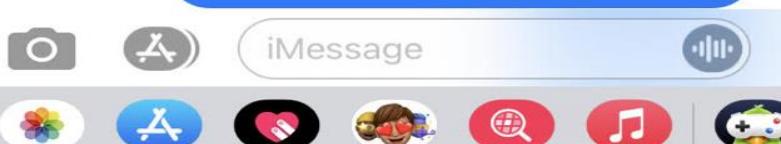


Recycling for the Westpark Recycling Center

I am a member of a religious church group called The Neocatechumenal Way. As I was considering my social network, I realized that I could take advantage of this community by raising awareness of the detrimental effects that the usage of plastic, PET, and other potentially recyclable materials has on our environment. My church group meets every Wednesday, so I set out on this nerve-wracking (but ultimately incredible) journey to encourage them to recycle at home.

Hey! I wanted to ask you for your permission on something. I was recently introduced to an organization called Global Social Leaders. I am partaking in a project from that organization where I spread awareness and encourage people to recycle. I wanted to ask you if I could give the community this Wednesday a small introduction on the impacts of plastic on the ecosystem and then ask them if they would support me in this endeavor and actually recycle their "trash" (things they would otherwise consider as being trash but are able to be recycled). I would ask them to give it to me by the end of the month so I can then take them to a recycling center.



Asking the leader of my church group for permission - **Tuesday, March 2nd**

Here is a screenshot of the message I sent to Rocio, the leader of my community at church, to allow me to speak in front of the group the next day, when we meet. She is incredibly supportive and agreed to it! Now, onto the slightly frightening, but necessary, part of standing in front of the podium and spread the message.

Talking to the group about my challenge - Wednesday, March 3rd



Above is an image captured by my friend at church. I stood in that podium in front of 34 people and told them about GSL and my independent challenge. I began my announcement by asking them about their current knowledge of the dangers of plastic, and I was delightfully surprised by the number of raised hands I saw. They were participating! It appeared that people knew about the extent of this crisis, however, I did count 17 plastic water bottles that night. I then told them a few facts about the way the usage of plastic is endangering oceanic life and how the further usage of it will undoubtedly harm future generations and the quality of their life. I chose to tell them this, not to frighten or judge them, but rather to motivate them to consider how their actions have consequences, consequences that will impact us. Moreover, this was a favorable audience considering that about 90% of them are parents. I then "opened the floor" to questions about the way those who wanted to support would give me the recyclables they would each collect.

Collecting their recyclables – March 10th and 24th



I sent a message, after our meeting on March 3rd, through a group chat the church group has and elaborated on the types of materials that are recyclable and those that are not, based on the list available to me by the Westpark Recycling Center website.

In the afternoon of March 10th, prior to our next meeting that night, I sent another message through the group chat detailing that those that recycled should tell me, that way I could pick up the bags from their cars. This image was taken at my church's parking lot, where I collected the recyclables of the 28 people who cooperated. That day and on March 24th - since on the 17th the meeting was cancelled - the trunk of my car auto was overflowing with bags and cartons! The cartons, specifically, took up the most space since they were quite large. The person who brought them is named Rosa, she is a mother who also volunteers at the Houston Food Bank on weekdays. She asked the person in charge of the food distribution to allow her to take home the cartons where food was transported from the Food Bank to the church so she could recycle them. When she told me this, I was ecstatic because she spread more awareness about this issue when she told the volunteers at the Food Bank!

It was delightful to see how many people took time out of their day to recycle!

Sorting the recyclables - March 27th



I chose that Saturday to take the recyclables to the center since it was the day closer to the end of the month that my parents could take me. I took the bags of recycling that I had collected from church and other family friends throughout the month and I dumped it in my backyard (since the bags they had given me were distinctly different, I put all of their "trash" together that way I would respect their privacy). I then put some gloves on (which were also recycled), and began sorting them!

I create a pile for paper and carton; aluminum and tin cans; styro-foam; glass; and finally, one for plastic. I would like to note that the average Hispanic, at least in my church group, consumes a concerning amount of soda cans, a health issue that could perhaps be tackled by a passionate change-maker. The pile for glass was comparatively smaller than that of the paper pile, which was mostly composed of junk mail. This made me realize how much paper is thrown away by the millions of Americans who get mail and do not take a second look at because it is useless to them. Perhaps companies who send it should consider giving customers options for digital mail, or giving surveys regarding what mail they would like to receive, effectively eliminating junk paper mail. Next up, the dreaded plastic – ecosystem's most potent enemy (next to greenhouse gases of course). Unsurprisingly, that pile was one of the largest. There was also an Amazon Prime package that made it difficult to determine whether it belonged in the plastic or paper pile given the nature of the materials it was made of. The yellow envelope was incredibly glued to bubble wrap found in its interior; moreover, I could not find the recycling logo anywhere on it. Amazon definitely has room for growth when designing their envelopes to be more recycling-friendly.

Cardboard drop-off - Saturday, March 27th



As soon as I finished sorting the recyclables into bags, I headed to the Westpark Recycling Center. I believe more people would recycle if they had centers, such as this one, closer to their home at least for me! This is because I had a hard time finding one that was near my home. I not only chose this specific center to drop off my recycling because of its proximity, but also since it was the only one I could find that accepted styro-foam in the Houston-area.

