60 mins, around set of core open questions, mostly recorded notes or where possible recorded and transcribed, themes identified.

We also spoke informally with 15 other young people over the last year whilst working in The Phoenix Cafe, Cullerne Gardens, The Hinterland.

Interviewees: representative of short-term visitors, people on programmes with FF, staff at FF, NFA community members short-term and longer-term, young people born/brought up locally.

Next steps:

Share findings with the NFA and FF leadership and community

Provide opportunities for workshops/engagement with findings and generation of new responses

*Abbreviations: New Findhorn Association (NFA), Findhorn Foundation (FF) We have also put the age of the interviewees and their role (volunteer, short-term resident etc) next to contributions*

## **Author: Owen Jarvis**

Owen is originally from London with Irish/Welsh roots. He is a social business person, consultant, researcher and social designer. His career has focused on innovative responses to advice services, social housing, unemployment and social franchising. He is a Clore Social Fellow, has a masters from University of Cambridge Business School and loves travelling in Africa. He came to Findhorn to explore sustainability, mindfulness, organic gardening, and the chance to be part of the ecovillage community. He is currently working on a funding and investment plan for Findhorn Foundation to develop a new range of affordable eco-housing for staff, volunteers, guests, elders, and community members.

*“I noticed the community wanted more young people but didn’t seem to be listening to the voices of those already here. I felt this research project could start filling in that gap and inform the debate. I believe Findhorn has a rich history of pioneering and is once again being called upon to inspire and support a new generation to come through”*

## **Author: Tessa Brock**

Tessa, 26, is originally from South Africa and holds a Bachelors in Business Administration and an Honours Degree in Sustainable Development and Renewable Energy. She is on the NFA Council and works at Global EcoVillage Network. Having completed her experience week at Findhorn last year and moving to the Park, she felt a lack in the numbers and energy of young people here. Knowing how crucial Findhorn has been to her own personal development, she realised how vital Findhorn is for the next generations.

*“The gift of Findhorn is a heart opening space, a place to find how we can best serve and how we can make a positive change in this world. I want to help open up this place to the future parents, future decision makers, to the future leaders of this world. The world can certainly benefit from a little bit of Findhorn and Findhorn can in turn benefit from young people and all that they bring. This is what motivates me to do this research”*

## Research Context:

It is widely acknowledged that something needs to be done to encourage and support a new generation to visit, live and work in Findhorn Foundation, NFA community.

NFA has average age over 55, increasing year on year

Findhorn Foundation says around 80% of attendees on courses over past 5 years are over 35.

In Moray, 30% population is over 65 (Office for National Statistics - <http://bit.ly/2p8kNFT>)

Across the UK, only 18% population is over 65

Findhorn sits within a rural economy challenged by limits of resources and jobs, and with higher costs of service provision

NFA community has concerns about costs of renting and buying new homes becoming unaffordable for most FF staff, elders and working age NFA members and young people visiting

The Findhorn EcoVillage has been a beacon and inspiration for many years - however as some of its key infrastructure and technology age and approaches to sustainability mainstream, questions arise as to its next steps, particularly as a point of attraction for younger generations

## Research Context: What is the Findhorn EcoVillage Offer?

One question we asked ourselves was, when young people look at Findhorn EcoVillage as a place to visit or live or work or settle long-term; what is the community actually “offering”?

What is a realistic expectation of the place? [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Findhorn\\_Ecovillage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Findhorn_Ecovillage)

*Here are two analogies we heard that we found interesting:*

*“I’ve heard people refer to Findhorn as being like God’s airport lounge where people stay for as long as they need before flying off again” Abbot LCG/LEAP*

*“To me, Findhorn is an international centre for personal and global transformation that also reminds me of a University town, spinning out numerous ventures and a thriving community around it” Don Kemper, Founder, CEO of Healthwise, USA (LCG, Findhorn)*

## Research Context: What Are Young People Like (*these days*)?

To generalise about young people is ambitious but it is possible to gain insights and spot trends. As a benchmark we looked to the **Deloitte survey** of 8000 Millennials across 30 countries <http://bit.ly/2fewlTM>. Millennials here are defined as those born after 1980, becoming adult after 2000 (18-35 yrs). They identified the following patterns:

**Millennials are “Apprehensive”** *seeking stability and opportunities in an uncertain world*

**They:**

Want both **freelance flexibility** with **full-time stability** in uncertain world

**Feel accountable** for many issues in workplace/wider world and support good causes

Like **plain talking** and **inclusiveness** from leaders/leadership

Are **Pessimistic** re future prospects (better off than parents) if living in the developed world.

