

JULY 2021 | ISSUE 10

GO2GRAD

TO ENHANCE, TO EMPOWER, TO ENRICH

NEWSLETTER



STUDENTS
VS
CLIMATE CHANGE

The illustration features a stylized globe with green continents and blue oceans, held gently in two brown hands. The hands are positioned as if supporting the globe. Overlaid on the globe is the text 'STUDENTS VS CLIMATE CHANGE' in a white, hand-drawn, brush-stroke font. The 'VS' is written in a larger, orange font. The hands are dripping with blue and green liquid, which is falling into a pool of water at the bottom of the frame. The background is a solid blue color.

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TIME TO RISE AND SHYNE

BY: ROZY ABO MAZID

Climate change is one of our generation's biggest problems and it's up to us to play our part in saving our planet. Knowing this, the youth are more involved than they've ever been in fact, most of the protests targeting climate change are youth-led. Protests, however, are not the only thing our generation is doing to raise awareness regarding climate change. Students all over the world are taking matters into their own hands by starting organizations to raise awareness, launching businesses with sustainable initiatives, and encouraging others to join in the conversation to help make a change.

One particular business that stands out in the sea of sustainable brands is Shyne. Shyne produces glasses made up of 100% recycled materials and is 100% student-led. Students from different majors who are all attending the

University of Ottawa have come together to play a part in this project because they believe in climate change and want to make a difference. I sat down with the project manager of Shyne, Alex Parsan, and Shyne's social media marketer, Antoinette Akkawi, to talk about all things Shyne and climate change! We started off our conversation by **sharing our thoughts on this crisis.**

"It's a problem that's been building on for generations and yet nothing is happening about it. Many people are choosing not to listen to science and even though we have more awareness and more knowledge of what the repercussions are, reparations are not being made to the fullest extent and we're still digging ourselves a bigger hole." - Antoinette

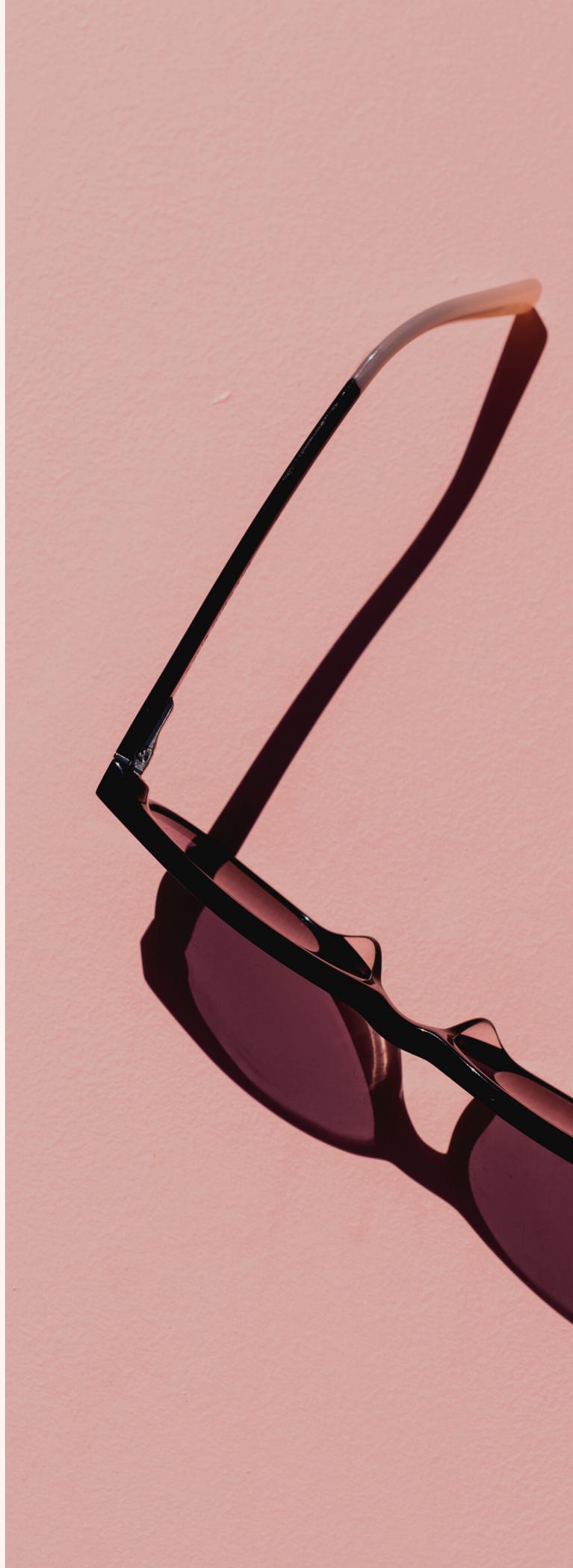
"I couldn't agree more with that! I think we have to collectively put our heads together and think about innovative ways to address this problem. We have to use our voices to amplify and cut through the noise because this is an important and defining issue for our generation." - Alex.

