



Coaching Climate Action: Recruit and Support Young Leaders

Our communities are loaded with young people who recognize the severity of the climate crisis and want a credible role in climate action. These ‘rebels looking for a cause’ can make quick shifts to behaviour change when coached with basic skills in leadership, event planning and social marketing. Team of youth leaders, as young as 10-years-old, have mobilized their families and schools to reduce car-trips to school. We need to coach and support more youth leaders.

To be effective and sustaining, WALKandCYCLE promotion in schools needs to engage the leadership of the target audience: students. Authentic youth engagement creates strong opportunities to channel motivation and enthusiasm which, once inspired and supported, generate variety and innovation in the strategies they implement (Toor & Havlick, 2004).

Not only do children and teenagers deserve an authentic role in charting their future, but benefits from behaviour change amongst the youngest commuters will a longer impact - *if sustained!* Students with opportunities to become engaged and skilled in the promotion of sustainability projects become much more than “a WALKandCYCLE club”: they can experience psychological changes that affect their identity and their interpersonal relationships (Blythe & Harré, 2012). This transformative process comes from authentic engagement in youth leadership and these significant life experiences will strengthen sustainability efforts beyond transport.

However, not all youth engagement initiatives model the characteristics of authenticity in their ‘inclusion’ of children and teenagers. For a variety of reasons (*time-crunch, funding limitations, short-term programming, inexperience of adult allies*), some youth-oriented programs might be more indicative of tokenism, decoration or manipulation (Portland Youth Planning, 2010) and will not sustain the necessary shift in climate action.

This presentation will outline authentic child and youth engagement with a focus on recruiting, training and supporting child and youth leaders to promote WALKandCYCLE programs.

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