

“Adults in Rotary push you to dream big and not be afraid.”

Julia Caussil



‘The change of tomorrow’

In early 2019, tens of thousands of teenagers in Europe stopped going to school on Fridays, hoping to pressure their countries’ leaders to confront climate change.

At the time, Julia Caussil, a high school student from Montpellier, France, was living in Charlotte, North Carolina, as a Rotary Youth Exchange student. She brought the European movement’s energy to the Piedmont by taking part in weekly climate strikes organized at Charlotte’s City Hall.

Now back in France, Caussil has combined her passion for activism with the network and experience she gained from Youth Exchange to become a leader in two environmental groups with international scope. She is the founder and executive director of the Climate Solutions Coalition, which is affiliated with Rotary’s Environmental Sustainability Rotarian Action Group; she is also France’s representative to Earth Uprising’s Global Youth Council, a group that connects young climate activists from more than 15 countries.

THE ROTARIAN: What was your favorite part of your Youth Exchange experience?

CAUSSIL: You can meet people from all over the world, including exchange students who are living in the same Rotary district as you. Now I have friends from something like 40 countries. And Charlotte is an amazing city.

TR: How did Youth Exchange inspire you to take a leadership role in environmental activism?

CAUSSIL: Being an exchange student allows you to grow very fast. I’ve always been very concerned about the environment, but I didn’t know what to do. In the United States, everything seems possible. Adults in Rotary push you to dream big and not be afraid. They don’t treat you as if you are a child, but as if you are a future change-maker and your voice counts. Sometimes in France, you want to do something and people will tell you, “Oh, don’t do that. It’s too complicated.” In the U.S., they tell you that you can do it.

TR: What are the missions of the two groups you are affiliated with, Climate Solutions Coalition and Earth Uprising?

CAUSSIL: Climate Solutions Coalition’s goal is to implement concrete solutions that will mitigate climate change and help the most marginalized people. I’m leading this project with the Envi-

ronmental Sustainability Rotarian Action Group and working with amazing youth leaders from all over the world. Right now, people from 20 countries are involved, and many are Rotary Youth Exchange students.

While Climate Solutions Coalition is focused on implementing direct actions, Earth Uprising aims to put pressure on politicians and governments to align with the United Nations’ Paris Agreement and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report.

With both, we’re making a difference, but these groups are also a symbol to all the people who want to do something about the climate crisis but think they can’t do anything about it. I want to show them that nobody is too small to be the change of tomorrow and that everyone is needed.

TR: Why is this movement being led by young people like you?

CAUSSIL: It’s our future. People need to understand that this crisis is real and it’s affecting us right now. In France, we have killer heat waves. We have huge wildfires in California and in Greece. When I was in Charlotte, there were floods and power outages in North Carolina from Hurricane Florence and Tropical Storm Michael. Every year, 4.2 million people die because of air pollution. And it is the most marginalized people in my generation who suffer the most. We are leading this action because it’s a rational thing to do.

—FRITZLENNEMAN