While breaking down their thoughts on our current climate crisis, Alex mentioned that the work they do for Shyne is one of the major ways that they're contributing to the fight against climate change. With that being said, I asked them to **tell me a little bit more about Shyne!**

"Shyne's mission is to provide eyewear that does good for the planet and the people, it's a kind of do good and look good project. Our glasses are 100% sustainable, all made from recycled material, and we are a social enterprise, so we also donate to charities. We get pelletized recycled plastic from our partner, Aquafil, and they send it to our manufacturer, Danor, to create our products and packaging." -Antionette

It's not an uncommon idea to recycle plastic wastes and to use the recycled material to create new products, however, I was curious to know **why eyewear out of all the things they could have created** so I asked Alex and he responded by stating,

"So, the company essentially began in 2018 and it was created by two friends who worked in retail. These two friends saw firsthand how much plastic waste was being made every day and wanted to do something about this problem. They kind of looked at the situation and said "hey we got to do something about this" instead of sitting around and encouraging it. They went with glasses because they wanted to make a cool product from recycled materials and eyewear fit



what they had in mind. They poured their heart and soul into researching and planning and they eventually brought on more team members to push this dream forward into reality. All their hard work didn't go to waste and we had our first product launch last November!" - Alex.

The founders of Shyne are not the only people who have come across the excessive amount of plastic waste that the world of fast fashion produces, however, they are one of the few who decided to do something about it, and I find that quite inspiring! Knowing they were also students when they decided to commit to Shyne got me wondering **how many students are involved in this project?**

"We're proud to say that Shyne is a 100% student-led operation and from marketing to finance and operations students run it all! The Shyne team consists of nine members for the summer, but that number does go up in September where we bring more students on board and we're super excited to continue to grow the team in the next couple of months!" - Alex.

Focusing a little more on their products, I asked Antoinette to walk me through **why they chose to use Econyl instead of Nylon to create their glasses.**

"So, our partner Aquafil collects textile wastes and fishing nets to recycle them and creates an environmentally friendly alternative to Nylon known as Econyl. Nylon is harmful to the planet since it's petroleum-based, so we were very thankful for our partner Aquafil who were able to create Econyl using their advanced technological methods. On the inside of our glasses, you can see that it is made from 100% recycled materials which we're very proud of!" - Antoinette.



The great thing about the Shyne team is that they're involved in the fight against climate change in their own way! Being students and being surrounded by students, I decided to ask Alex and Antionette if they believed **whether or not the youth was enough to win this battle to which they responded,**

"I think one thing we've seen our generation do is present creative ideas that can help us tackle our climate crisis. You also see things like the climate marches for action led by students and it becomes clear that the youth is involved and engaged in environmental action and activism. I think younger people are more aware of this issue now more than ever and you see a community of students from different grades



popping up to act which shows an increase in awareness. I think students are doing amazing work making their voices and concerns heard, I find that very impressive! I think what's important is the continued action towards this crisis and I think I'd love to see students continue to act on the ideas that they have, to try it out and see what changes they can make in their communities." - Alex.

"I completely agree, in terms of are we doing enough it's so hard to say what is enough because there's never enough, there are still problems in this climate change subject that we're not aware of yet. Our solutions aren't 100% sustainable but you know you have to choose your battles." - Antoinette.

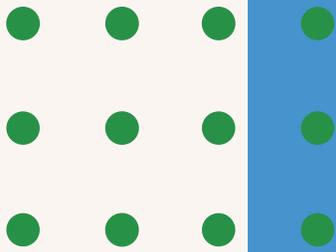
With such wonderful and hopeful responses from Alex and Antoinette, I decided to wrap up our session by asking them **what message they would give to the rest of the youth regarding climate change.**

"If I were repping Shyne, I would say that buying our glasses isn't going to save the world and we're transparent about that, but it is a step in the right direction. Our main goal for Shyne is to

raise awareness and encourage other people to make better, more sustainable decisions. I know that the years are moving fast and instead of letting panic takeover, I think we need to channel that panic into action and do something to help save our planet." - Antoinette.

