

STUDENTS WEIGH-IN

When Mallory Hewlko took on a summer job tree planting she may have been looking for a change of scenery, but ended up with a change of lifestyle. Her summer work experience dramatically changed how Mallory thought—and acted—on a daily basis.

“We had the entire summer to live without anything,” she recalls. “We were living in tents and relying on our surroundings for our daily needs. I started reading a book on environmental justice, and it really hit home.”

Hewlko is a student ambassador for sustainability, invoking change as she engages the student body in sustainable initiatives.



Hewlko's passions for sustainability landed her the goBEYOND Campus Coordinator role on UBC's Okanagan campus. goBEYOND, formed by the Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC), is a project that focuses on climate action at British Columbia colleges and universities. The program has engaged over 200 students on campus in awareness and education activities to reduce carbon emissions.

“Students are excited and concerned about sustainability, but they don't always know how to take action, or they don't think it is feasible,” says Hewlko. “Sustainability is often associated with being expensive or inconvenient. I try and set an example of how behavioural changes are possible and can have big impacts.”

“People are concerned about sustainability and want to learn more about what they can do. Our job is to raise awareness about the steps everyone can take to lead a more sustainable life.”

Last year Hewlko led fellow students on a carbon diet. Nearly 100 students participated in the year-long challenge to reduce their carbon footprint by 5,000 lbs by incorporating sustainable practices in their daily lives. The largest changes were in transportation and food habits, alongside a major shift in attitude.

Hewlko didn't lose the target 5,000 lbs because, essentially, she's already at her ideal weight.

“I had a pretty low carbon footprint to begin with,” she explains. “I've been taking actions to reduce my carbon footprint for a long time. Now I'm trying to lead by example, at school and at home.”

The SYC goes beyond motivating students at individual campuses—it creates a network of students in universities in Canada. Monthly phone calls and “Feedback Friday” email exchanges keep sustainability-minded students connected across the country.

“It's all students and we have a collaboration network, we bounce ideas off of and learn from each other,” says Hewlko.

She's an active member of the campus' student sustainability group, which provides a forum for students to pitch sustainability initiatives and get involved. Students gather monthly to discuss project ideas—from filling the campus courtyard with empty water bottles to raise awareness, to conducting campus waste audits and reports.

Hewlko sees herself as both a leader and a peer. She is a “connector” bridging the gap that can exist between faculty, staff, and students on campus.

“Students can relate to me a lot easier,” she says. “I get the off-hand remarks that might not get to a professor. Being a student, I am more accessible and I can then share their ideas with other university bodies.”

Hewlko enjoys seeing the intersections within the university and being able to work with a variety of groups.

“It's nice to bridge borders. I like being that connector, the person students can come to with questions and concerns, particularly when they don't feel comfortable or don't know where to go.”

