

Gloria Barron Prize For Young Heros - Project Essay

The odor was overpowering. An entangled mess of fishing line wrapped around the intestines. A fishing hook and small fragments of plastic lodged into the turtle's esophagus silenced me. An innocent sea turtle's life carelessly taken at the hands of humans. This moment was too powerful and sickening to stand by and let our society continue to destroy the beautiful oasis we are lucky to call home.

The summer of my Freshman year, I had the incredible opportunity to study in the Mediterranean and see first-hand the effects of plastic pollution on marine life. The knowledge I gained from this experience inspired me to make a real difference upon returning home. In the fall of 2018, I formed "For A Strawless Sea", a teen-led organization dedicated to eliminating single-use plastics in my town, Arlington, Virginia. Changing lifestyles and market competition has led to a proliferation of single-use materials in our everyday lives. At first, plastic was a brilliant innovation, but it soon turned into an addiction to satisfy our need for convenience. This addiction has resulted, and will continue to result, in extremely dire consequences for humanity and our planet.

To combat this growing problem, I knew change was needed. I fostered relationships with key participants, including the Global Co Lab and the Smithsonian. I was appointed the ambassador of the Eco Teen Action Network Plastic's Hub, which works to

create a global community of teen changemakers that take action towards reducing single-use plastics, improving recycling programs, and encouraging thoughtful consumption. Our newest initiative is a reusable to-go box program at National Landing, the home of Amazon's new HQ2.

I have connected with an array of large corporations to help execute and support this program. On a local and national level these corporations have the power to institute wide-scale change. I was also able to showcase this project at the 2019 EPA Recycling and Innovations Fair and gathered support from the head of the EPA, Andrew Wheeler. To engage the local community, I have attended several local civic events, and garnered hundreds of signatures expressing the community's support. These efforts allowed me to be honored at the Leaders In Energy Four Generations Sustainable Solutions Ceremony as the Millennial Generation Nominee. This past month I met with Amazon to explain what role they would have and I am waiting for a response from their team within the upcoming weeks. I am very excited to showcase our progress at the Smithsonian Earth Optimism Summit in honor of the 50th Earth Day. This project has expanded in ways I could never have imagined and I am very optimistic that within the coming months this program will be piloted at Amazon's new headquarters.

Ultimately, it is my goal to encourage people to reconsider their daily consumption habits and to influence organizations to shift to more eco-friendly practices. I hope that this reusable take-out container initiative leads to a more universal sustainability model. I have found this project to be particularly interesting in that it has given me insight into the sustainability practices (and goals) of large corporations. I discovered that I have a passion

for this field and something I want to pursue in my future education and beyond. It is up to my generation to try to shift our society into a more environmentally conscious mindset, or the world as we know it will disappear. This is my home and my future, and I believe we have the opportunity to tackle this issue head-on.