"I think hearing the number nine does raise panic and yes you should panic. This is a serious issue and it's not going to go away if we don't speak up about this. But I know that nine years is not tomorrow so we have time to act. We need to direct our energy to people who need to be hearing this and get them on board. I think you're never too young to join in on the conversation and make a change." - Alex.

I couldn't agree and I want to give a big shoutout to Alex and Antoinette for letting us in on the Shyne project and for being a delight to talk to! Shyne will continue to produce sustainable products and we will continue to support them as they make a dent in the world of fast fashion! For more information on Shyne and to shop their products, click [here](#).



Stella Bowles

Meet Stella Bowles, a Canadian climate activist who began advocating for climate change when she discovered that the river located near her house was used as a dumping ground for sewage wastes. Stella came to this realization when she tested the water in the river for fecal bacteria for her grade six science fair project. She posted about her findings on Facebook where they went viral and caught the attention of several government officials. As a result of her findings and decision to share them publicly, the government spent 15.7 million dollars cleaning up the river.



YOUTH IN ACTION: MEET PROJECT NIBI

BY: ROZY ABO MAZID

Access to clean drinking water is a human right.

Project Nibi is a social enterprise that provides solutions for the water crisis in Indigenous communities across Canada. Project Nibi is a student-led project, and they hope to empower the youth in these communities by supporting and providing resources to maintain clean drinking water. We sat down with Alexandra Whiteduck, a First Nations woman and project manager for Project Nibi, to discuss the water crisis in Indigenous communities across Canada, Project Nibi's unique purification solutions, and climate change! We started off our conversation by **sharing our thoughts on climate change.**

"I believe that a lot of people don't understand how bad it is or how bad it's going to get if we don't act as soon as possible. I think the mentality that certain people associate with this issue is "why should I go out of my way and change my lifestyle if nobody else is going to do it". "

Unfortunately, not everyone is as involved as they should be in this fight against climate change, however, Alexandra is **doing her part** as she mentioned,

"So, I try to practice a zero-waste lifestyle and I participate in climate action protests. Most of my contributions are done through Project Nibi because it is a platform that encourages change in terms of how we can take certain steps to help our planet."

*Access to safe and clean
drinking water is a human right.*

- Project Nibi



While explaining what she does to help make a difference, Alexandra mentioned that Project Nibi plays a big part in her contribution to the fight against climate change. With that being said, I asked her to **tell me a little bit more about Project Nibi!**

"I'm a second-generation project manager, so the founders have graduated and I'm now taking care of the project. The founders discovered that there was a water crisis happening in Indigenous communities across Canada and what frustrated them was that nothing was being done about it, especially by the Government of Canada. So, they decided to create Project Nibi and they were going to go into Indigenous communities and create filtration systems but the fact that they were still students who were still learning about engineering or science made it hard for them to act on creating these systems. With the help of our partners, Birchbark Coffee and Life from Water, we can help and support Indigenous communities take ownership of their water and we can create the proper infrastructure based on the communities' necessities, which makes our program customizable. Project Nibi also focuses on educating the youth about water testing or maintaining their water through workshops where we introduce the systems to the youth and explain what types of contaminants are being filtered from the water."

The wonderful thing about the story of Project Nibi is that although the founders were students at the time, they were determined enough to act on this injustice and decided to reach out and find partners who could help them out in creating a customizable program to support Indigenous communities to get access to clean and safe drinking water. After hearing the background story of Project Nibi, I was curious to know **why they chose to tackle the water crisis in Indigenous communities across Canada**, which Alexandra explained,

"Our founders are strong allies for the Indigenous communities in Canada, and they were reading about the water crisis and decided that they had the resources and the funds to help and support these communities. The project has changed since its original creation but as we evolve we can access more funds and offer more support which is great."

Being that the founders were students when they launched this project, I asked Alexandra to tell me a little bit more about the students involved on the Nibi team,

"So, Project Nibi is student-led and the Nibi team consists of seven students as of right now but we're recruiting more in the fall. The students involved in Project Nibi come from different

educational backgrounds; people with different backgrounds and different majors offer different perspectives and that's what makes the project grow."

