

Report from the First Oregon Academy: Abraham's Tent—Guardians of the Earth

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Climate Change for Families and Plant for
the Planet Begin to Start U.S. Academies
in Oregon!



Introduction

Tuesday, the 28th of July, 2015 marked the first Academy in Oregon. It happened in Portland, Oregon as part of an Interfaith Camp called Abraham's Tent in which Jewish, Christian, and Muslim students came together to become Guardians of the Earth. Supported by several congregations including P'nai Or Jewish Renewal—the congregation of Ambassadors Miko and Isaac Vergun and their mom, Pam Vergun—it was led by Michael Foster together with Miko, Isaac, and Pam (the primary organizer).

The location was a beautiful building that serves as P'nai Or's Synagogue and St. Mark Presbyterian's Church. The students, most of whom were part of a week-long camp focused on protecting the Earth, had met the previous day and continued after the Academy for the next three days to work on projects such as getting rid of invasive species, as well as hiking, studying, and planning together. The camp ended on Friday with a presentation at Portland Ahmadiyya Community's Riswan Mosque for families of the students and members of these three congregations as well as other participating groups.

Other faith-based organizations that were involved included: the Interfaith Council of Greater Portland, Muslim Educational Trust, Moreland Presbyterian Church, First Congregational United Church of Christ of Portland, Tigard United Methodist Church, and Aloha United Methodist Church.

The Academy had eleven students from at least three cities across the Greater Portland area: Beaverton, Portland, and Tigard. They represent at least seven

schools (in addition to local schools which they previously attended, such as Barnes Elementary School): The International School of Beaverton, Tigard High School, Fowler Middle School, Northwest Academy, Sellwood School, Portland Waldorf School, and Trillium Charter School. They ranged from entering 6th graders to entering 12th graders, from about 11 to 17 years old. Some knew each other through close friendships or through participating in Abraham's Tent in previous years. One particularly exciting thing was that a student, Jeremy Clark, and his brother, Noah, who we had meant to invite after hearing Jeremy on Oregon Public Broadcasting's radio show *Think Out Loud*, heard about the camp from his church's Sunday School teacher, Batya Podos (who like Pam is a Maggidah, a Jewish storyteller and teacher) and so ended up in the camp anyway!

Sponsors and Supporters

As mentioned above, one interfaith organization, one Muslim organization, a Muslim congregation, a Jewish Renewal synagogue, and five Christian churches from three denominations participated in the Academy, as well as other groups that helped to publicize it. The Academy began because of the interest that one of the volunteers, a teacher, minister, and father, Rev. Kris Voss-Rothmeier, had in Isaac Vergun's Bar Mitzvah Project to get the City of Beaverton to divest from fossil fuels and nuclear power. When Kris asked how Abraham's Tent could help, we suggested they sponsor a Plant for the Planet Academy as a first step!

The interfaith focus made for a very multidimensional experience for both students and helpers. We were particularly delighted that our first Oregon *Plant for the Planet Academy* and *Abraham's Tent—Guardians of the Earth Camp* have both been endorsed by 350PDX, the Portland chapter of 350.org!

We also began to develop a supportive relationship with local officials whom we invited as guests. Although none of the officials were able to come because of the short notice (less than 10 days, closer to 4 days notice in one case), each of the leaders we contacted spent significant time trying to arrange their schedule to allow them to be part of the Academy and requested that we let them know about future opportunities to learn from and support the students. Specifically, U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley was scheduled to be in Washington D.C., but his staff was very supportive—his State Director requested that we let him know about future chances for him to connect with our work. Senator Merkley's State Director, Jessica Stevens was one of those invited to speak, and she tried to rearrange her schedule for a few days, but couldn't manage it. In addition to Senator Merkley and State Director Stevens, we invited State Representative Phil Barnhart from Eugene. Representative Barnhart is an Oregon leader in Climate Change, having sponsored: 1) HJR10, Imposing

taxes on carbon emissions; 2) HB2572, mandating carbon footprint labeling on all consumer products sold or offered for sale in Oregon; and 3) HJR10, which imposes taxes on carbon emissions, proposed by Oregon Climate, using a Carbon Tax and Dividend approach. We also invited Beaverton Mayor Denny Doyle who has been a leader in working on Climate Change and very supportive of our campaign to get the City of Beaverton to divest from fossil fuels and nuclear power. At the very least, we were able to begin to get word out about Plant for the Planet to local officials as a result of this first Oregon Academy, as well as laying the groundwork for future connections to elected officials.