Are **Pro-business** but expect to see positive impacts on social/eco issues

**Welcome Generation Z** (under 18s) who they see as bringing strong IT skills and creative thinking

## Research Context: The Interviewees

In our research at Findhorn we spoke with 30 interviewees, advisers and contributors alongside informal discussions with visitors over the past 12 months, aged 18-39, majority under 30. We selected our interviewees to give a wide perspective of those with v short, medium-term and long-stays in the community.

### Background:

- Everyone was busy working, volunteering, or on short/long education programmes
- Living in Findhorn village, Forres, Cluny Hill or the Park
- Most came to Findhorn at point of crisis or change
- Recommendation of friend/family crucial to choosing Findhorn
- Only a minority had experience of other or knew of other communities

### Attitudes:

- Respectful and appreciative of the community's culture, history and traditions
- Young local residents often felt least included or heard
- Typically reflective - checking "is it me and my issues or are these community issues?"

## **Research: Key Discussion Point - Why Anonymity?**

We originally offered anonymity because we felt themes and patterns were more important than a focus on individuals.

However young people we spoke to living and working within the community were particularly reluctant to have their quotations attributed to them.

Two interviewees who have been with the community for a number of years said they felt that they were concerned that they would be “tattoo’d” forever with anything that was written down and shared with the community, even though this was an observation of an experience at a specific moment in time.

Is this widespread across Findhorn EcoVillage?

If so, why is this commonly the case?

## **Summary Of Findings: Needs of Young Adults at Findhorn**

### **1. Inner Journey and Community:**

Young adults come to visit Findhorn because of its history and reputation passed on by friends and family - it provides a good, safe, structured place to heal and develop a spiritual practice in community at points of change or crisis in their lives, and the warmth and openness of the community which offers an alternative space away from the mainstream.

### **2. Current Difficulties:**

Living in the community is difficult for many young adults - programmes are expensive and inflexible, jobs are hard to find, money is a constant issue, navigating the community is often made unnecessarily difficult, much of the buildings, seem “frumpy” and need a make-over.

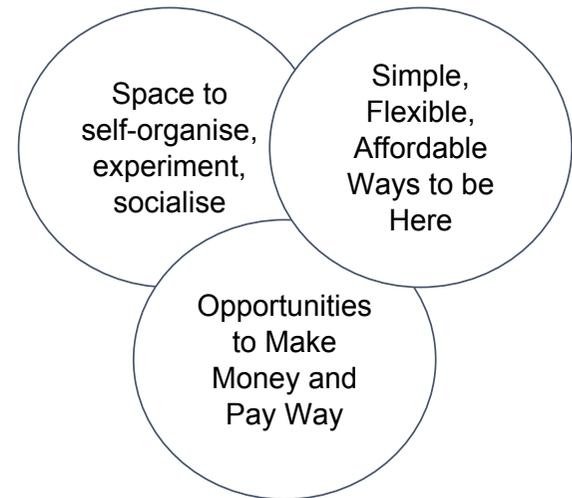
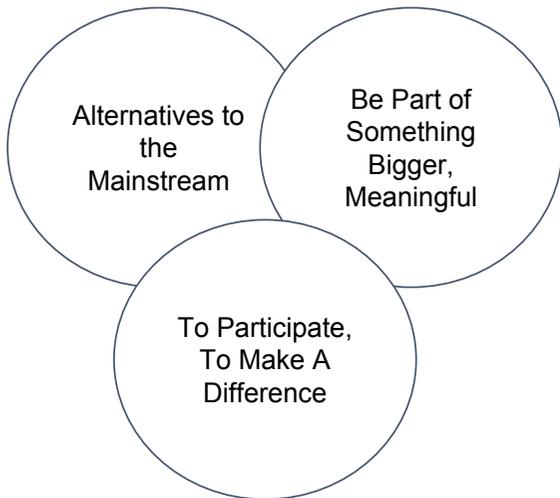
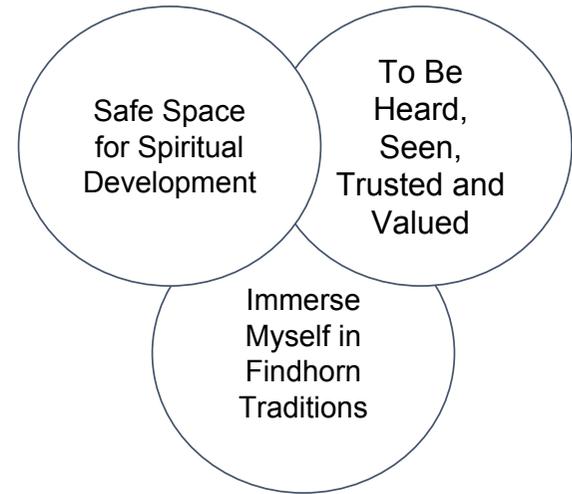
## Summary Of Findings: Needs of Young Adults at Findhorn

