



# Future Justice

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## Climate Change and Me

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**I am** in my last year of high school and for the past eighteen months I have been running the school Environment Club. I became involved because I wanted to do anything I could to help combat dangerous climate change. Two stand-out memories from the last year have greatly influenced my involvement.

Earth Hour 2009 — Saturday, 28th March 8.30pm. I find myself looking up at the clear, velvety night sky. I have come up to my school for two reasons: to look over the whole of Toowoomba from a high vantage point, and to see the lights go dead in my House's boarding house. As I look over Toowoomba I feel disappointment hit me, as 8.30 strikes, then 8.35, then 8.40, and still very few lights have gone off across the town. Nearby, the boarding house still stands in darkness, with echoes of laughter and chatter coming from inside. At least the boys have followed through.

Having organised the House's involvement, I felt really moved and inspired to see other students, as well as staff, supporting the event. I was convinced that the momentum for change was starting to build and that perhaps the Environment Club, although short on committed members, was making a difference.

The second memory is from Power Shift, July 2009 in Sydney. After an amazing weekend at the conference hearing inspiring speakers such as Al Gore, Rajendra Pachauri, Tim Flannery, Christine Milne and Australian Youth Climate

Coalition Co-Directors Anna Rose and Amanda Mackenzie, I felt really driven to go home and make a difference. I will never forget the feeling of empowerment I got from dancing on the steps of the Sydney Opera House alongside over 1200 other young people passionate to make a change. We sent a strong message for meaningful action against climate change to our government. However, one of the moments from Power Shift that has stuck in mind is hearing myself say, whilst describing my school Environment Club, that I had not succeeded in getting other students to be involved and take action against climate change.

Having spent the past 15 months struggling to get others within the school community active against climate change, I suddenly felt like I was running a one-man show. Although I never thought of giving up on it, I began to think of the Environment Club — and myself — as a failure.

When I started running the Club I was a complete novice, which made it difficult at first. Not only did I not really know much about what it was I was trying to fight off — climate change — but I also had no experience of running meetings or public speaking. In spite of this I was ambitious and threw myself into a variety of projects. I spent an enormous amount of time and effort trying to organise an environmental video competition for high school students in the Toowoomba region. I also arranged to have an aluminium can recycling bin made for the school and got together with some fellow students to make a short video promoting its use. I informed myself as much as I could about climate change, reading, watching films and talking to others. I wanted the school to make sustainability a key focus of our community. I pushed for care of the environment to become part of the concept of service that is an important aspect of life in our school, arranging participation in action days such as Clean Up Australia. I investigated the introduction of a Certificate I in Volunteering for interested senior students. With expert help, I started work on a website for the Environment Club; I wrote newsletters,

organised meetings and spoke at Assembly. I imagined that, since people in my school knew me because I played sport and music, it would not be long before they would all want to join in the action against climate change.

Well, I was wrong. In spite of a generous support from the school Administration, my video competition did not get off the ground. As for recycling, on match days I would find the 'normal' bins overflowing with cans, while the recycling bin stood half empty. A second humorous video, this time promoting a mobile phone muster, turned out to have been filmed on a tape that ran out of space half way through the video and participation in the muster was disappointing. The Certificate in Volunteering plans fell through when the government changed the guidelines for the course. In the Environment Club, I continued to find it hard to persuade others to take on leadership. I felt a deep sense of having let down the people within the school who had helped me and had faith in my schemes. I did not become apathetic, but for a while a sense of inertia settled on me like a dark, heavy cloud.

Power Shift made the difference. It made me realise I was not a freak for caring about the environment or seeing issues of climate change as hugely important. The contact with other like-minded young people revitalised me and made me see things in a different light. My video competition is not going to be the big show I had hoped for — but I will still go ahead, with a smaller scale version. The 'Binnie monster' video we made to promote recycling was worth doing: it was fun to make, went down well in Assembly and was a creative approach that perhaps started others thinking. It now has a few hundred views on the Internet. I am suddenly finding that more students are volunteering for environmental action like National Tree Day, encouraged of course by the sausage sizzle at the end. I even have a small number of students interested in taking over the running of the Environment Club next year, and staff committed to supporting them.

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It has not been an easy 18 months, but I have learned from my experiences as a young climate-change activist. I have learned that no matter how serious and urgent the issue, I need to use humour and motivation to engage young people. And if my plans haven't worked out, I'm not a failure, I just need to learn more skills. Most of all, I have learned that persistence is a great thing — vital, if we are to reverse climate change.



**Hugh Duffie** wrote this in 2009 when he was in Year 12 at Toowoomba Grammar School in Queensland.