Besides the commitment of P'nai Or Jewish Renewal of Portland leader Maggidah Rev. Batya Podos and St. Mark Presbyterian Pastor Rev. Dr. Barbara Campbell, Michael Foster of Climate Change for Families and Plant for the Planet who came down from Seattle, Washington in between meetings with the Governor about the recent Climate Change lawsuit, and the Vergun family's desire to see Plant for the Planet spread in the U.S. into Oregon and beyond, several awesome volunteers from the participating Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities helped make for a wonderful Academy.

Miko and Isaac Vergun, the two Ambassadors, put in many, many hours preparing to lead their first Academy by themselves, as many of their peers from Washington were busy with the recent legal success of *Zoe & Stella Foster v. Washington Department of Ecology*.

One volunteer in particular, a member of P'nai Or named Harriet Cooke, helped in many key ways. For example, Harriet asked the P'nai Or Council to approve money to support the food for the Academy. Harriet turned the \$100 she was given into an awesome meal that she, the Verguns, and other volunteers such as Emily Polanshek made. It included a bunch of wonderful homemade vegetarian food such as chili and bread and additional food donated by folks like Britta Dedrick & Tim Brandon of P'nai Or.

Another P'nai Or member, Cathy Zheutlin, though she was unable to attend, put us in touch with a fellow videographer, Ron West of WorkPrint Productions and Looking Glass Digital, who filmed the Academy and who will be producing one or more videos for our use!

Pam Vergun and Kalyna, Kameiah, and Horgan Korok and others all contributed by taking photos of the events of the day.

We are also grateful for receiving the help of Plant-for-the- Planet staff member Ian Eveleigh.

In addition to the parents and siblings who were part of the audience and support for students, several volunteers helped during the day, particularly: Jeri Silfies and Heba helped throughout the day, with Beth Hirschfield, Bruce Morris, Rachel Lileet-Foley, Bill Coddington, Milt Markewitz, Joel Glick, Rivkah Coburn, and Shaylene Haswarey helping in various ways.

Sandy Polishuk lent a hand with publicity and obtaining the sponsorships by 350PDX, with Masada Disenhouse and Zoë Wong-Weissman coming through on the national level with 350.org. Rick Brown from 350PDX made time to be there for the afternoon presentation and graduation, bringing 350PDX buttons as gifts for the new Ambassadors.

Deborah Moon, Editor-in-Chief of a local Oregon magazine that focuses on stories with Jewish themes, *Oregon Jewish Life*, is considering publishing an article featuring our work on Climate Change and Recovery including this Academy in their annual Bar and Bat Mitzvah issue. We hope to see it in the October 2015 issue, and when it is, we will post it at www.ClimateChangeRecovery.org.

Continuing appreciation goes to Pastor Barbara for watching over the tree that the students planted, Isaac Newton, a fig tree donated to the P'nai Or and St. Mark Garden by the family of Kris and new Ambassador Henry Voss-Rothmeier.

You could ask, why so many volunteers for a modest number of students?

We had hoped for and tried to arrange much larger numbers of students, but unfortunately the late start that the Academy was given in planning, combined with concerns the interfaith camp organizers had about their ability to handle large numbers of students who were not there for the full week and who signed up shortly before the camp led to a relatively small camp. They also had concerns about allowing the younger children (entering Kindergarten through 5th grade) to be part of the Academy, and so the younger ones and their parents were in the end only invited to the afternoon presentation. The Academy time was shortened to enable the incorporation of a morning service (since this was part of the pattern of Abraham's Tent camp) and to end in time to more easily enable the families of younger children to participate in the end of the day activities. Though several parents of younger children were interested, all the younger families ended up leaving and missing it, but we will contact them about future opportunities to be part of Plant for the Planet.