### 3. **Emerging Needs: Space and Agency**

A number of changes can improve experience for young people with the community as it is currently - new spaces for creativity, social life; being heard and engaged in decisions, putting money/costs openly on the agenda to be addressed.

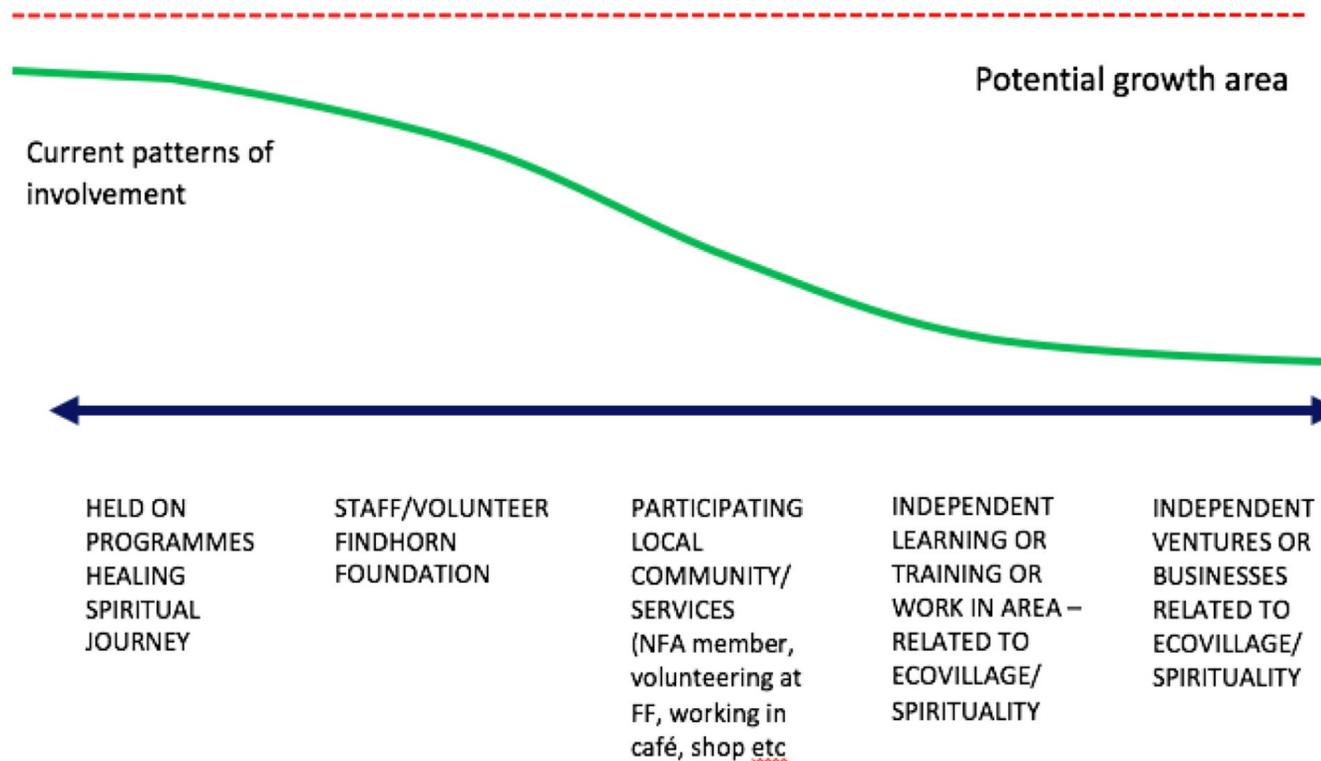
### 4. **Opportunities: Creativity and Enterprise**