Speaking of students and involvement of the youth, Alexandra mentioned the **youth workshops** that Project Nibi offers,

"We've offered three workshops in the past, and it's been more speaker-oriented. we've had speakers, artists, and a chef that are very close to the crisis lead the conversation. We've also done activities related to the water crisis within these youth groups. We're working on developing six more interactive science workshops and six keynote speaker workshops so over the year we'll be offering twelve workshops that people can sign up for. "

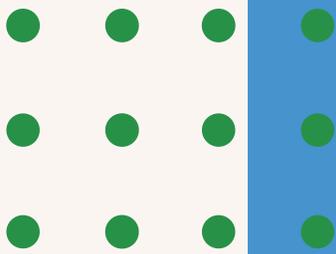
Being that Project Nibi offers workshops for the youth and that their entire operation is student-led, I asked Alexandra **if she believes we have a fighting chance against climate change** to which she responded,

"Absolutely, so what's great about Project Nibi is that we work closely with Indigenous communities. Indigenous people are stewards of the land and they know how to use resources without depleting them. They know how to re-establish balance with nature. I think it's easier for them to address climate change, guide the world towards respecting the planet and allow the planet to heal."

I want to give Alexandra a huge shoutout for being such a lovely interviewee and for sitting down with me and explaining the water crisis in Indigenous communities across Canada and her thoughts on climate change!

If you would like to learn more, you can join one of the youth groups offered by Project Nibi by clicking [here](#).





Albert Lalonde

Meet Albert Lalonde, a Canadian climate activist, student, and spokesperson for Devoir Environmental Collectif. Albert joined forces with Greta Thunberg at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2019 where he spoke about climate change and demanded action alongside a crowd of 8,000 people. Albert stated *“Because of the climate crisis, and because of government actions which make this crisis worse, today we are not free to imagine our futures, to pursue a degree and career, or to think and make the choice of raising children, instead we must constantly come face to face with the reality of climate chaos.”*



AN INSIDE LOOK INTO A YOUTH-LED YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATION

BY: ROZY ABO MAZID

Nothing says youth empowerment more than an organization made by the youth for the youth!

The Foundation for Environmental Stewardship (FES) is a not-for-profit organization accredited by the United Nations. FES is youth-led and empowers the youth to create a more inclusive, fair, prosperous, and sustainable future. We sat down with the wonderful Kat Cadungog, executive director of FES, to discuss the goals behind FES a little more and to delve deeper into our generation's biggest problem. But before diving right in, I asked Kat to **tell me a little bit about herself,**

"I'm Kat, I'm a second-generation immigrant and I'm the executive director of the Foundation for Environmental Stewardship and I wear a ton of different hats in the field. I started as a consultant to different youth communities throughout Canada particularly in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

telling them, not like guiding in different action projects within the local community to tackle climate change. From there, I was promoted to the director of operations and administration, and I went on to organize the virtual transformation of our sustainable development goals training program delivered to universities and expanded that beyond Canada into the USA and the UK. I stepped into the executive director role in early 2021. I'm passionate about youth empowerment and I believe they are incredible agents of change. In every single pivotal moment in time within history and once again youth are at the frontlines of this historical moment, that is the climate crisis. So, I am so passionate about the work being done by youth and focus my work on trying to find ways to empower them and get them heard by decision-makers."

To be so passionate about youth empowerment and environmental justice and to act upon this passion by dedicating your career to it is quite

inspiring and I applaud Kat for her dedication to this worthy cause! FES also stands behind youth empowerment and has **launched two successful programs that target climate change** and the involvement of the youth. Kat broke down these two programs by stating,

"Now, FES originally hosted two different projects: the 3% Project and the Sustainable Development Goals Youth Training Program. The 3% Project was a project that our founder worked on and is what started the work at FES. By attending a lot of universities and colleges, he found that a lot of students wished they knew more about climate action before they had gone to university and that's when he came up with the 3% project. So, we intended to go to as many schools as we could - particularly in remote, rural, and Indigenous communities to advocate for climate action but to frame it around solutions rather than the problems. A lot of times it's easy to get eco-anxiety and feel paralyzed by the scale of the problem but people often forget that the solutions are there, they just aren't as well resourced as the problems. The 3% project was very successful and it's no longer operating but we have our sustainable development goals training program. That started in 2015 with the launch of the SDGs. At the time there was not a lot of education around it, so we were one of the first people going to universities and colleges talking about sustainable development and encouraging them to develop different alliances within their school getting the word out."

Being that FES is a youth-led youth-serving organization, I asked Kat to **tell me a little bit more about the students involved in FES.**

"Students do reach out to us from time to time just for mentorship. For university and college students we do have volunteers to come in and help with certain specific tasks here and there. We always like



to offer internships to students, and we have 3 summer students on our team right now and they're just lovely! Students can get involved, whether they would like to volunteer or if they would like to work with us. However, it's important to note that we're very much the type of organization that prefers to provide youth with full-time livable wages versus part-time gigs that force youth to find multiple jobs because that's not sustainable. We are very much an organization that focuses on quality over quantity with a keen focus on ensuring that our staff is supported in a meaningful and robust way. "

Since Kat's work revolves around sustainable development and targets issues like our climate crisis, I asked her **what her thoughts were on what scientists are calling our generation's biggest problem,**

"I'm optimistic because so many people and decision-makers are stepping up to the plate to be able to take action. I think these changes need to be rapid and they need to be quick but I'm very optimistic that we have the tools, the solutions, and the people behind the movement that can make these changes happen."

