

# Young Yellowknifers strike for action on climate change



Brendan Burke/NNSL photo

More than a dozen students stepped out of class and onto the street Friday to demand action on climate change.

*'There's definitely a lot of hope,' says Ella Kokelj, the 'brains' behind Friday's youth rally*

by **Brendan Burke**  
Northern News Services

"There is no planet B."  
"If you don't act like adults, we will."

Among a myriad of eye-catching signs and slogans waved by over a dozen young Yellowknifers on a busy downtown street corner last Friday, the message was the same: act now on climate change – before it's too late.

Demonstrators – many taking time off school – gathered in front of the post office

on Franklin Avenue, drawing honks of support from passing motorists, as they joined students across the globe in a call for action against climate change, dubbed "School Strike For Climate."

Ella Kokelj, a 16-year-old Sir John Franklin High School student and a youth board member of Ecology North, was one of them.

"People are starting to realize, 'oh, my future's in jeopardy; my children might not see a green future. It's definitely

turning into a reality that people are having to face," she said.

A lifelong lover of the outdoors, Kokelj's passion for protecting the environment blossomed when she recently joined forces with Ecology North, the long running non-profit that advocates for sustainable living and promotes environmental education.

Her involvement with the organization and the inspirational work of 16-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thun-

berg, who started the School Strike for Climate movement, pushed her to help organize Friday's demonstration.

"It's a movement that's gaining momentum globally," said Kokelj. "I want to be a part of it. I don't want to watch it go by."

Thunberg-inspired protests led by young people have popped up in hundreds of cities across the world since 2018. The demonstrations call for collective action, from governments and individuals

alike, to mitigate and reverse the impacts of climate change.

According to a 2018 report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the planet is on pace to warm to dangerous levels – setting the stage for floods, food scarcity and droughts – by 2030, what Kokelj calls the "year of no return."

"If we don't reduce our emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 – it's not hopeless but it's not going to be any good for sure," said Kokelj.

Kokelj said Yellowknifers can do their part in curbing climate change by committing to small acts that go a long way, such as biking to work, recycling and cutting down on plastics.

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, who joined demonstrators Friday, told *Yellowknifer* she stopped by to offer encouragement in the face of what seems like an "insurmountable" issue.

Green likened the daunting task of reversing the effects of climate change to the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. In the wake of medical advances, a diagnosis is no longer a death sentence.

"So even though climate change feels like an insurmountable problem, we can act together to work on slowing the rate of change and maybe even reversing it," she said.

Green was impressed with the level of youth engagement when it comes to addressing climate change – something not seen in previous generations.

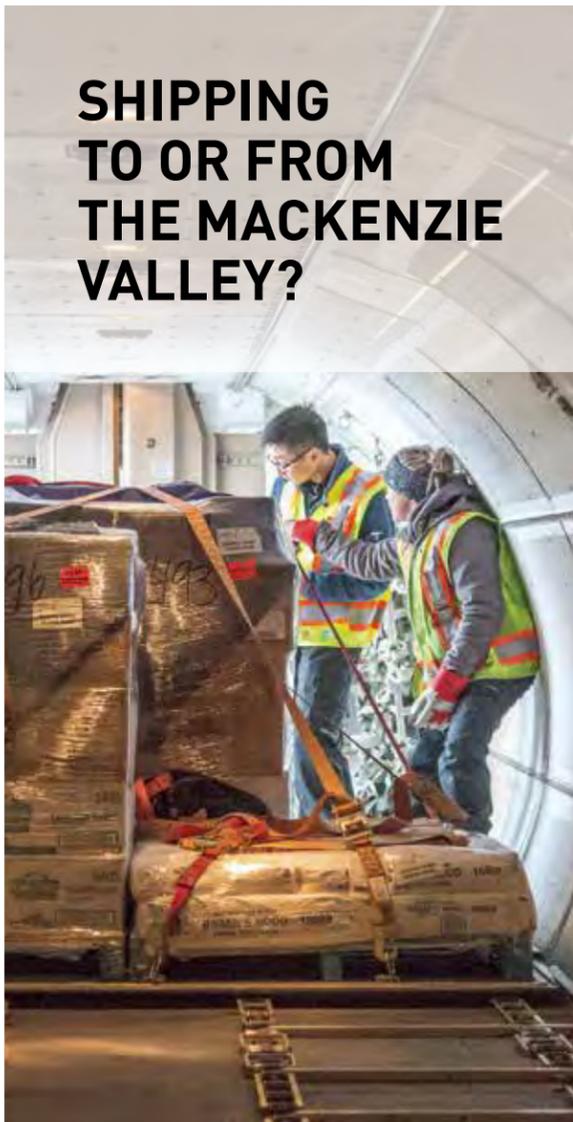
"I must say I wasn't nearly as passionate or articulate as she is at this age," she said. "So I really am encouraged that they're taking up this activism and prompting us to think about it."

Emma Willoughby, a Grade 12 student at Sir John Franklin High School, was encouraged by the display, too.

"It definitely makes me very optimistic for the future seeing all the younger generations out here generating some change and action," said Willoughby.

Ella Kokelj, described by fellow protesters and peers as the "brains" behind Friday's call to action, agreed.

"There's definitely a lot of hope."



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