We believe in order to attract a larger number of millennials/generation Z the EcoVillage needs to offer space for new, exciting, dynamic projects related to themes on sustainability, nature connection, good livelihoods - with opportunities to lead, create, build and make an impact.



# Young Adults: Patterns Of Involvement

## YOUNG ADULTS INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY AT FINDHORN



## **In their own words.....**

**(Please note that the following quotes are the experiences, opinions and words of the *interviewees*, not those of the authors of this research report)**

## 1.1 Inner Journey and Community

“I am here to find a place that has more acknowledged conscious living than the normal city or time in any place” volunteer, 21.

“I don’t have to work hard to experience beautiful things or for magic to happen, it just happens” short-term visitor, 32

“For me, Findhorn can be a powerful container to learn about your own needs” FF, 25.

“I have found more and more and more stuff to work on that I was not aware of and that is not exactly positive but definitely something very interesting with which to employ your time” FF, 28.

## 1.2 Inner Journey and Community

“I really get challenged by my many blind spots but I am hugely supported by the transformational field and support to really force myself to grow” FF, 34.

“Can be as slow or fast as one likes. It is very much up to the individual and that is what I like about it. It is more of an open space” volunteer, 21.

“You meet all these people who influence you and kind of inspire you” volunteer, 21.

“Cullerne is like a healing process everyday just being in nature” volunteer, 21.

“How does Findhorn community help people take what they have learnt from the outside world? How does it play out? Are there stories from the outside world as to what happens next?” Visitor, 21

## 1.3 Inner Journey and Community

“I have a real gratitude and admiration for what the community is. I appreciate it can be difficult and complex, and that people are warm and welcoming, and that there is an old fashioned energy to the place” visitor, 32

“I feel I have been really appreciated for my work efforts, and it’s helped me work across all of these departments” short-term programmes, volunteer, 20

“I came here to explore bridging community, activism and the self, after a visit when I during my college years” FF, 25.

“I came here willing to give. I wanted to be a part of this experiment of how can we live an even better life” NFA, 26

## 2.1 Current Difficulties - Money and Living Costs

“If you want to be here you will find a way to be here”. I found that comment so empty and a little bit cruel. They will ignore the fact that you are doing 5 extra KP shifts a week in order to afford to be here. When your basic needs aren’t being met or considered, then spiritual development almost becomes a privilege” FF, 28

“I kept asking myself, how do I stay around here without becoming totally broke” visitor/volunteer, 21

“It is just too expensive for me to do more than one day as a visitor. The £25 I spent to be here for the one day was more than my food costs for the rest of the week so” visitor, 21

“Committing to Findhorn Foundation is a risk – you can end up with nothing financially and getting stuck” NFA, 30.

“We need more flexible ways for people to be in the community” FF, 25

## 2.2 Current Difficulties - Traditions and the Culture

“Findhorn, is almost like going to your grandma’s – everything is in order, she puts flowers on the table, she has this ritual, it is often good for people to have this kind of rhythm, but sometimes you think, “grandma things are different now, can you loosen up a bit?” Visitor, volunteer, 32.

