

Ashfield News May 2023- Youth Climate Action

Youth advocates have been central to the fight against Climate Change. Most people have heard of Greta Thunberg, the Swedish activist who became famous for challenging world leaders to take immediate action on climate change. This month's Energy Committee column will profile some local youth and organizations and invite our local youth to help us in our work to make Ashfield a town which is part of the solution.

Allen Gabriel, now 25 and getting his MBA in Barcelona, started his journey as a climate activist growing up in Ashfield when his mom attended environmental talks and meetings and would bring him along. Richard Pree also attended many of those events and when Richard became involved with Citizen's Climate Lobby (CCL) he invited Allen several times to come to a meeting at the Congregational church. At age 14 Allen says he was "dragged" to his first meeting, and by age 16 he had been attending regularly and went to CCL Lobby Days in Washington DC. Allen states at Lobby Days "I felt powerful for the first time- the people who make decisions will actually listen to you- it was a very empowering experience." Allen has stayed involved in climate activism. "It has been the rudder that has steered every decision I have made since High School." Allen did all his undergraduate academic projects on Climate Change, including his BA dissertation on carbon pricing, and plans to do his Master thesis on carbon pricing as well and then use his MBA to work within the system to create change.

To young people who might be considering getting involved or who might feel apathetic or overwhelmed Allen states "Just do something, do anything- you'll feel good and be a part of the wave of climate action. If I have grandkids I want to be able to tell them I did everything I could." How can adults support young people in getting involved? Allen encourages adults to find a way to publicly acknowledge young people for their contributions, like when Richard Pree and Sarah Pirtle nominated him for a local peacemaker award. Allen also feels it is powerful for young people to be with adults who take them seriously. Allen reports having had very positive experiences being part of CCL- "Here I am in a place with adults doing important work, and I am part of the conversation....Adults are so happy to hear from young people and are so supportive...when I went to Lobby Days the congresspeople listened attentively to me...They were so delighted...It galvanized them."

On March 19 a group of young climate activists gave a presentation at St James/St Andrew's church in Greenfield. Ollie Mae Perrault, one of the presenters, started Youth Climate Action Now (YCAN) in 2020 at age 12. Ollie says her organization has 3 guiding factors: 1) youth empowerment 2) Creativity and community building 3)Sustainability and Environmental Justice.

YCAN and several youth-led groups in Western MA put on a Creative Climate Festival at Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary in Easthampton on April 23rd featuring live music and dance performances, poetry readings, and workshops, and tables by local climate organizations. Despite the pouring rain the event was very well attended and truly inspiring. Wonderful speeches, opportunities for information sharing, mutual support, and FUN!

Ollie notes that the youth climate organizations in western MA all work together in the Massachusetts Youth Climate Coalition (MYCC) but all have slightly different approaches. She describes YCAN as being focused on community building/ community organizing. Another organization, Our Climate, is a youth climate organization associated with Citizen's Climate Lobby with a focus on lobbying elected officials to implement carbon pricing as a way to incentivize companies to reduce emissions. The

Sunrise movement currently has campaigns focused on a Green New Deal for Schools and for Communities.

The Mass Audubon's Youth Climate Leadership Program (YCLP) is a youth-led, action-oriented climate change program that builds climate literacy, meaningful and hopeful connections, and equitable community climate solutions. In partnership with local schools, nonprofits, research institutions, and universities, the YCLP connects youth changemakers with experts and mentors to guide them in planning and implementing innovative climate action in local schools and communities. Ollie and many of the other climate activists at the March 19 panel discussion have attended YCLP and have been instrumental in organizing the Youth Climate Summit, which will be held this year November 2nd and 6th at Umass and in Springfield.

When I asked Ollie how adults can support young people in getting involved to address the climate crisis she was very clear- don't have a "youth representative" or in other ways tokenize youth to somehow speak for their generation. Don't use our inspiring youth activists to make ourselves as adults feel better about our inaction. Instead, as Allen Gabriel said, lets let our youth activists galvanize us INTO action!

On June 3, Ollie and several of her colleagues will be coming to speak at the First Congregational Church of Ashfield for a **Youth Climate Action Panel** sponsored by the First Congregational Church, the Ashfield Energy Committee, the Belding Memorial Library, and the Ashfield chapter of Citizen's Climate Lobby. Please join us 1-2:30 and support the amazing work these young people are doing! The event is free but all donations will go to support the organizations the young people represent.

As Summer approaches the Ashfield Energy Committee would like to invite youth to join us in our work right here at home. Home from college and have some free time? High School student looking to do some volunteering? The Ashfield Energy Committee could use your energy, ideas, and help!

In addition to summer volunteering, the Energy Committee invites high school or college-age youth to **join** our committee. We meet once a month and meetings are both in person and on zoom, so even if you are not in town full time you can help with this important work.

Contact information for local climate organizations:

YCAN youthclimateactionnow@gmail.com

Our Climate Eben@ourclimate.us

Sunrise amherstsunrisemovement@gmail.com

Mass Audubon Youth Climate Leadership Program youthclimateaction@massaudubon.org

Citizen's Climate Lobby -Meets 2nd Saturday of the month 12-2, Ashfield 1st Congregational Church
Contact Richard Pree for more information : richpree@gmail.com

Contact the Energy Committee at energy@ashfield.org with suggestions, comments and questions. The Energy Committee meets monthly in lower town hall (and on zoom). You are invited to attend a meeting. Propose ways to increase the use of clean energy and reduce our carbon footprint in Ashfield. Offer support for one of our projects. We truly welcome your input. Our next regular meetings are planned for Monday May 1 at 3:45 and Monday June 5 at 3:45. Because meeting times can sometimes change between publication of Ashfield News and the meeting time it is a good idea to check the town website for the meeting posting before you come.