It's one thing to be optimistic and it's another to be realistic so I asked Kat **if she believes that our generation can solve this problem** before it's too late to which she responded,

"This is an intergenerational problem, it's not our generation's responsibility to fix everything that the previous generations have left for us! Despite inheriting the consequences of previous generations, we are also the best agents of change to take action. But again, this comes with the caveat that previous generations have the moral imperative to support this generation in the effort to solve the climate crisis. I don't think I can say that it's this generation's sole



responsibility to be able to tackle the climate crisis in nine years, I think it's every single generation's responsibility to tackle this crisis since it's the same barriers that set up the stage for this crisis that is now preventing youth from being able to present our solutions. So I would say yes, our generation can solve this problem, it's just not our generation's sole responsibility."

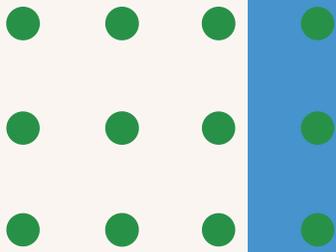
To wrap up our session, I asked Kat the million-dollar question being **what message she would send to the rest of the youth regarding climate change, to which she responded,**

"Just start. Start the work and start the conversations and surround yourself with the people that are going to empower you to be the best version of yourself. One thing I would challenge all youth to do within every decision is to ask themselves what is the future that we want? What are we looking to create with this future that we are inheriting, what do we want it to look like? If you want something to look a certain way, then you should take action to ensure that it does look that way. Youth are united, powerful, and have all the tools to solve the climate crisis - so let's do it."

I stand behind Kat's message, and I want to give her a huge shoutout for being such a lovely interviewee and for sitting down with me to talk about all things youth empowerment and climate change!

FES will continue to launch programs that empower and engage the youth. If you're interested in the fight against climate change and want to offer your services, you can get in touch with FES through their [website!](#)





Lilah Williamson

Meet Lilah Williamson, a 16-year-old climate activist in Burnaby, BC, and co-founder of the Sustainabiliteens. When Lilah isn't attending school, she's off organizing climate strikes in fact she's organized six climate strikes to date. She played a major role in organizing the climate strike in Vancouver, one of the most successful strikes in Canada with over 150,000 people marching for climate change! During one of the climate action protests that Lilah organized, she stated *"To change everything, we need everyone"*



organization PickWaste, and his ability to connect strongly with students. Sam is a professional speaker having delivered two TEDx talks, a board director of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers, and the founder of a self-improvement program for students called High Performing Students. We were lucky enough to sit down with Sam and chat about all things PickWaste, volunteerism, and giving back to the community. I started the interview by asking Sam to **tell us a little bit about PickWaste,**

"My whole life, I wanted to be a professional soccer player. By the age of 17, I had three major knee injuries, two surgeries and tore the labral in my right hip, had to stop playing sports, went down a terrible path as a student, and had no idea what I wanted to do with my future. And I had a teacher who at the same time was very passionate about solving social problems, who in his world issues class taught us that a small consistent action can make a massive change, and gave us a challenge: to go into the community and take a small action to see if it would make a difference. And I would walk home from school asking myself what's an action that I can take and one day realize there's a lot of garbage on the sidewalk and decide to just start picking it up. You know, that was going to be my way of testing my teacher and hopefully six months later walking back into his office and saying, sir, no disrespect, but you were wrong. This didn't work. And you know, I did it for about four months, until a buddy saw me named Dylan. He's like, Dude, what are you doing? I explained to him about small actions making a big difference. And we start picking up trash together. Originally, the organization was called the waste man's. And we thought it was just a funny play on words. And then we rebranded it to PickWaste, because we live in Pickering, and d pick up garbage. It was

PICKWASTE – SMALL CONSISTENT ACTIONS TO SAVE THE PLANET

BY: AHMAD GALUTA

Nothing says giving back to the community quite like weekly litter cleanup sessions!

Over 2300 bags of garbage have been collected across Canada and over 5000 volunteer hours have been dedicated to weekly litter cleanup sessions organized by a non-profit organization known as PickWaste! The PickWaste volunteer team is almost all students who want to make a difference and give back to their community. We reached out to Sam Demma, the cofounder of PickWaste, primarily because of his initiative in reducing pollution in his community, through his



inspired by a teacher by the name of Michael Loudfoot to take small, consistent actions and our small action was picking up litter for one hour once a week."

