

Evaluating University Climate Wellness Models: Lessons Learned and Future Directions

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BACKGROUND

The climate crisis is taking a growing toll on young people's mental health, yet most universities lack spaces to process these emotions [1]. To address this, the **Wellness Impact Lab (WIL)** began hosting **Climate Cafés** - informal gatherings for students to share and cope with climate emotional related distress [1].

Climate Cafés at York University

- The Climate Cafés at the Wellness Impact Lab were designed by **Dr. Harvey Skinner and Susan Harris**, who adapted the Climate Psychology Alliance-North America (CPA-NA) model to meet the unique needs and context of York University students.
- Our **evaluation** tool was co-developed by Susan Harris, Dr. Harvey Skinner, and Katherine Newman, with additional input and refinements provided by Sophia Bryan-Carbonell.

Sample Characteristics

Age	M = 24.6 years, SD = 8.72
Sex	73 participants (78.3% female, 21.7% other)

Pros: Fostered hope, peer connection, pro-environmental motivation, and open discussion of climate emotions.

Cons: Online Cafés had lower engagement and more negative emotions; participation skewed toward women; transnational students had distinct needs; attendance affected by timing and consistency.

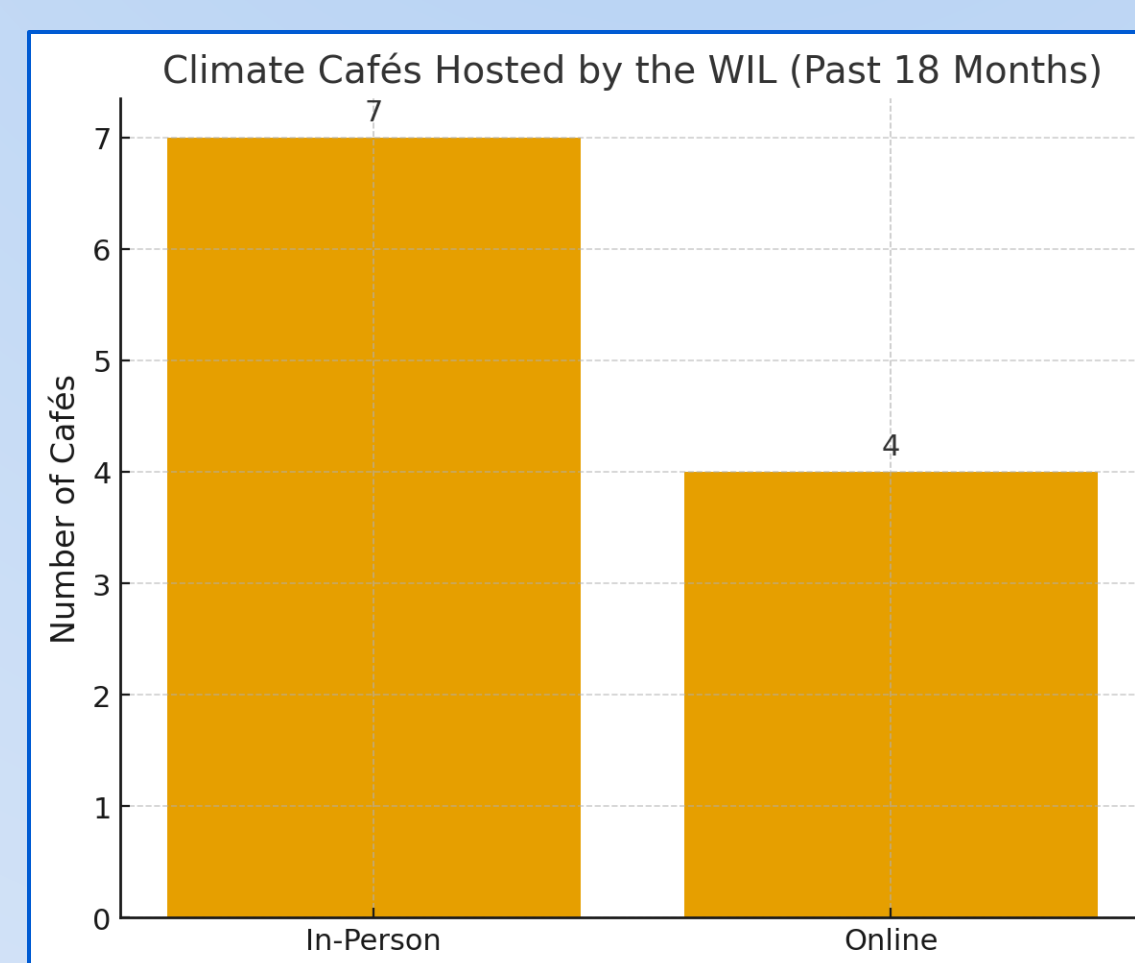


Figure 1: # of Climate Cafés hosted by the WIL (October 2024-May 2025)

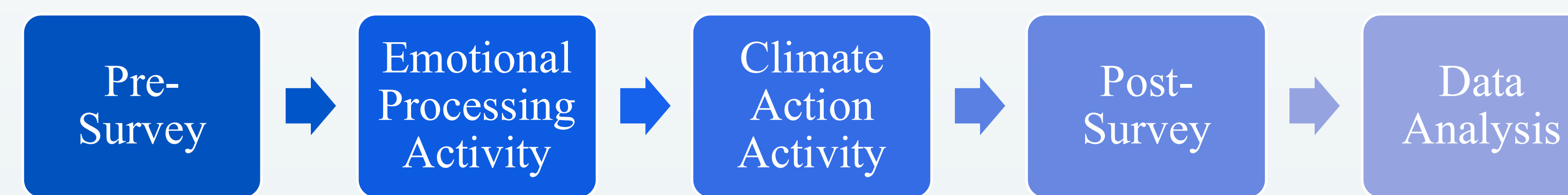
CREATION OF THE NEST

Building on the Climate Café model, **Sarah Merghani and Sophia Bryan-Carbonell** launched *The Nest*, a student-led initiative funded by Agents of Change YorkU that integrates dialogue, creative expression, and climate action.

METHODS

The **preliminary** evaluation used a **pre and post event survey** design to measure changes in emotional states, community support, and motivation for climate action. Students completed short 1–5 Likert scale surveys before and after each *Nest Circle*, assessing community support, coping confidence, personal action, motivation, and connection to the circle's theme (post-only). Findings reflect preliminary trends from **26 participants (Pre n = 24; Post n = 26)**.