“The only way I could find things and places to stay was through networking and meeting people, it was hard to find things easily otherwise” NFA, 37.

“I see many people who say they really want to come here and don’t then find their place – but for me doors would just open, and I do sort of think it depends upon what energy you come with” NFA 26

“Would have liked an access or connection point to help find my way around – but that may overwhelm community (resources wise) - so maybe a mentoring system would be better” Visitor 21

“My first impression here was that Findhorn is a bit old fashioned” visitor/volunteer, 32.

“I see people living here not doing what they are passionate about, I don’t feel I am surrounded by people following their heart and passions” visitor/volunteer, 35.

## 2.3 Current Difficulties - Voice and Agency

“Ways of working and decision making makes things more difficult than it needs to be, things aren’t made really easy for you” FF 28 year old.

“It does a lot of good for a lot of people. But it is not always right for younger people. I don’t always feel I am wanted here” resident, 20 years old.

“I sat in a break-out group with 4 people over 60 who discussed how to get more young people to Findhorn, for 10 minutes without asking me for my opinion” NFA, 30.

“Findhorn is already too big, already pre-made. You have it all. So as much as I respect the community, everything had been done, there’s no more to put into it” visitor, 26

“Young people are often put on a bit of a pedestal, or not being taken as seriously as they would like” FF 25 year old.

(In a French community) “There was a lot of trust and it always seemed to work out. There were no limitations in what you can do. In only 2 weeks I was put in charge of organising the breakfasts for 100s of people - which I did really well” FF 28 year old.

### 3.1 Emerging Needs - Space and Agency

“In my experience, young people want an exciting radical space to explore their edges and grow, where they can be with peers, have adventures, and create the life they want” NFA, 33

“It would be nice to have more people about my age because they have a different vibration” visitor, 32

“I often felt I was walking on eggshells, as there are so many rules and ways of doing things it felt like I was always about to do something wrong,” short-term course organiser, 35.

“Community centre is usually empty after 7.30pm can feel lonely” visitor, 32

“This place is a bit boring, where does everyone go at night?” resident 34

“There isn’t a living room where you can hang out here in the park, like a tribe, very natural” FF, 28.

## 3.2 Emerging Needs - Space and Agency

“There needs to be some kind of new vision. There needs to be a challenge. When you start something you attract people who want to move their energy” NFA, 39.

“I came here to do was to learn those skills of “how do I grow my own food” “how do I build my own house” that sort of very practical and radical sustainable living” NFA, 25

“I came to Findhorn to find out what else there was to do rather than just sitting around doing drugs or whatever – something a bit more interesting and different” regular visitor, 21

I sense early on that the foundation may not be working so well and there’s a lot of internal drama and I think I didn’t want to get sucked up in it and I think there’s more important world work that we need to do. I know myself and if I get involved in an organisation like that I will try to fix it until I get burnt out” NFA 26

## 4.1 Opportunities: Creativity and Enterprise

“What I want is to feel this ancient energy. The energy that got this place kick-started. And to see all those buildings it is amazing to see that back in the day. It’s the power of the people that built it together” short-term visitor, 28.

“There’s an opportunity to give young people space to build the future, pioneer a way to live and not get caught up in repairing the past” NFA, 25

## 4.2 Opportunities: Creativity and Enterprise

“Listening to nature and living with it, really is our niche in the eco-village movement” NFA, 25

“I see a lack of interest in ecovillages and climate change, people not really engaged, people do not really understand how windfarms work or the financial models of the ecovillage is. What I am seeing is that these key functions of the eco village are resting with specific people” NFA, 25.

“Findhorn’s approach to sustainability is a bit suburban, there’s a lot of use of plastic” NFA, 37

“So many people now are trying to get out of that hamster wheel of market capitalism. I think Findhorn can help play a role in that with young people coming here and saying aha – I don’t have to take part in that system at all” NFA, 25.

### 4.3 Opportunities: Creativity and Enterprise

“I also would like to organise something myself but I don’t know where to start. If you have a new idea and you want to bring people together how do you do that?” Visitor, 32.

“I hear a lot of “what am I going to do with the world?” and maybe we need more structures to figure this out because this is a very primal question” NFA, 39.