What a story! Sam talking about his friend Dylan and how he picked up a bag and got involved made me wonder **how many people are a part of this initiative, to which Sam responded,**

"We have a very small but dedicated team. So it's me, my co-founder, Dillon Mendes, we have an intern named Abdul, who's also a high school student that helps us with various tasks. We have a social media slash design intern or team member named Emile who was also a student at Ryerson University, Julia, who helped us build the website, and Vania who was also a high school intern. So Vania and Abdul are technically gone, but they still volunteer their time with us. Julia helps with updates on the

website and she's just a huge support. And then Emile helps us actively with all social media posts. In terms of who comes to the cleanups, we have an active email list of just over 700 students, all from the Durham Region. Out of the 700, I would say we usually get between 20 to 40 volunteers for each of the cleanups."

The amount of people joining in on this initiative is truly inspiring and I had to ask Sam **how the trajectory of growth has been over the past five years to which he explained,**

"In year one, it was just me, Dylan, and two of our buddies going out every weekend. In year two, we started to get a lot of volunteers because we started speaking a lot and, in year two, we also started three other chapters. So we started the Scarborough chapter and Ajax chapter and a Waterloo chapter. And we had



four teams going out every Saturday picking up trash. In year three, Dillon took off to university, so I was running it by myself. The other chapters folded because they decided they only wanted to do it for one summer. So it was back to Pickering only. In year four, Dillon was still away at school, so we started building an online platform called *sustained*, where we were showcasing articles and blogs. And we got about 60 active writers. Then year five is right now we scaled back the writing stuff because we realized we weren't that excited and passionate about it. But we're hoping to use year five to scale the organization in the city of Pickering and to implement the day. We also found that in this year, specifically year four and five, there's been an increase in volunteers just because students are finding it increasingly difficult to earn their hours because a lot of places aren't taking in-person volunteering."

Now that we've established the origin story of

PickWaste and the number of people involved, it's time to talk about the theme of the month, students vs. climate change. Since PickWaste is tackling the problem of pollution, I asked, based on his knowledge, **how pollution is related to climate change?**

"For us, it's a principled connection. So, we wholeheartedly believe not only at PickWaste, but I just personally believe this in all areas of my life, how I do one thing is how I do all things. And if I'm okay with not taking care of my physical environment, that I'm also going to be okay, not worrying about climate change. And I'm also going to not worry about any of the environmental issues facing our world. Pollution seems like a very surface-level thing. I'll be the first person to tell you that picking it up doesn't solve a direct problem. Like it's going to end up in a landfill, or it's going to end up going to recycling. Sure, it does help, you know, make sure that trash doesn't end up in oceans or bodies of water, which is a direct impact, and it might change other people's perspectives. But for us, it comes down to the principle and the value of if we're going to do this little thing, then we're going to do the bigger things. So we're hoping it just starts the conversation about caring for our common home."

What a great answer, I believe that how you do anything, is how you do everything. So, if you're okay with polluting Planet Earth, which is our home, then that means you are also likely to pollute your own home, your car, and your own body. So, if we do one thing right, then maybe we can carry that habit across different contexts. This brings us to my next question, how bad is the garbage problem? Being actively outside and picking up the garbage, I asked Sam how much garbage is out there?



"Well, I have a biased opinion, because I've seen some of it. And it's funny, you think Pickering, this suburban community that's relatively clean, and has great facilities and a team of staff that clean up parks and all this fun stuff. But if you go into certain forests and areas, it blows your mind. And the craziest part is that I still consider Pickering a very clean place. So imagine what the garbage problem is not only in the city of Pickering but on a global scale. And there are some great resources to help you find this stuff. There's a documentary called "Smog of the Sea", where these people jump on a boat and they spend a month sailing and also running this big net along the surface of the water to collect little microplastics, and they collect an insane amount of little plastic out of the ocean. There's another great thing you could start called "the Great Atlantic garbage patch" which is like this continental-size patch of trash that's floating in the middle of the ocean due to the tides. And it just will blow your mind seeing this stuff and

hopefully give you a new perspective on the issue at hand. I think at the end of the day, the real root of it is that recycling also isn't the solution, because things can only be recycled seven times before they turn into garbage themselves. So the only real solution is education, awareness, and moving to a zero-waste lifestyle, which is too big of a hurdle for some people right now to think about doing. "

