



Auckland Unitarian Church
Love beyond belief

School Strike for Climate – Learning from our Children

Tess Brothersen © 18 April 2021

“We, the young, are deeply concerned about our future. Humanity is currently causing the sixth mass extinction of species and the global climate system is at the brink of a catastrophic crisis. Its devastating impacts are already felt by millions of people around the globe. Yet we are far from reaching the goals of the Paris agreement.

Young people make up more than half of the global population. Our generation grew up with the climate crisis and we will have to deal with it for the rest of our lives. Despite that fact, most of us are not included in the local and global decision-making process. We are the voiceless future of humanity.

We will no longer accept this injustice. We demand justice for all past, current and future victims of the climate crisis, and so we are rising up. Thousands of us have taken to the streets in the past weeks all around the world. Now we will make our voices heard. On 15 March, we will protest on every continent.

We finally need to treat the climate crisis as a crisis. It is the biggest threat in human history and we will not accept the world’s decision-makers’ inaction that threatens our entire civilisation. We will not accept a life in fear and devastation. We have the right to live our dreams and hopes. [Climate change](#) is already happening. People did die, are dying and will die because of it, but we can and will stop this madness.

We, the young, have started to move. We are going to change the fate of humanity, whether you like it or not. United we will rise until we see climate justice. We demand the world’s decision-makers take responsibility and solve this crisis.

You have failed us in the past. If you continue failing us in the future, we, the young people, will make change happen by ourselves. The youth of this world has started to move and we will not rest again.” These words were penned by the global coordination group for the youth-led climate strike in March 2019 and were published in an open letter in the Guardian.

For the last 16 years, young people from across the world have lead the call to action to combat climate change. Beginning in November 2006 when the Australian Youth Climate Coalition was formed to organise climate change actions involving youth and school children. The Australian Youth Climate Coalition is Australia’s largest youth-run organisation. Their mission is to build a movement of young people leading solutions to the climate crisis. To educate, inspire and mobilise young people to win campaigns for a safe climate, to keep fossil fuels in the ground and build a future powered by clean energy.

In 2010 in England there were school walkouts over climate change, linked to a Climate Camp.

In late-November 2015, an independent group of students invited other students around the world to skip school on the first day of the [2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) in Paris. On 30 November, the first day of the conference, a "Climate strike" was organised in over 100 countries; over 50,000 people participated.^[17]

In August 2018, Greta Thunberg, then in ninth grade, gained international attention when she decided to not attend school until the 2018 Sweden general election because of the heat waves and wildfires across Sweden that summer. Thunberg protested by sitting outside the Swedish parliament every day during school hours with a sign that read "Skolstrejk för klimatet" ("school strike for climate"). After the general election she continued striking every Friday. She coined the slogan FridaysForFuture, which gained worldwide attention, and inspired school students across the globe to take part in student strikes.

In September 2018, 10-year-old Lilly Platt, began weekly strikes in the Netherlands. In November, Sophia Mathur, 11, began a FridaysForFuture climate strike in Sudbury, Canada. And on 28 November 2018, hundreds of Australia students gathered to protest government inaction on climate change, kicking off the first large scale protests. Around 200 students gathered outside Parliament House in Canberra to demand answers from Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Two days later, 15,000 students across Australia joined in that country's first Strike for Climate Action.

Since then, over 171 student-led climate strikes have taken place in more than 170 countries around the world.

Here in New Zealand thousands of students in 40 cities and towns joined in the Schools 4 Climate Action protest on 15 March 2019.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/wellington/111298009/tens-of-thousands-of-school-students-demonstrate-across-nz-calling-for-action-on-climate-change>

Look at all that energy our children have.

This was followed by a second school strike for climate change on 24 May 2019. Tens of thousands of people across New Zealand joined together to demand for the government to declare a climate emergency; New Zealand to hit a carbon zero target by 2040 (instead of 2050 as suggested by the zero carbon bill which has now passed); all new coal and oil exploration to cease, and for the development of a renewable and environmentally-friendly economy.

In September 2019 a series of international strikes and protests to demand action be taken to address climate change were held. In New Zealand, an estimated 170,000 people including school students participated in 40 events in urban centres across New Zealand—roughly 3.5% of the country's population; turnout figures exceeded 80,000 in Auckland and about 40,000 attended the demonstration in Wellington (almost 20% of the city's

population). An open letter signed by 11,000 New Zealanders was delivered to Parliament on 27 September, urging the government to declare a national climate emergency.

While Covid 19 disrupted most of the planned actions in 2020, School Strike 4 Climate NZ organised protests across the country on 9 April 2021. About 1000 protesters turned out in Auckland, hundreds in Christchurch and about 5000 in Wellington, gathering outside Parliament.

At the protest in Wellington two weeks ago, minister for climate change James Shaw said "You have every right to be angry, I'm angry [that] for 30 years, which is more than most of my life and more than most of yours combined. Governments and businesses have kicked the can down the road."

"Now we have run out of road... probably not the greatest metaphor.

"Time is up, this year is the year we've got to move from talking about climate change, to actually doing something about climate change."

Sadly, not all adults have been supportive of our children's efforts. Australia's Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, infamously said "What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools," in response to the school strikes in Australia early in the movement.

Resources minister Matt Canavan said he would prefer students to learn about mining and science rather than protest. "The best thing you'll learn about going to a protest is how to join the dole queue," he said.

Pretty condescending stuff.

Here in New Zealand some schools refused to excuse absences of students participating in the climate strikes, marking students as truant. Some schools scheduled NCEA exams for the day of the strike in an attempt to discourage students from protesting.

It's easy for adults to say kids don't have enough experience, or don't know what they're talking about. That they're not really concerned about climate change and are just using protests as an excuse to skip school.

I disagree. My children are deeply concerned about the planet and the effects of climate change. They know they will be the ones who have to live with climate changes' impacts.

In a recent opinion piece on student protests, Brannavan Gnanalingam wrote, "There's something even more magical about teenagers making a stand. For many, fitting in and/or being invisible are high priorities. Teenagers are unlikely to fight for something unless they feel passionate about it...There has been a lot of critical responses online to [teenage led] protests...Time and time again though, posterity and hindsight prove the kids rights, no matter the dialogue at the time. Ultimately, if kids are fighting for underdogs, and you're telling them they're wrong or that there are other ways to do it, you've simply chosen the wrong side." --Brannavan Gnanalingam, The Sunday Essay: When the young stand up, 4 April 2021

Our children as speaking, marching, yelling. Are you listening?