“Get the idea that the body is not a major focus here – I see quite a few people over weight and I don’t mind but it is more like how is the focus on health and well being” visitor, 34

“I organised a refugee project with EcoVillage and sustainable communities welcoming in refugees – and so when people start a new life in a new country they are already in a community setting” NFA 25

“It needs these projects that are innovative and step out a bit of the normal pricing and set prices” NFA, 25

## 4.4 Opportunities: Creativity and Enterprise

New types of programmes, topics, ways of being at an EcoVillage are being called for.

“We need relationships, structures, projects and to build things, we need to find our authentic voice in the wild” NFA, 33

“We did start this circle on healing love intimacy and sexuality which attracted a lot of people of who were interested in learning more and engaging more on experiences in love and relationships” FF, 25

“Sexuality: not really discussed and embraced – comes up a lot – doesn’t need to have centre stage but be in there somewhere” Visitor/volunteer, 32.

“In Portugal we had young people from different parts of the world came together for 12 days to volunteer and life in tents/outside a city and volunteer on various community projects and learning traditional skills” Volunteer, FF, 21

“I’d like to see creativity and groups coming together to carry out missions, creating our own rituals” Volunteer, 35.

## 5.1 Summary Comments

Money and living costs were a dominant theme amongst interviewees whether visiting or FF or NFA. Course costs and living in the area are seen as off-putting. Jobs are scarce. Rents relatively high. We also heard of a “sink or swim culture” or proposals for young people being sought mainly to provide care work and household services for an aging population.

Can a new generation be inspired to support the next phase of the EcoVillage leadership, taking sustainability to the next level in the community, taking decisions and delivery of eco-buildings, food growing, energy generation? And in doing so taking those ideas and experiences back out into the world?

Many people were reluctant to go on record with quotations - of putting heads “above the parapet”. Some interviewees felt blocks were being put in the way of being heard, finding opportunities to contribute their skills, being trusted with responsibility. Young local residents felt most excluded.

Navigating the community is difficult. Finding the right people, knowing who is in charge, or what and how things work. The vibe of the buildings and decor look “frumpy”, a bit run-down, old fashioned. Some rules seem inflexible.

## 5.2 Summary Comments

Young adults are looking for some spaces - in all its forms - physical, social, cultural, creative, political - to express themselves and learn by doing away from the “gaze” of the community. This also includes new ways of working, new types of programmes, designed by, with and for young adults themselves.

Young people we met were all busy within the community, working, volunteering, learning however, overall we got the sense of untapped potential.

Our research indicated to us that many young people are looking for an alternative to the mainstream, a chance to build or create something new, whether a new generation of EcoVillages or create their own business or projects or workshops. They want to make things happen, and find the spirit, history and community of Findhorn an inspiration, albeit that innovations here are starting to show their age.

However they find there are currently few opportunities for that to happen locally, so they go elsewhere or if they come, enjoy a short stay and move on. We believe finding ways to support creativity and enterprise of young adults is key in attracting and supporting a new generation.

## 5.3 Summary Comments

Many interviewees said that community members seem unhappy, low.

People told us they want to contribute, create their own business, projects inspired by conscious living and need either help and programmes finding their path, or a platform and resources to get going....

We heard many good things about the warmth and openness in the area. FF and NFA offer a valuable alternative space to the mainstream society.

The old fashioned, older population makes for a settled and secure environment, with well honed systems in place and lots of talented people and wise elders.

We were asked where people go after being at Findhorn? In fact, does Findhorn celebrate its alumni enough?