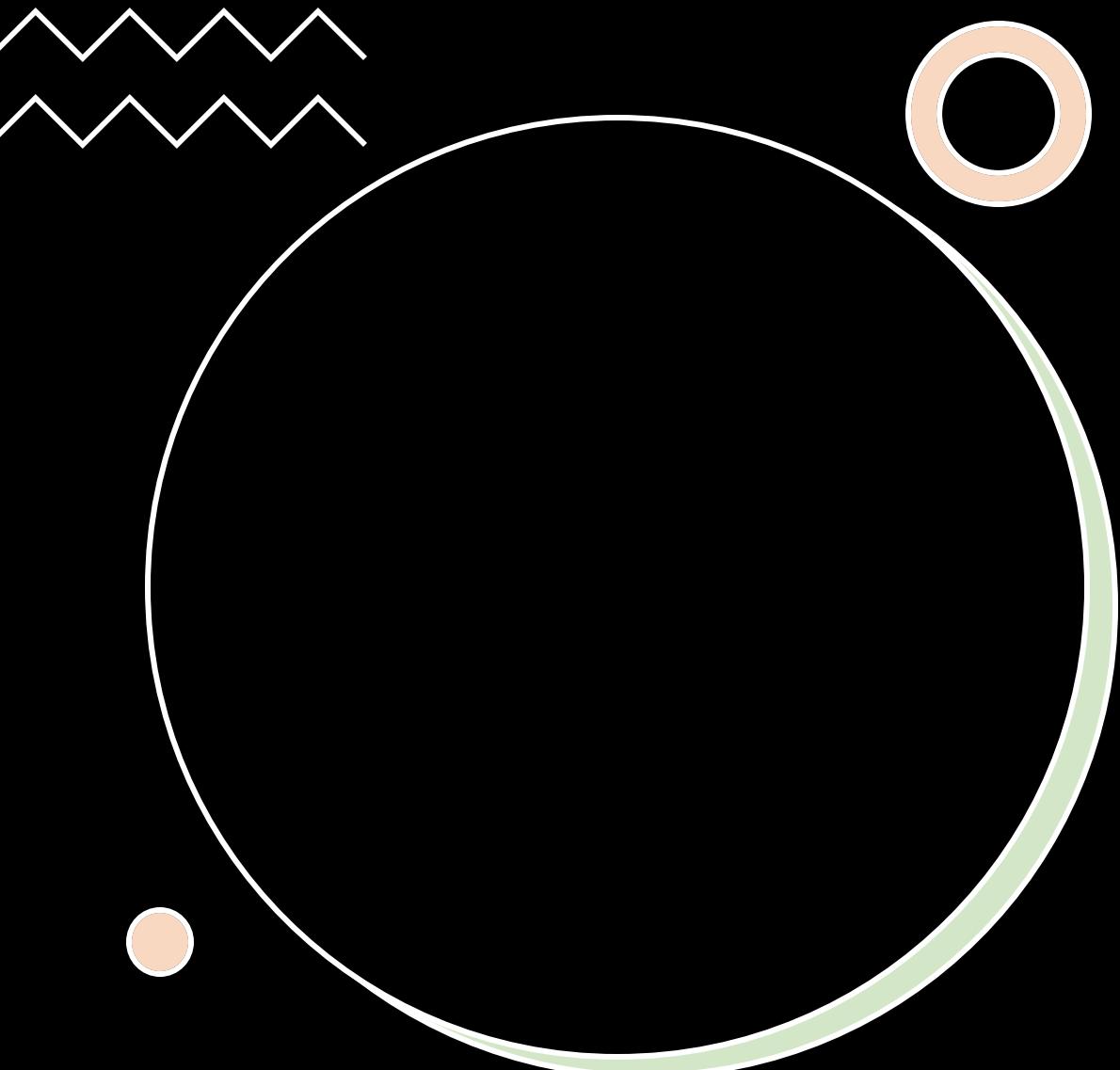
As soon as I arrived at the center, I saw a sign that said to drop off cardboard at another section of the compound. My parents pulled up there, and we began to unload it from our trunk. The large, green machine that can be seen to the left is where we deposited the loads of cardboard we brought. Since it was my first time at that recycling center, I was amazed by the machinery! It was not only a container to place it in, but it was also mechanized to increase the intake of cardboard already there in order to make space for more.

It definitely required teamwork to unload the what seemed like an endless pile of cardboard, but we did it! Now, onto the bags filled with recyclables.

Recycling drop-off - Saturday, March 27th



After we circled back to the drive-through area, we waited for other cars to unload their recycling. When it was our turn, we entered the warehouse that appears on the image to the left. There, and still in our cars, a man greeted us and took our temperature since it was a City facility. He asked us to open the trunk of the car and removed the 14 bags that those who supported me in my challenge had collected. He took the 7 bags that contained paper, then moved on to the 4 bags that held plastic, and lastly, the bag that had styrofoam; the other filled to the brim with aluminum cans; and the bag with glass bottles. After he had collected all that was in the trunk, we exited the facility!



- **Steps I will take in the future -**

- E-mail Raising Cane's (a fast-food chain) and inform them of how the styro-foam containers they utilize to place their food in will take approximately 500 years to break down in landfills, and encourage them to keep the community they claim to care about, safe
- Encourage my friends in school to recycle
- Keep in touch with the people at my church group who are interested in continuing to recycle so that I can facilitate it
- Continue recycling myself!

Thank you!