The Nest Evaluation Design



RESULTS

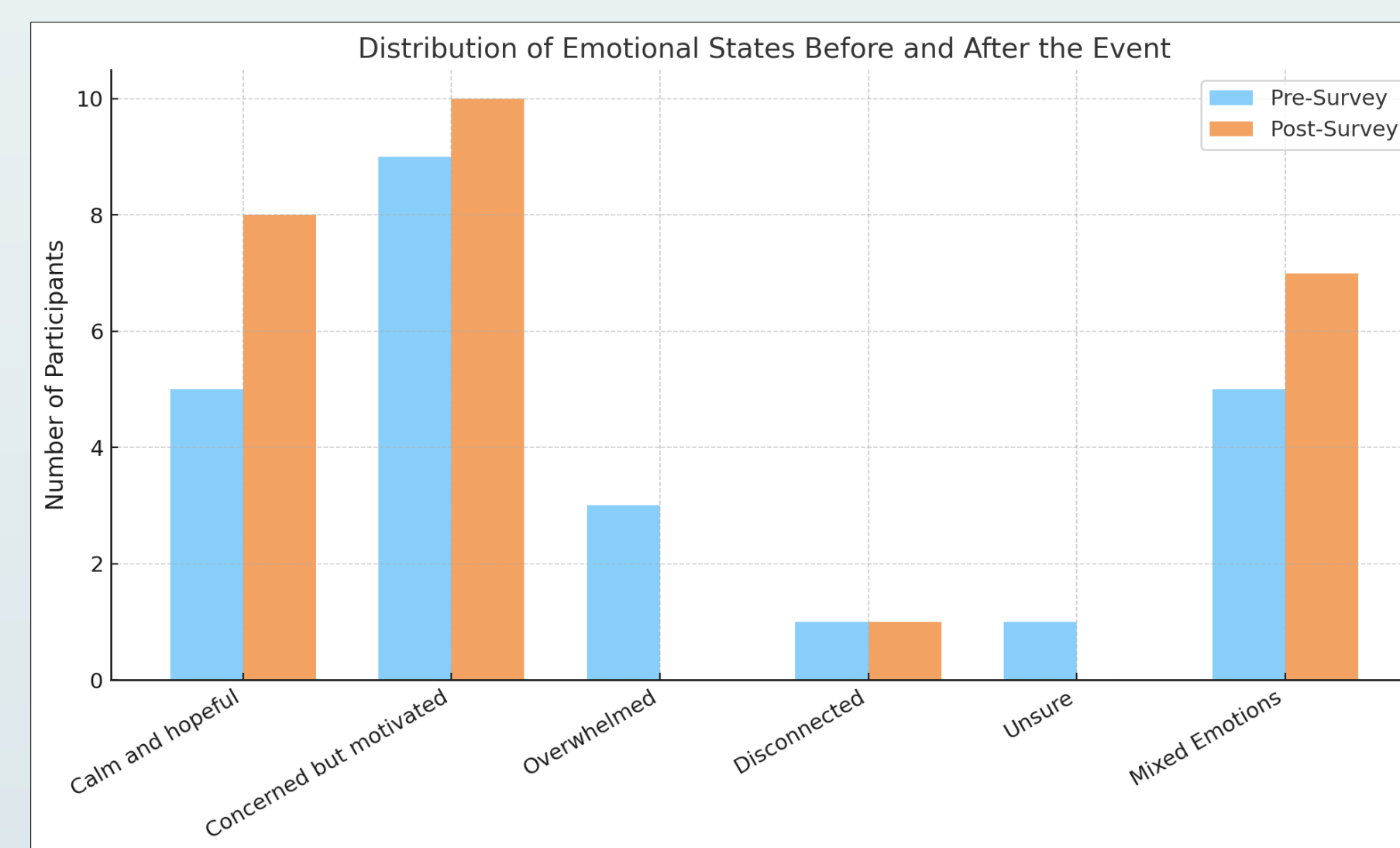


Figure 2: Shift in Emotional States (Pre vs. Post)