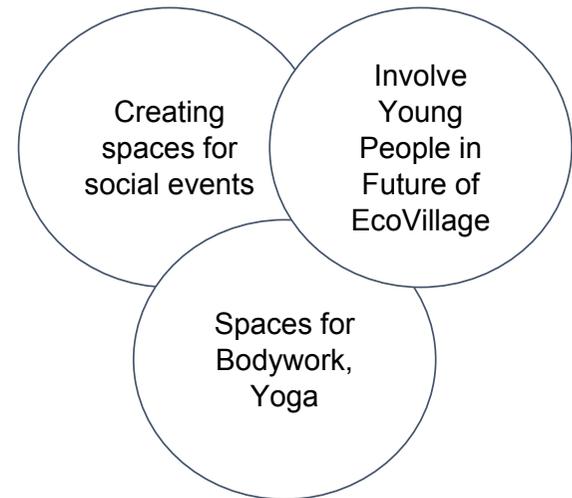
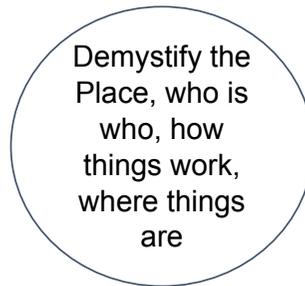
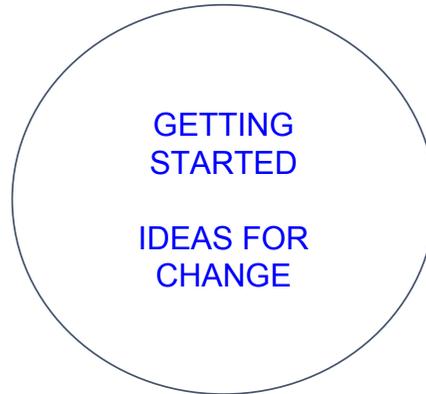
Rights come responsibilities - if Findhorn as an Ecovillage steps forward to the challenge, are new generation ready to step up, and then is Findhorn ready for young people?

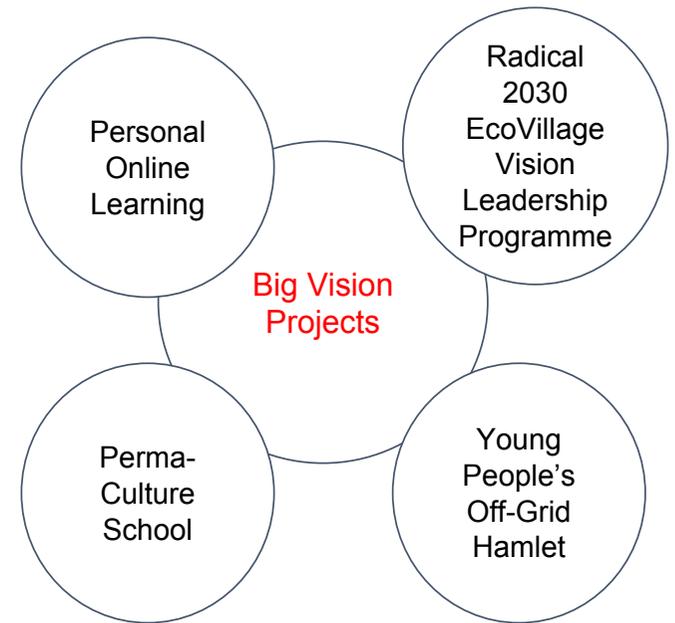
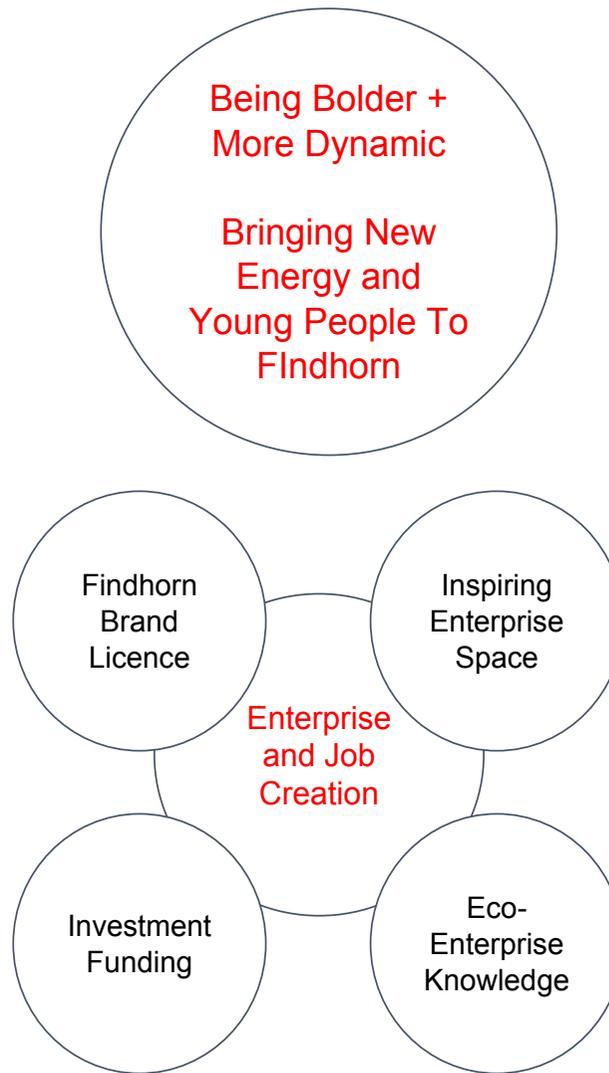
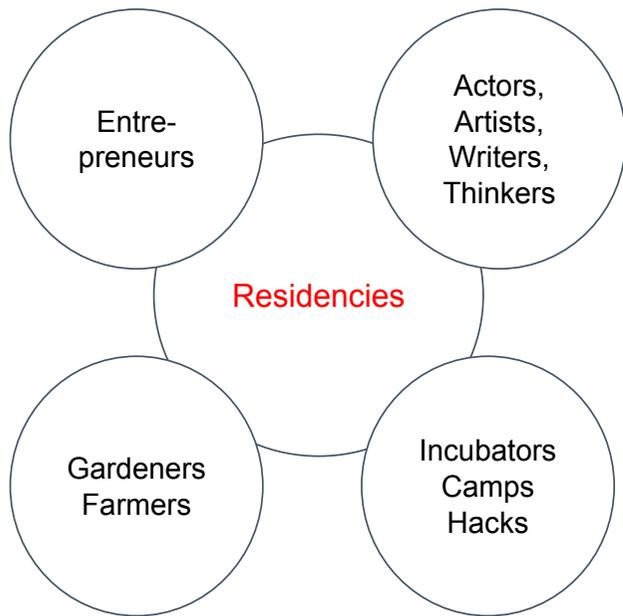
## **Recommendation - 8 Points to Get Started**