Even given the restrictions put on the Academy, the variety of schools, towns, and religious affiliations represented make for a very strong first Oregon-trained cohort. And, as for the volunteers, we saw this Academy as a chance to showcase Plant for the Planet in Oregon, and so we made a point of connecting as many interconnected local leaders as possible to the Academy. That way, as we go forward in planning

future Academies, they would each be in a position to understand what a precious and valuable experience this is, and be able to draw upon each other to help build up future Academies. For example, Michael, Pam, Miko, Isaac, Harriet, Cathy, Emily, Joel, Beth, and Rachel were all part of the Kayaktivist actions in Seattle and/or Portland, in a book group together studying Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism v. the Climate*, or both, and the Vergun and Korok families both have ties to the Marshall Islands (vulnerable to rising sea levels) and to each other.

Parts of Our Day

Welcome, Ambassadors' Presentation, and Q & A

We began the morning according to the plans of Abraham's Tent, with a short Jewish morning service that included gathering around P'nai Or's Torah. Then, Michael introduced Plant for the Planet and connected the morning service to the day's Academy through leading us through a poem with movement that was reminiscent of Jewish prayer styles that echo yoga and honor nature.

*Be like a tree in pursuit of your cause.
Stand firm, grip hard, thrust upward, bend to
the winds of heaven, and learn tranquility.¹*

These beautiful moments were followed by the children, teens, and adult volunteers watching with great attention "Now We Children Save the World!" Then, previously appointed Climate Justice Ambassadors Miko and Isaac Vergun gave the slideshow presentation covering the topics of Climate Change and CO2, the depth of the climate crisis, the history and goals of Plant-for-the-Planet, and the key piece of global justice. Both Miko and Isaac had done Mitzvah Projects ("Mitzvah" means "commandment") to address issues related to Climate Change, with Miko's focusing on the country of her birth, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Isaac's on divestment from fossil fuels and nuclear power.

One of the best moments in the presentation was when the billion tree goal was mentioned and one of the audience members (a kind and fairly knowledgeable person and teacher) let out involuntarily a sort of scoffing sound at the idea of planting a billion trees. You could almost hear her say, "Do you have any idea how many a billion is?" Then, Miko and Isaac explained how the new goal was 1,000

¹ Dedication to Richard St. Barbe Baker, Father of the Trees, in *Earth Prayers from Around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*

billion because we have already passed 14 billion. It was a brilliant moment in which everyone present got a taste of how what seems impossible can happen. And how we can tell stories like this one now to give each other courage and someday tell our grandchildren the same story with pride at our accomplishments.

Break and World Game

After questions and answers, we enjoyed a break in the orchard that is part of the garden and shared refreshments. When we went back inside, we all gathered around a big table for the World Game. Under the direction of Miko, the teens made their best estimates of how population, income, and CO₂ is distributed across the continents. Although they had fairly educated guesses, there were some surprises, like how close Australia is to the U.S. in terms of its abuse of our shared climate. Then, each took turns reading a sobering story of an impact of Climate Change. This was a chance for even the most shy to speak and command the attention of the others.

Public-Speaking Training

Because we needed to use our time particularly effectively, we began by giving each student a printout of the slides they would be teaching about and most formed into groups of two-person presentation teams. Michael, with some help from Miko and a student or two talked about what makes for an effective speech, and how to use your hands and other parts of your body language in a way that adds to your message rather than detracts from it. Then, some did a few quick practice speeches in front of the others, and everyone got a chance to discuss, observe, and give good, positive feedback—and gentle constructive criticism.

Lunch Break

After the public speaking practice, the children joined the adults and saw the delicious food that had been prepared. Drawing upon Christian, Muslim, and especially Jewish tradition, together they gave blessings and thanks for the food and everything that went into creating it and bringing it to them. For lunch we took our reusable tableware and went out to the garden with its little gazebo, rocks, and picnic benches to sit on. Some sat on the newly-laid brick patio to relax a little, and we all got to know each other better and had the chance to discuss Climate Change and the rest of the day. Zusha, the labradoodle whose person is the Hazzan (Cantor)

and current spiritual leader of P'nai Or, Bruce Morris (or Baruch, meaning Blessing") came to join us. Her friendly personality was much appreciated, and Zusha taught at least one student about the importance of valuing the food we are given. (And, of keeping it out of reach of interested and rather tall dogs.)

