

Climate Strike inspires community



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By Nate Smelle

For the past 13 weeks Hermon Public School Grade 4 student Brynn Kilpatrick has ditched class on Fridays to lead a climate strike at the intersection of Hastings Street North and Bridge Street in downtown Bancroft. Additionally inspired by 16-year-old Swedish-born environmentalist Greta Thunberg, Kilpatrick has been helping to share that inspiration with others throughout North Hastings.

Since beginning her own #Fridays4Future campaign in Bancroft, Kilpatrick said she has noticed how many extreme weather events have occurred this spring in Ontario. By helping to raise awareness of the impacts of climate change, she hopes more people will take action to protect the environment.

"There has been so much rain and floods and then in other places it is so dry they are having forest fires," said Kilpatrick.

"The water was up over our compost this year. In Ottawa they just had tornadoes again. Nobody was killed but it is still really scary."

During the climate strike, Kilpatrick said she has been learning about several different environmental issues affecting her future. By learning about these issues, she said she has come to realize how interconnected everything is. At the same time, Kilpatrick said she has also discovered that there are solutions to many of these environmental issues that people can easily start implementing. For example, she said rather than using single-use plastic straws and utensils people can make a difference by using glass or metal straws and reusable utensils.

"Not all of what we put in the recycling actually gets recycled," said Kilpatrick.

"A lot of it ends up in our oceans and in the food chain. There was a turtle that had to be taken to an emergency vet because it was choking to death on a plastic straw. Things like this shouldn't happen because people can use a metal or glass one. It's not just about us humans. We should care more about the animals because if we make sure they are still around then we will still be around."

Kilpatrick's climate strike has been inspiring people of all generations to take action for the environment. Nora and Dave Drennan are two of the many community members that decided to get involved in the local campaign. While Dave strummed on his guitar and sang a song entitled "Save Our Future," that he came up with for the strike, Nora explained why they decided to join the campaign three weeks ago.

"There was a recent report by the International Panel on Climate Change that said we only have 11 years left to make a difference, and I am worried about my grandchildren and my grandchildren's kids. I want them to have a thriving Earth to live in. What we are seeing is not just a changing climate, it's a climate crisis?"

Deb Jeffreys is another local resident that has been coming out to support Kilpatrick each week since learning about the strike.

Having worked in ecology for several decades, she said that she has seen the climate crisis worsen to the point where it is directly affecting people's lives. While holding a sign she made that read, "I Support Student Action," Jeffreys said "This year it looks like we are going to have some serious food shortages because of the extreme weather that is coming from climate change and a disrupted Arctic. Crops are not growing in the midwest, southwestern Ontario is a big mess, and so is California and the southeastern United States. That will hit people hard in a different way - like how people are catching on that the climate crisis is real because of the devastating floods in forest fires. I am really happy to have the leadership of Brynn, so I will continue to do everything I can to support her in her endeavours. I'll be dead so I won't have to live through the worst of the climate crisis, but she will."

Although Kilpatrick's climate strike is about to wrap up at the end of the school year, her campaign will continue into the summer in different ways. For instance, on June 30 she will be speaking at St Matthews Church in Baptiste Village as part of the Sunday Night Live series during a special service called "Hymns for a Blue Planet."

In addition Cheyenne Amos, another community member inspired by Kilpatrick's initiative, has started a campaign she calls "Bags for Brynn." To help lighten the local ecological footprint, Amos started sewing cloth bags for people to take to the grocery store to replace the plastic bags used for fruit and vegetables. Bags for Brynn are available on Amos's Bags for Brynn Facebook page, with \$5 from every sale going towards Kilpatrick's campaign for a healthy planet.