



# Project Plastic Free UAE

**Project Aim:** To strive towards a zero waste future in our school and the wider community.

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## The Problem:

We noticed that lots of students used disposable plastic water bottles in school. This is because the local water can sometimes be unsound to drink, thus bottled water is encouraged. Therefore, drinking from disposable bottles is often seen as a simple solution, which is irresponsible consumption (Goal 12). Many people also struggled to understand how to use the recycling bins, as recycling is also not a common practice here and many were unfamiliar with it. Because of this there is a large amount of plastic waste produced by the UAE: 8.3 billion tons annually to be exact. This waste then pollutes the environment, especially the waterways in the UAE (Goal 14). The high demand for disposable packages also takes a large toll on the environment, as plastics generate heat-trapping gases at every stage of their life cycle (Goal 12/13). Using information about garbage collection from our school, we have calculated that our school produces close to 50,000 kg of plastic waste each year and there was no viable recycling system in place before the project.

## Highlights:

Last year, we launched a new annual competition that students of all ages from throughout the school could enter. Students were asked to design a water bottle cover that reflected the theme of protecting marine life. We have found that our consistent engagement with younger students has encouraged a school wide passion for marine protection. This contest also encouraged students to research and consider marine life health and the impact of plastic, thus starting a conversation within the school about Goal 14.



This year, the winners of the competition had their designs turned into high quality reusable water bottles which we offered for sale to the school and local community. After negotiating with the bottle producers, we were able to minimise the cost of product thus maximising our profits. We decided to donate these profits to a charity called Plastic Oceans, who provide underserved schools and communities with safe drinking water and reusable bottles. We feel that by giving to this charity we ensured that our project's impact would be felt globally, not just in our local area.

Within the first two hours of selling our bottles we made well over 500 dirhams revenue from selling almost 50 bottles, and we know this number will only continue to increase once we can get back to our local community and start selling our bottles once again!

We have also introduced new recycling bins around the school, in canteens and classrooms, and informed students on how to use them properly. We also decided to partner with a local company, Simply Bottles UAE, which turns plastic waste into fabric which is then made into clothing, to ensure that any plastic waste produced by our school would be recycled. We have been seeking funding



**New recycling bins at the school**



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from our school and are very close to implementing Simply Bottles bins into our school which will allow us to send all plastic waste to them to be repurposed, and we hope to do this once our school reopens. We hope to become a community hub, where people from outside the school can also bring their collected plastic waste to be recycled, ensuring that our entire local community will feel the impact of our project.

We have also hosted a social media competition using our school's official Facebook and Instagram pages over the recent winter holiday. We received hundreds of applications, showing that students are already very eager to participate in competitions relating to saving the planet.

have already bought reusable bottles from us. This will reduce demand for plastic products, thus reducing their negative impact on the environment (Goals 13/14). Our newly implemented school recycling system, and our partnership with Simply Bottles means that almost all plastic waste produced by the school will be recycled, preventing it from polluting the environment, thus protecting marine life (Goal 14). We estimate that we will be preventing roughly 40,000 kg of waste from being sent to landfills annually (as our tests have shown our recycling program to be 80% effective). Therefore, we will save around 240,000 kg of carbon dioxide per year by recycling this plastic waste (Addressing Goal 13) and preventing thousands of pieces of plastic waste from entering the oceans (Addressing Goal 14).



**Selling our bottles at International Day at our stall which the PTA gave permission for us to have**

The school's PTA actively supports and promotes our project, showing that our project has also reached parents and encouraged them to consume good responsibly (Addressing Goal 12). Even though our project was interrupted by the pandemic, we have been able to continue to promote waste free living over social media and will continue our project when we return to school.

## Knowledge, learning and skills:

### Outcomes and Impacts:

We have spoken with every single year group, meaning that every single one of our school's 2000 students have been involved in our project. Our assemblies have ensured that they all now have a better understanding of the dangers of plastic waste and how we can reduce it by consuming responsibly by using reusable instead of disposable goods (Addressing Goal 12). Numerous students, teachers and parents

The process of completing this project not only benefited our community, it also taught us a variety of new skills and allowed us to learn more about our environment. This project acted as an opportunity for us to look into the true, devastating impacts of plastic, motivating us even more to work on this project and to carry on our advocacy once it has finished. The biggest skill we learnt was how to work in a team. Before starting this project, many of us knew hardly anything about each other, but after working together for months we became a family- dedicated to helping our earth. We also learnt valuable communication skills from contacting different organisations and stakeholders of our school, and how to plan for our different events. On top of this, the older



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students built on their leadership and organisation skills from leading the other members. Overall, all of these new skills have allowed us to grow, and mature, and we can now apply them to future endeavors.

We faced some setbacks, as the COVID-19 pandemic caused our school to close and halted our project. However, we were fortunate enough to still be able to communicate and worked as a team to ensure that we continued to encourage waste free living using social media. This challenge allowed us to develop perseverance, as we decided not to give up and continued to work on the project even though it was more difficult. It also taught us spontaneity, as we had to think of a solution to the problem very quickly.

## **Our Team:**

Our team has collectively spent over 150 hours on this project. We have informed and encouraged over 2000 students and hundreds of families from our school to consume responsibly, recycle and use reusable goods. We have also formed a relationship with the local company 'Simply Bottles', thus supporting their work, and we are also dedicated to supporting the international charity 'Plastic Oceans' to ensure that they are supported and thus allow us to have an impact internationally.

## **Future plans:**

- Invite Charlene Anwar from unwrapped UAE to present her organisation's message with the school
- Implement bins from Simply Bottles for students and parents to bring in plastic for it to be upcycled
- Reward system for those who regularly use these bins
- Further market and sell our bottles throughout the school
- Hold another EcoArt contest
- Host a desert clean up
- Have a competition between classes for who purchases the most bottles