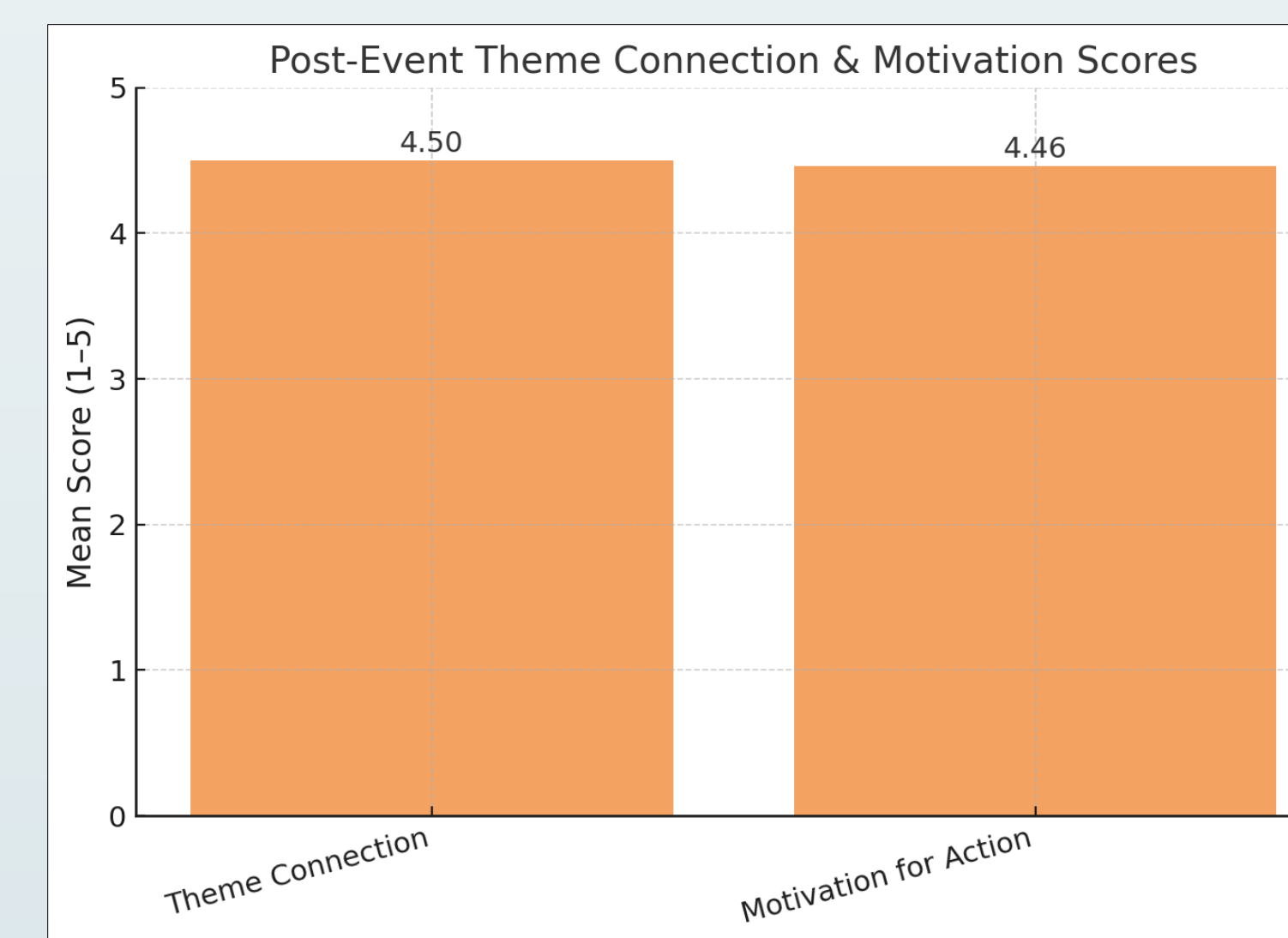


Figure 3: Shows strong post-event ratings for both Theme Connection and Motivation for Action



Figure 4: Shows mean scores on a 1–5 scale for each outcome before and after the nest circle

