

Empowering Change: Dejea Lyon's Journey through Policy Advocacy Education

This blog explores the impact of youth engagement in policy advocacy education, through the story of Dejea Lyons, a leader in the [Planeteer Alliance](#), which is the program that evolved out of Ocean Heroes and that continues to partner with UNEP Tide Turners.

Dejea Lyons, 21, embarked on a transformative journey of advocating for environmental sustainability after attending her first policy advocacy training, the [Ocean Heroes Bootcamp](#), in 2019. Co-founded by Captain Planet Foundation and Lonely Whale with support of United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Tide Turners initiative among others, this bootcamp brought together 300 passionate youths from across 20 different countries to train them on public speaking, carrying out advocacy campaigns, and making proposals towards businesses and policymakers. During one such public speaking session, she heard one of the other participants say, "Youths are only a certain percentage of the global population right now, but we're 100% of our future. So what are you waiting for?" "And that moment is what struck a chord with me. From then on, I knew exactly what I was going to do for the rest of my life", states Dejea.



However, Dejea's deep appreciation for the environment originated much earlier, when she was a young girl growing up surrounded by the pristine beauty of the Cayman Islands. Her family's

connection to the sea, with a father running a water sports company and a great-grandfather who was a seafarer, instilled in her a love for the oceans.



Armed with the knowledge gained from the bootcamp and driven by her newly ignited passions, Dejea took up the helm of Protect Our Future, a youth-led organization. She began spearheading several campaigns, including [one against a proposed cruise berthing facility in George Town Harbour](#). Recognizing the environmental threat posed by the project, Dejea and her team, later becoming known as “the sheet kids” in their community, engaged [in various advocacy efforts](#), from petitions to peaceful protests and in the end were able to successfully halt the project.



Dejea's commitment to environmental causes extended to addressing plastic pollution in her locality, where a lack of effective waste management led to the creation of a massive trash mound known as Mount Trashmore, sadly also deemed as the highest elevation point in Cayman Islands by the locals. With Protect Our Future, she [advocated for a single-use plastic policy, pushing for legislative change](#). Despite setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in government, Dejea continues to work towards sustainable policies, now studying Global Development and Sustainability at Bath Spa University, one of the UK's leading environmentally friendly universities, to further equip herself for the cause. For her achievements in environmental advocacy and promoting cross-generation dialogue, [Dejea was awarded the prestigious Diana Award in 2022](#).