Finishing lunch, the Abraham's Tent teachers led short services from the three traditions in preparation for planting a tree, with Isaac, for example, reading from the Tanakh, the Elder Scriptures.

Planting Party

Only a couple of steps from where we enjoyed our lunch was the orchard part of the Faces of Light Garden. ("P'nai Or" in Hebrew is "Faces of Light", and that is a great characterization of the focused and beautiful collection of children and adults who were gathered there.) Michael explained about how best to plant a tree and talked about the importance of timing and also watching over the trees so they would have enough water given the drought Oregon like so many areas is experiencing. The bigger and stronger the tree can get, the more CO₂ it can absorb, he explained.

Michael helped some of the stronger students like Kalyna and Miko to get the fig loose from its pot, and everyone helped to dig a hole in the hard earth that was big enough and to plant their tree. After some debate, since it was a fig tree, one of the trees mentioned in the Torah, and in honor of Abraham's (and Pam's) son Isaac, they named the tree "Isaac Newton" (as in Fig Newton and the scientist who contributed so much to our understanding of our planet). Then, everyone present reached out to bless the tree.

World Café

During the week of the camp, the students worked together and had informal opportunities to think about what they want to do together as a team. Because of the shortened day as explained above, our World Café happened informally with a follow-up planning session the following week.

They thought through questions about how to get adults, friends, and classmates involved, how to get the media to report on their work, and how to seriously get started planting trees and Academies. Here are a few of their ideas and plans:

"We can tell the media about this and maybe be interviewed. We can also make use of hashtags to bring media attention to our work."

“In order to motivate the adults, especially elected officials and others in positions of power, like school principals, we can talk to the adults about stuff they want to hear but also say things they may not want to hear.”

“To motivate friends and classmates, we could tell them that at the academy there is free food. I could also say that it is their future that is disappearing.”

“To organize a planting party we can contact companies who carry trees ask them to donate. We can also contact other organizations like ours to spread the word out to people who are from other environmental organizations.”

“As an individual, your audience is other individuals and your job is to let them know that Climate Change is happening, and we still have enough time to stop it.”

“Working as a team we can get government officials, heads of state, city council leaders, and others to listen.”

“You can take a pledge to be a climate leader, like I have, on the website Earth Guardians, and start a Crew. This will not only get more people to participate in taking action, but it is another way to show that you’re an official leader.”

Preparing to Give the Presentation

Unlike most Academies in which the students work in subgroups and decide together who to have present, because of the small number of students and our desire to get them all as ready as possible to become leaders in this work to get Oregon up and running quickly, students teamed up in pairs, except for one student who wanted to present by himself and two who teamed together with already-appointed Ambassador Isaac. Each group practiced their slides with support from Miko, Michael, Pam, and others.

Afternoon Presentation

Before we knew it, it was time to give the presentation! We greeted the parents of the younger children who weren’t able to be part of the Academy and encouraged them to stay. Though none did, we had several good conversations with both parents and children about Plant for the Planet and will be letting them know when future Academies happen.

In addition to ourselves and our families, we had friends from P’nai Or who came to witness our presentation, including the Vice President of our Council and another P’nai Or friend and author Milt Markewitz who brought his grandchildren. Also Rick Brown came from 350PDX to hear our presentation and bring us 350PDX pins to be given as part of graduation.

The presentations by the students were all pretty good. One thing we learned was the importance of making sure that everyone knew they would be presenting without notes—one team didn’t realize this until about 10 minutes before the presentation, and so they ended up using notes, but still did a good job.

The two-person team approach and having everyone present worked well. Even for those who were most shy, they could rely upon their co-presenter when they got too nervous. In the case of one team, for example, though they seemed at ease during their practice, one of the girls got almost too nervous to speak during the presentation, but her team member helped her out and so the material was covered. In the end, everyone got the chance to be part of the presentation. Also, the two-person team approach made it easier to focus on the message than if we had had people each presenting separately.