Cheaper / subsidised courses: Findhorn Foundation and College

1. Affordable living spaces: rental spaces short and long-term, full-woofing facilities at Cullerne
2. Elders Advisory Circle: celebrating wisdom, energy, knowledge, experience and skills of older members of the community to advise and guide the community including younger people
3. New Social Spaces: physical space young people to gather, create, experiment
4. Positions on boards: are the interests of young people being represented directly or indirectly in decision making
5. Residencies: young artists, designers, entrepreneurs, musicians, permaculturalists, playwrights, film-makers, poets, philosophers - all enabled to be inspired by and inspire Findhorn EcoVillage
6. Good Enterprise/Job Creation: putting the “E” word on the agenda and supporting start-ups, use of a brand license, young entrepreneurs interested in sustainability, nature connection or spirituality to bring
7. Practical community building skills: helping young people to learn skills in decision-making, conflict resolution, non-violent communication, deep listening
8. Practical sustainability skills - going off-grid - such as micro energy generation

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# Thank you - interviewees and contributors

James Stapleton-Cotton

Maria Cooper

Jamie Jackson

Daniela Zapf

Sam Shohet

Vicky Meyer-Leker

Tineke Brinkhorst

Martin Pentenreider

Nicos Valmas

Loes Berkhout

Elizabeth Smith

Cloudia Tinley

Phillipa Bray

Lua Ordas

Peter Egan

Niusia Winczewski

Megan Searby

Judith Grootes

Léo Schweitzer

Cloud Tinley

Vera Franco

Jake Jay-Lewin

Liz Smit

Peter (Tenerife)

Willow Holdcroft

Julia Lay

Lily MacClelland

Esther Zajackowska

Oceana Rum