Sam makes a great point and talking about the problem is important to try and figure out a solution. With that being said, I asked Sam **what he thought were some effective ways for keeping our cities clean from garbage?**

"Yeah, I'll say first and foremost, is to be the example. Now people think that they aren't leaders because they don't have their organizations or initiatives. But the reality is, you're influencing everyone who's looking at you, every single day, you know, every action

you take can be influenced consciously or subconsciously, the mind of a random stranger. So if you see garbage on the ground, you know, pick it up, put it in the garbage can, someone walking by will look at you and go, Oh, wow, that kid went out of his way to pick up that trash. And I might influence their next decision when they see garbage or think about throwing it on the ground. Step two, education. It's so crazy that students, consumers, and people still don't know what goes in what bins, what goes in the recycling bin, what goes in the garbage can, what's biodegradable. And that's a two-pronged issue. You know, we're not being educated properly by the people who make the products. I feel like making sure that we're being educated on the issue at hand, how large it is, not only in our cities but on a global scale, is super important. So being the example, making sure schools and organizations give the proper education to the people. And then doing more publicly facing events and large cleanups. So again, social proof can kick in so people can see us picking up trash and change their perspectives on it. I think those are like the main three ways to keep the cities a little bit cleaner."

So lead by example, show people, you know, the importance of cleaning up to educate people and to raise awareness and then to hold massive events too, to gain social proof. The most effective way to change people's behavior is through education. If people are not aware, they won't act on it, but if they have that knowledge, that's the precursor for behavior change.

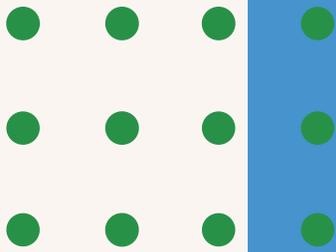
To wrap up our interview, I asked Sam **what would be one thing that he would say to our generation regarding climate change?**

"It's not too late, but the time is now. So, I feel like sometimes to a fault, we might talk about and market this idea that it's too late. And it's getting to the point where it's almost too late. But I think every time someone hears it's too late, they just give up regardless. They're like, "Oh, well, if it's too late then why should I even try?". So, I think it's more important to remind our generation that it's not too late, but it's getting there, and the time is now."

I love that message. I want to thank Sam for chatting with me about volunteerism, pollution, and the PickWaste team! We at Go2Grad support and will continue to support PickWaste as they try to make our world a better place.

If you would like to join the PickWaste team, you can get in touch with them about cleanups, speaking, volunteerism, and any other inquiries through email, info@pickwaste.com, or by visiting their [website](#).





Autumn Peltier

Meet Autumn Peltier, an Anishinaabe water-rights advocate and a leading global youth environmental activist. Autumn believes in that clean drinking water is a human right for not only reserves in Canada but for developing countries too. She has shared her concerns about the contaminated water on Indigenous reserves in Canada at the United Nations. She was also appointed Chief Water Commissioner by the Anishinabek Nation in 2019 and was nominated for a International Children's Peace Prize three years in a row!



GET EDUCATED: MEET GREENLEARNING CANADA

BY: ROZY ABO MAZID

Our generation is involved in the fight against climate change now more than ever and to encourage the youth to keep making noise, several organizations and businesses have launched educational programs that can teach them more about our current global crisis.

GreenLearning Canada is an Alberta-based NGO that offers free educational programs about clean energy, climate change, and green economy to

engage and empower students to create a positive change in our world. I was lucky enough to sit down with the executive director of GreenLearning, Mary McGrath, to break down the story of GreenLearning and to talk about all things climate change! Before jumping right into it, I asked Mary to **tell me a little bit about herself,**

"I came to GreenLearning through a somewhat winding path - I could have started my career in



International Development, but I knew I always wanted to work in the environment and so I wanted to combine those two. I was very fortunate to have an experience in high school where I was able to live and work in Jamaica and I was able to work in the field of environment and education working in a school there. I fell in love with the kids there and thought 'okay for sure I want to do something with kids.

I did my university co-op experience in West Africa - specifically in Senegal, and I was able to do that also in environment and education which was an amazing experience. I got to see the good sides of development work and a lot of the not-so good sides. I just felt that I couldn't be part of the structures that I had seen, and I wasn't sure what role I could play based on all of these challenges that I saw. So, when I came back to Canada, I knew I wanted to work in the environment and ideally in education."