Graduation

Following the presentation, we began the graduation ceremony. One by one we called up the students (who looked relieved at having finished their first Plant for the Planet presentation). Michael and Pam awarded their certificates, and each student received their appointment as a Climate Justice Ambassador. We also gave them a copy of the book *Tree by Tree: Now We Children Save the World* by Felix and Friends and the new book for teens *Everything Would Be Alright: How Children Can Change the World—A Polemic Paper* by Felix Finkbeiner. Pam also awarded each Ambassador a 350PDX button that had been brought to the ceremony for 350PDX by Board Secretary Rick Brown.

One of the cool things that happened, perhaps because the Academy took place as part of Abraham’s Tent where students had been using permanent fabric markers, is that during the breaks some of the students teamed up and personalized their shirts with phrases like “sHell No!” and “Two Green Leaves” (the name of the Climate Change blog started by one of the students the year before) drawn in many colors. (It is impressive the graphics they did on the backs of shirts that were currently being worn!) Their artwork on the shirts, and the additional temporary artwork they did on their skin, made for a very vibrant and artistic day and concluding presentation, not to mention adding to the fun.

Students, parents, volunteers, and other adults and children in the community who came to listen and bear witness to their achievements were all delighted by the end of the Academy. Together we shared some treats at the reception afterwards and had a great time. Talking about the day as we cleaned up, we were really struck by what a great group of kids had joined Plant for the Planet that day. Even though we hadn't been able to spend as much time on World Café as the typical Academy, the fact that the students were spending a week together focusing on the environment and that many had met each other at previous Abraham's Tent camps, or were friends going back years, meant that they already had some of the connections and could more easily continue on with the work of Climate Recovery after the Academy.

The Rest of the Week

The Monday before the Academy the future Plant for the Planet students went to Johnson Creek and the Springwater Corridor, located in the Sellwood District of Portland. They worked all day in the hot sun (about 35 degrees Celsius) to remove the invasive species English Ivy, Canadian Thistles, and other weeds. They also watered the native plants that others had planted to help them survive the unreasonably hot weather. Except for the delicious blackberries the students picked and ate as a break, what a hands-on way to learn why we want to stop Climate Change and protect areas from increases in invasive species.

The next day, Tuesday, was the day of the Academy.

Wednesday, having graduated from the Academy, the newly-appointed Climate Justice Ambassadors and the volunteers for the day went to a start-up urban farm also in Sellwood called Abba's Garden. ("Abba" means "dad" in Hebrew.) The farm was started by Mennonite community whose goal is "to bring peace to the city through community engagement and urban farming." Many years ago, the grounds were a large estate with a grand house complete with a greenhouse. The house and greenhouse are still there, but the landscaping was taken over by weeds. The farm has goats to help eat the Himalayan Blackberries, another invasive species, but the Ambassadors worked to dig out the plants (though they still enjoyed the berries on their breaks :-)), fed the goats, and pulled off the English Ivy that has been choking the trees.

On Thursday the Ambassadors had planned to do more community service for Tryon Creek State Park, but the need for signed permission forms from the parents was forgotten and so the Ambassadors were not able to do the work. Instead, they had a great hike together, covering the whole park, including going over an awesome suspension bridge. It was fun, but it was difficult to hike for about 7 hours

with the temperature being over 35 degrees Celsius, way hotter than it should typically be in our area.

Friday, the Ambassadors worked with their teachers Kris and Pam to create a slideshow that incorporated photos and information on their accomplishments throughout the week into a shortened version of the Plant for the Planet slideshow to present for the closing event of Abraham's Tent—Guardians of the Earth. This took place at Rizwan Mosque before afternoon prayers, with family members, community members, and representatives of the Interfaith Council of Greater Portland present. Their presentation was an impressive end to their week and allowed information on Plant for the Planet to reach a wider interfaith audience.

Thank You

The team at Plant-for-the-Planet would like to thank all those involved in this wonderful Academy.

In particular, the Ambassadors have said they were grateful for the dedication of Michael Foster and Pam Vergun :-). Everyone agreed that Miko and Isaac Vergun did an awesome job singlehandedly leading their first Academy.

We deeply appreciate the kind donation of \$100 by P'nai Or's Council Members toward food and their support for the Academy and for Abraham's Tent. We also appreciate Pastor Barbara Campbell and St. Mark Presbyterian Church for their support, including allowing us to use the building and garden they share with P'nai Or, and to Riswan Mosque for welcoming us to their space and for sending their youth to participate.

