

Engaging young people in climate change solutions

BLAKE (The Sir Peter Blake Trust)

Governments and leaders around the world recognise the importance of involving young people in climate action. Environment-based education from BLAKE uses virtual reality (VR) to help tamariki and rangatahi learn about climate change and explore ways to make a positive difference.

Melting glaciers, underwater seaweed forests and hills topped with wind turbines are just a few of the unique environments brought into the classroom through BLAKE's climate-focused education. The not-for-profit organisation carries on the work of Sir Peter Blake, who inspired millions of people around the world to care more about the environment and take action to protect it.

With support through the Climate and Sustainability Fund in December 2022, BLAKE developed and piloted a virtual reality climate change module for their NZ-VR environmental education programme. The programme is shaped by national climate policy and enriched with locally relevant Wellington content, including local climate goals and initiatives.

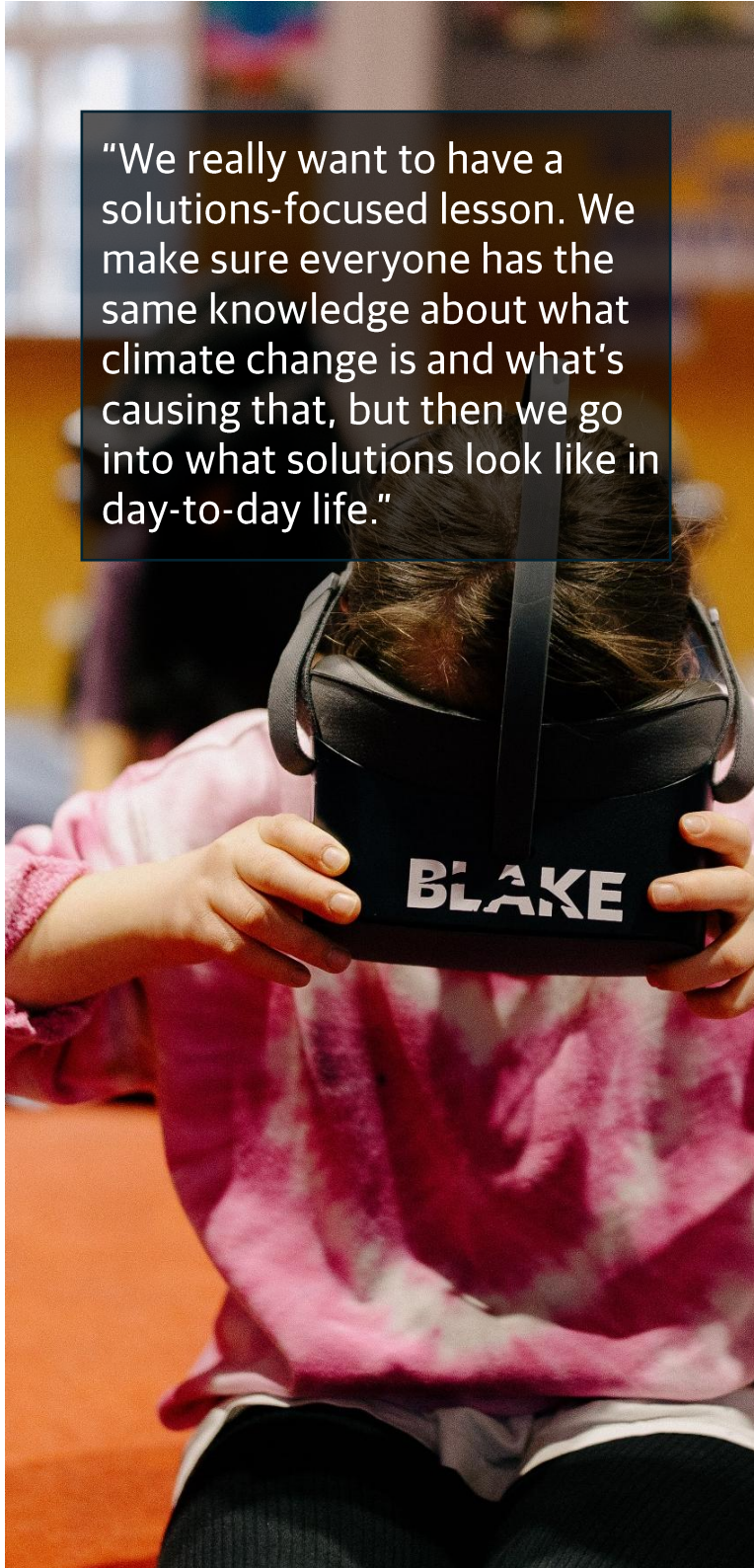
The NZ-VR programme supports teachers and students to better understand the causes of climate change, how it affects us and what we can do. BLAKE's programme manager Alice McCullough says VR is a great way to bring a range of significant places and creatures to kids who might not otherwise get to see and hear them.

> "We use VR so we can bring these environments to everyone. In the past we have taken students away for a certain period of time but not everyone can do that. So this is a great first experience." *- Alice McCullough, BLAKE*

Around 9,000 intermediate-aged students in Pōneke | Wellington experience BLAKE's VR education each year, contributing to a total of around 40,000 per year across the motu. A learning session begins with a short presentation about a particular environmental issue or goal. Then each student in the classroom dons a VR headset to see how the issue connects to people, places and creatures in Aotearoa.

Alice McCullough says the climate change lesson is designed to address anxiety by helping young people understand the actions they can take.

The VR experience places students in the middle of a scene with 360-degree views. Each real-life visual world helps them understand the positive action happening throughout New Zealand. In the depths of the ocean, looking to the right reveals a ginormous southern right whale as part of learning about carbon sequestration. Walking around a hydroelectric dam brings the idea of renewable energy to life. Students explore the sights and sounds of sustainable



transport, the future of food and regenerating native forest without leaving the classroom.

Alice McCullough says the VR climate action lesson also shares some Pōneke scenes with students around the country.

> "One of the VR experiences is on the front of a Kaicycle bike. We've got a drone flyover of Mākara wind farms, and some kelp forests around Kāpiti Island." *– Alice McCullouah. BLAKE*

Nothing compares to being outside in the natural world when learning about conservation and climate action. But not every family is able to visit different parts of the country or access special tours. The immersive aspects of VR mean everyone in a class can feel what it's like to climb glaciers, swim with whales and follow a compost-collecting bike through the city streets.

BLAKE's team plans carefully to make sure the VR experience can support action in the real world. As part of each session, students and teachers come up with ideas for taking climate action at home and in their daily lives. Some schools develop ongoing plans and activities to keep students engaged in climate change solutions, building a strong legacy of lasting impact.

Alice McCullough says it's satisfying to work with enthusiastic young people who want to be part of tackling the biggest issue society is facing.

> "Climate change is affecting everything we do. Now we can actually see it in the real world, people are starting to take it more seriously." *– Alice McCullough, BLAKE*



Young people are key to driving climate innovation and building a resilient future. Let's support and equip them to take action through education and hands-on climate initiatives.

To learn more, visit **blakenz.org**