It's interesting to see how one personal experience can shape your career path and inspire you to pursue a field that you weren't considering to begin with. Being that Mary went to West Africa and Jamaica and got to see the

current climate states of different countries outside of Canada, I wondered **what her thoughts were on climate change,**

"There is no crisis currently that equals the climate crisis. I would say that the climate crisis is not going to be solved without looking at the intersectional nature of the crisis and by that, I mean you cannot address or solve the climate crisis without looking at issues of poverty, discrimination, inequality, and migration. It's a crisis that needs to be tackled at multiple levels which means that there's a role for everybody to play no matter what profession you take on. I think there's a major change that needs to happen and so whether you're interested in economics or whether you're interested in energy, engineering, social issues, or whatever it is that you know where your skills in your talents lie, I think there's a role for you to play in tackling the climate crisis.

I agree that it's kind of our existential crisis and it's unfortunate that future generations are going to be feeling the most significant burden, especially if we don't deal with it now because we're in it. At the same time, I would say that there are a lot of opportunities, and we see that



in GreenLearning - we see the opportunities for young people and even workers who are experiencing transition. I think if we plan our response to the climate crisis appropriately, we can make our economies more prosperous and resilient."

I couldn't have said it better myself and I think Mary emphasized the most important message: we need all hands on deck regardless of your profession or age. We need to put our heads together and utilize our skills to win this battle before it's too late!

Mary mentioned that GreenLearning also stands behind this statement and I asked her to **walk me through GreenLearning's philosophy and initiative,**

"GreenLearning has a very interesting story. The organization was founded by community members in Drayton Valley, Alberta. Drayton Valley is a small community in the heart of the oil sands in northern Alberta. In the mid-1980s there was an explosion at a sour gas plant and that explosion killed a couple of people and polluted the air for months. The community decided that they needed to better understand

what was happening in the energy sector all around them and create better relationships with the energy companies that were such a big part of and still are such a big part of the community, so they founded an organization that's now called the Pembina Institute. This is one of Canada's largest research and policy thinktanks and it included a focus on education because one of the founders was a teacher and he believed in the power of education; his name is Rob Macintosh. GreenLearning was the education arm of Pembina, and then in the early 2000s, GreenLearning was able to stand on its own feet and became a separate organization.

GreenLearning has been around officially since 2010 as its organization and we still keep our focus on education around energy and climate change and creating a clean, green economy. We feel like GreenLearning's niche is in climate and energy education and helping with an energy transition that will move us all. We're very much a digital organization and all of our programs are offered digitally and it's all free so teachers or educators or homeschoolers or museum interpreters can go to our website and download materials for free! We also offer virtual experiences like workshops, and we have a lot of digital simulations and different interactive things on our website. We try to keep it so that's very accessible and free so that anybody who wants to learn about these topics can learn about them."

The fact that the programs are offered digitally and that it's free makes it accessible to anyone and that's what makes GreenLearning so unique and transparent in the work that they do because you truly feel that their end goal is to

empower and engage students about these topics above all else! To that of, **Mary mentioned that they offer free workshops for those who are interested, and she went on to explain,**

"Not all the programs have workshops but a lot of them do and we offer workshops throughout the year. Some workshops focus on professional development for educators to help them feel more confident talking about these topics. Some of these workshops are live and some are recorded, and we also have a lot of instructional videos on our website - like one of our programs called "Re-Energy" which turns youth into energy engineers and teaches kids about renewable energy and clean technologies. A lot of our programs also have challenges so if you participate in the program, you can win a prize! We have six different challenges across our programs that relate to energy and a clean economy."

I find these challenges to be a smart way to engage students as knowing there's an end prize can be a real motivator for them! Mary went on **to explain the learning outcomes behind these programs by stating,**

"We want to create opportunities for students and educators to play an active role in building sustainable, prosperous, and resilient communities starting with where they live. For educators, we want them to be able to satisfy all their curriculum requirements without having to consider where these programs fit into the subjects they teach. We just want people to be able to play their active role and feel a sense of urgency in their communities to be able to tackle this huge crisis with the right knowledge and understanding but also the skills and experience to be able to play that role in creating sustainable communities."

To wrap up our session, I asked Mary the ultimate question being **what message she would send to the rest of the youth regarding climate change to which she responded,**

"I think it's important for you to find out what gives you purpose and know whatever you do with that purpose can impact future generations. I think it's important to find what gives you meaning in your life to follow your path for yourself and at the same time think about future generations."

I couldn't agree more, and I want to thank Mary for sitting down with me and talking me through her life journey, and breaking down the end goal of GreenLearning! The Go2Grad Team supports all the work GreenLearning continues to do, and we thank them for raising awareness and encouraging the youth to join in the conversation.

To access all of Green Learning Canada's programs and challenges, visit their [website](#).





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