A special thanks go to Ron West for filming the Academy and to the folks at WorkPrint Productions and Digital Lookingglass. We look forward to seeing the raw footage and final products and working with you as often as you'd like!

Additional thanks to Deborah Moon, Editor-in-Chief of *Oregon Jewish Life*, for including our work in the upcoming article featuring Isaac's Bar Mitzvah and Miko's Bat Mitzvah Projects. When the October 2015 issue is released, look for a link to it at www.ClimateChangeRecovery.org.

We also appreciate the additional donations of food by the Vergun family (including the organic beans purchased for Isaac's Bar Mitzvah :-)), Britta Dedrick and Tim Brandon, Emily Polanshek and Joel Glick, and others. The work of all the volunteers filled the Academy with more kinds of support than we can easily name. Our volunteers include in particular: Michael Foster, Pam Vergun, Miko Vergun,

Isaac Vergun, Rob Vergun (who helped behind the scenes even though his work didn't permit him to attend), Harriet Cooke, Ron West, Emily Polanshek, Joel Glick, Kris Voss-Rothmeier, Jeri Silfies, Beth Hirschfield, Kalyna Korok, Kameiah Korok, Bruce Morris, Horgan Korok, Rachel Lileet-Foley, Maggidah Batya Podos, Pastor Barbara Campbell, Bill Coddington, Heba, Sandy Polishuk, Milt Markewitz, Shaylene Haswarey, Rivkah Coburn, Rick Brown, Masada Disenhouse, Zoë Wong-Weissman, and Zusha Morris.

More academies in Oregon are planned for 2015. Upcoming Academies will be announced on the Plant-for-the-Planet website, <http://climatechangeforfamilies.com>, and at our local site: www.ClimateChangeRecovery.org.

Postscript: The Next Week— Our First Oregon Plant for the Planet Club Meeting

The Friday following the camp, the Ambassadors were invited to the first club meeting. Many were busy, and one family had an unexpected conflict and so weren't able to come at the last minute. However, Jeremy and Noah Clark and their parents Chris and Catherine joined the Vergun family at our house to plan next steps for the group, and they brought along Charlie Abrams, the other half of the organization Jeremy co-founded, *Two Green Leaves* (<http://twogreenleaves.org>). Charlie will definitely be part of the next Academy and so we consider him an Ambassador-in-Training along with another Abraham's Tent camper who wasn't able to make the Academy. :-) Together we shared a Shabbat dinner in our garden, and then brought the candles in along with the peace and wholeness that Shabbat brings and got to work!

Talk about a kick-off meeting! Jeremy, Noah, and Charlie came to our first meeting having raised more than \$100 and having established a Southeast Portland office in Jeremy's basement!

We discussed many, many excellent approaches we can take together to make a difference, as well as the challenge it would be fitting in the work around school, jobs, and the occasional other activity. Some of the plans we made follow:

We intend to add to the divestment campaign in Beaverton a push for Beaverton to adopt a Climate Recovery Ordinance like the one in Eugene, Oregon. We are also considering making a request for gas pumps to be labeled with a "warming label", as Berkeley, California is preparing to do. We concluded after talking with Michael that the urgency is so great that the Council will just have to accept our multiple requests. We decided that Isaac could continue to lead the divestment work, and Miko would introduce the Recovery Ordinance, and that we will try to find a

Tuesday when there is a Council Meeting to which the others can try to go, even though we don't expect that we'll all make every meeting. But, if we have a fairly consistent presence and prepare well, that should make the impact we want.

To make the most of our time, we concluded that this approach could simultaneously be started in Portland, where the Clark family lives, and at some point extended to other cities and towns where Ambassadors live. (Portland supposedly got agreement on divestment, but we have heard that they haven't been following through on this, so we'll have to do more work on it.) Portland will be more difficult because the Council meetings happen in the middle of the school day. Our conclusion was that the Ambassadors who live in each town could be the ones to lead, with the rest of us trying to join them as much as we can. We also set a difficult goal of showing up at one meeting a month, since regular attendance is how these things happened in Eugene.

