



Testimonial by Namgyal Gyaltsen

Having grown up in Bhutan, the environment has played a strong role in shaping my life. I intentionally designed my education at Brown University to include two majors that I was certain would play a role in helping Bhutan's development process: Economics and Environmental Studies. My professional interests lie in the issues at the nexus of these two fields and I hope to be able to gain enough expertise, balanced with my cultural knowledge, to help Bhutan develop.

Given this, when I first got involved with the Stone Soup Leadership Institute, I was largely drawn to their work more so because of the sustainability side of what they do. However, having attended their last summit and worked with multiple youth leaders through the year, I'm equally as invested in the educational impact that the Institute has had on their lives. The Summit is an innovative process that exposes youth to sustainability and better life planning skills. It includes different days that are allocated to different activities. The last summit was centered on ocean sustainability and as a result, included collaborations with different organizations focused on trash and ocean conservation. This has proven to be a great way of introducing new topics to the youth delegates. For some of these young people, the summit becomes the first place they are given the platform to learn and discuss the issues affecting the world. The Institute's commitment to developing cultural understanding and opening discussions on global topics is commendable. I was pleasantly surprised to encounter the Institute's Performance Metrics, which mirror's Bhutan's own Gross National Happiness (GNH) survey. The Metrics are a self-reported measure that are administered to youth before and after the Summit. This initiates a dialogue for reflection and self-improvement while also allowing us to collect quantitative proof of the Institute's benefits. The Institute has refined it further to include actual elements from the GNH survey. This touched me as Bhutan has worked to advertise GNH as adaptable to others. The Institute's capacity to adopt best practices from other cultures while fitting it to its own model is the best example of what makes it so special in an increasingly globalized world.

Through the Institute, I have worked with youth who at first, didn't know what sustainability was but are now out in their communities getting involved with local organizations, designing their own community service projects and even getting their friends involved. The Summit is so special because it gathers young, impressionable students and allows them to explore and influence each other. They are able to relate to youth from other communities that face the same issues they do. This creates a global network of connected youth that are all dedicated to helping solve the most pressing climate change issues of our time. My work with the Institute has given me a much-needed perspective into the importance of bringing young people to the table and making sure that youth are as engaged and integrated in community processes as possible. The Institute's model is easily replicable and adaptable to other communities. Working with them and learning about their work has given me a lot of skills and ideas that I am excited to develop, specifically with the Bhutanese community in mind.

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