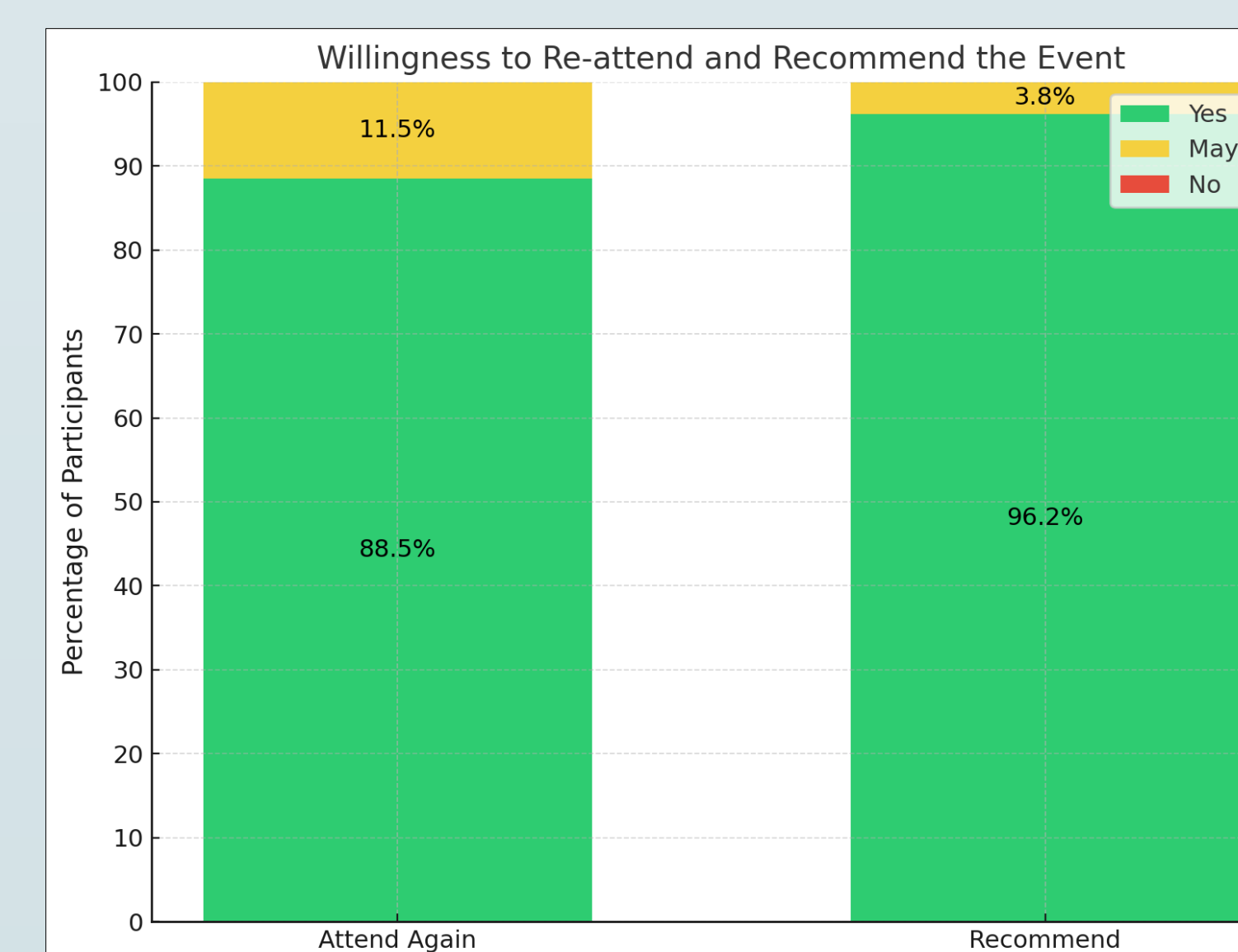


Figure 5: Intention to Attend Again and Likelihood of Recommending The Nest

DISCUSSION

1. Strengthening Emotional Coping & Belonging

- Preliminary findings show that participation in *The Nest* improved coping confidence and perceptions of community support.
- These results suggest that structured, peer-based dialogue can effectively transform eco-related emotional distress into connection, reflection, and motivation for action.

2. Emotional Reframing & Motivation for Action

- Participants' emotions shifted from *overwhelmed* to *concerned but hopeful and motivated*.
- This positive reframing highlights how collective dialogue can channel anxiety into pro-active climate engagement.

3. Engagement and Satisfaction

- 96% of participants would recommend a *nest circle* to others.
- Post-event motivation averaged above 4.4/5, showing high resonance with the event's format.
- Consistent emotional validation and peer connection were key success factors.

4. Implications for Future Programming

- Results highlight the value of integrating emotional processing, creative expression, and actionable activities within climate mental health resources.
- Continue expanding peer facilitation training and climate wellbeing leadership.
- Adapt and translate evaluation tool for wider use across programs and campuses.
- Collaborate with clubs, faculty and community organizations to scale both Climate Cafés and Nest models beyond York University.

REFERENCES

- De Jong A, Harris S, Costanian C, Skinner H. Climate cafés as a space for navigating climate emotions, a scoping review. *J Clim Change Health*. 2025;24:100466. doi:10.1016/j.joclim.2025.100466