Jeremy and Noah and Charlie asked how they should spend the money they raised. We discussed various options such as donating it to Climate Change for Families or Plant for the Planet. They talked animatedly about using the money they raised to buy tree seeds and starting the seedlings, caring for them until they are ready to be planted so that they will have a lot of trees for very little money. We all thought that was a great idea since Jeremy and Noah's parents thought it was doable for them!

Charlie and the Clarks also encouraged the Vergun family to join Oregon Climate and help with the Tuesday phone banking events. They said they found it was really great calling people and talking to them about Climate Change. We definitely will try to work that in. In early September, we got to hear Jeremy speak at one of their events.

We also talked about the schools to which we have ties and how we can encourage these schools to sponsor and send students to Academies.

To sum up, we mapped out a strategy of working on the interrelated goals of: getting Climate Recovery Ordinances passed in as many places as we can, getting cities and other organizations to divest from fossil fuels and nuclear power, making as many people as possible aware about the urgency of dealing with and preventing Climate Change, and getting people involved through encouraging them to support and sponsor Academies.

In spite of the seriousness of our discussion, we had an unbelievably fun time—anyone walking in would have assumed that the five kids and four parents had known each other forever!

This is one of the most rewarding parts of Plant for the Planet and Climate Change for Families—the way these organizations help children and families to connect to others who are working or wanting to work on Climate Change. The situation is bad enough, but it is very isolating for those of us who realize how serious it is when it seems like most of the people around are just ignoring what is going on, or at least so focused on other things that it comes down to the same thing.

By bringing us together, it makes us stronger and gives us the hope to do the work we need to do. We are very grateful to Felix and everyone who has been helping him to start Plant for the Planet and build it over the last few years. Together we can accomplish so much more and keep our spirits up while we do it!

Postscript²: P'nai Or Chooses Climate Change for Families as its Tzedakah (Justice) Partner!

Several months before the Abraham's Tent Camp, the Vergun family had been working with the members of P'nai Or's influential Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) Committee to try to get Climate Change for Families to be chosen as a Tzedakah Partner. (*Tzedakah* means Justice.) When a nonprofit becomes a Tzedakah Partner, P'nai Or does its best to offer support such as encouraging financial donations as well as members volunteering their time to help the organization. Though we are not a big congregation, this partnership can be very helpful to the organizations that end up being chosen. So, the Vergun family was very happy when Pam's pitch to the Committee resulted in Climate Change for Families being chosen along with 350PDX and Fully Fund Oregon Schools as a candidate in June 2015.

In order to build the relationship between Plant for the Planet, Climate Change for Families, and P'nai Or, we asked several P'nai Or members if they would volunteer for the Academy or at least be able to come and see the students' final presentation or some other part of the day. Members were also very supportive about turning out for Isaac and Miko's first presentation to the Beaverton City Council. Rob, Miko and Isaac's dad, worked very hard on our presentation to the community at the Labor Day picnic, and we are delighted to say that after his presentation and the four of us, especially Miko and Isaac, fielding questions, Climate Change for Families was chosen as this year's Tzedakah Partner! One of the great things about this has to do with the saying, "Once a Tzedakah Partner, always a Tzedakah Partner." In other words, though this officially a year commitment, the ties created this year will continue on long beyond the first year.

Less than one week later, at P'nai Or's Rosh Hashanah, we premiered a new Climate Change for Families flyer created by Pam and printed by the Tikkun Olam Committee and a Climate Change for Families poster board display about Plant for the Planet Academies and all that has already been accomplished in Oregon, along with the launch of a new website focusing on our Oregon-based work on Climate Change, ClimateChangeRecovery.org.

At the end of the two days of Rosh Hashanah, we returned to the Beaverton City Council and picked up where we left off, with Isaac speaking again on divestment and Miko introducing her request that Beaverton pass a Climate Recovery Ordinance. To our delight, Mayor Doyle, Council Member Cate Arnold, and the Development Division Manager who oversees the Sustainability program, Cadence Moylan, and possibly others all expressed their appreciation of Miko and Isaac's requests. On to following up with them and arranging more Academies!



9/25/15

