

## Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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### Summary:

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The realisation that communities lack resilience in the face of food and energy scarcity, forces a reconsideration of our developmental objectives. We are challenged to identify new or adapted systems for production, distribution and consumption suited to delivering well-being now and in the future.

We must ensure suitable investment in those capitals influencing well-being: Capital that complements, allows for and is interdependent upon meeting food and energy needs; such as kinship, health and education. A knowledge of sustainability technologies, policy and science underpins this essay but I have written a human story, for that is the story that must unfold.

### Essay:

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It's a cold morning, the kind of cold that stays deep in your bones and makes your body crave a hot and stodgy meal. The queue in front is slowly losing numbers as each grateful recipient takes their small parcel, thanks the volunteers and turns to start the walk home, taking care to hide their relief from those still waiting patiently in line. People around here stopped showing off some time ago. It's November, 2010 and those receiving emergency food parcels in the small Welsh valleys town are glad that they'll be able to feed their families until the weekend. Just a year ago, many of those queuing had pushed trolleys of bulk and colour, out of the supermarket and towards their cars, or struggled under the weight of plastic carrier bags as they made the slow climb back up to the estates at the top of the valley.

The old houses leak hot air like steam from kettles. On a cold morning you can see the heat rising. From old boiler, through carpet then out through the moss-covered slate roofs – thermal spirals of precious cash into the sky. The houses with large families have fared better this winter; huddling together at night. It's easy to forget how last year, children would complain of sleeping next to the boiler which was too hot, too loud.

Outside in the street, the kids are playing as you walk past. They'll know to come in when the smell of food the air, but for now the whole road is theirs. Most of the cars have gone now: No windows to smash with stray shots, no screams of 'off the road' as neighbours return from work. The road is playground now.

A group of 20 or so kids disperse then scarper into overgrown hedges, leap into empty wheelie bins and lie down beneath the bicycle stand that the rugby club built last Saturday. One child stands, eyes half shut, counting down. They let their heartbeats settle from the exercise they struggled to find on their doorsteps before the jobs and

The mines closed in the 1970's and it seemed like each town was under a black cloud, just as the real black cloud of soot and coal dust had been blown away.

The town had been forced to look outwards – men who grew up with tough fathers who toiled in gas-filled caverns, were encouraged to train as recruitment or IT workers. Those who failed were left unused and those who got rich left town, or gained flashy suits and cosmetically soft skin that made older men uncomfortable.

Suicide rates were high before: A cocktail of exponential aspiration, debt and alienation pushing the young to exit. Many found work in the city, where call centres thrived on the refinancing of debts, selling of insurance or the service of customers. Breakfast with the children, school plays and sports days were foregone in the name of professionalism and for years the town became a car park.

When the oil prices went up, the town suffered and then cracked. There was no resilience to the addiction that the town had to oil. Every loaf of bread bought, every journey made, home-heated or meal cooked was born of oil and tied tightly to its price. The community knew it and had begun to realise that things had to change.

One evening in 2008, as Icelandic banks melted on television screens, residents gathered together in the town hall, to decide what action should be taken locally. Proud families declared poverty, bemoaned a lack of leadership and begged for lower taxes and fuel subsidies. Cries for sticking plaster solutions gave way to new ideas and to realisation that only sustainable ways would work.

Plans were forged to remove street lighting and use the money to provide each home with an energy efficiency budget. The college trained in loft and wall insulation techniques, PVC window installation and lime-plastering. Already, many houses had been improved to the point where they barely needed to be heated. In time, the national government's plans for renewable and nuclear energy would keep those remaining fuel costs down.

The Women's Institute agreed to start teaching 'grow your own' food techniques, and with the help of the sports clubs, organised to clear unused or decorative gardens so that come springtime a harvest could be planted. A food co-operative was formed, running a seed exchange and coordinating the growth of all the foods a community would need to eat healthily.

Chicken coops were built, sheep purchased by the butchers to be grazed by volunteers who would later buy the meat and wool backcheaply. People dug gardens, built fences and insulated lofts. Health workers noted a drop in the heart disease and asthma rates that had characterised the stressed, processed food-fed and sedentary lifestyles of recent years.

The Council developed a new resource plant for the town. Waste would be sorted in the home, then collected by electric cart and sent to be recycled on the site of the old steelworks. Anything that couldn't be recycled was turned into power that fed into houses. Anaerobic digesters collected methane from food waste and the growing piles of animal slurry, converting it to heat that went directly to the school.

The new credit union allowed trial manufacture of insulation products from the recycled paper and plastic. The products sold, with all those houses being

refurbished locally. Everyone wanted the businesses to succeed, since it was a collective investment.

It felt to many as if the community had been reborn. Families were spending time together, meals made from scratch, not packets, demanded a group effort and led to the sharing of duties. On the cold nights you could now escape your private world and share the warmth of community activity that had had lain dormant while growth, wealth and competition had ruled minds and promised so much.