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The Plastic Straw Project

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During my time at the Brown Environmental Leadership Lab in Rhode Island, I learned a lot about the effects plastics have on the ocean environment. When I created my action plan, I knew I couldn't focus simply on all plastics, so I chose to focus my project on plastic straws. In America we use more than 500 million plastic straws everyday which is enough to wrap around the Earth two and a half times. Many people carelessly use straws at restaurants or coffee shops and even though they may know that plastics can harm the environment, they may not be aware of alternatives or if their actions can actually make a difference. When I heard it has been predicted that there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050 I was heartbroken and questioned whether or not I could make a difference, but I knew that even a small difference in my community could inspire others to start dialogue about this issue on a larger scale.

I titled my plan the Plastic Straw Project which I intended to complete two distinct tasks: educate people about the effects of plastics and encourage them to live a plastic free lifestyle and eliminate plastic straws from my school community. When I got back from Rhode Island, I emailed about fifteen mayors from various cities in the Bay Area. My goal was to set up meetings with them to discuss plastic pollution and how to do away with plastic straws in their cities. Only two mayors responded to my emails: Deborah Penrose of Half Moon Bay, CA and Edi Birsan of Concord, CA. They were both open to what I had to say and encouraged me to continue being an advocate for marine life preservation. Mr. Birsan recommended starting The Plastic Straw Project with my school community then shift my focus to change in policy by making petitions and continuing to educate people about the effects they have on the environment.

When the school year began, I met with the Dean, Mrs. Main, and Principal, Mr. Cushing, at my school and explained to them that because the fibers in plastic straws are so weak, they cannot be recycled and often

end up in the ocean as industrial waste. Because our school community is already focused on sustainable practices, they were open to hear about the alternatives I would propose to the current plastic straws in the cafeteria, the Garaventa Center. I also met with the manager of Epicurean, the school's food supplier, to examine other types of straws that we could use. After several weeks of meetings, I was informed that my dream would become a reality and the plastic straws would be replaced with paper straws. I was ecstatic with how open other students were to this change; though some people complained, it seemed that many appreciated the initiative to use less plastic.

My action plan is not finished and will continue to be a significant part of what I wish to spend the rest of my life doing. I write letters to restaurants that use plastic straws as well as put letters in mailboxes in my neighborhood and posting about plastic pollution on social media to increase awareness about the issue. I also plan to create a petition for a state-wide ban on plastic straws which I will present to the governor and hopefully further implement change.

After attending the Leadership Lab I decided to live a plastic free lifestyle and during the course of my action plan I was even more inspired to live more sustainably and encourage others to do the same. The Plastic Straw Project also helped me realize that I want to spend the rest of my life being an advocate for marine life and I will forever be thankful for the opportunity Brown University gave me to attend this program. It was a formative experience that has given me a platform to develop my leadership skills and learn more about what I am passionate about.

An acknowledgment from my school for my work:

<https://www.carondeleths.org/news/newspost/~post/paper-straws-replace-carbon-footprint-20190329>

