



RICHMOND VALE
ACADEMY



Climate Activism
6 Months Programme

Welcome to Richmond Vale Academy

Established in 2002, our Academy is a registered non-profit research and training institution situated in the Chateaubelair area of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Since the opening more than 600 students from the Caribbean and across the world have participated in courses fighting global warming and global poverty.

We need to react and take action for a better world for all.

Reaction comes from a lover of life and when more directed, a believer of the value of changing the world.

I urge you to ask yourself "What kind of planet do we leave behind for the next generation?" and "What kind of generation do we leave behind for that planet?"

Joining one of our programs will equip you with knowledge; skills, understanding and experiences to better protect our precious planet.

Our current system has caused Global Warming which has created temperatures higher than ever before in human history, which again has created climate change disasters with millions of people suffering; along with an acidic ocean, loss of biodiversity and a toxic planet.

Our school includes people of all ages and nationalities and we walk the talk! We are a centre for sustainability in the Caribbean and at our campus we have renewable energy, rain water harvesting systems and we are moving towards producing our own food with free range chickens and sheep, agro-forestry and Permaculture gardening.

I am very happy you are reading this and I hope you will join our program!

You are needed to take collective action for humanity, shoulder to shoulder with the poor and protect the planet!

We welcome you

Stina Herberg

Director - Richmond Vale Academy







St. Vincent and the Grenadines



The country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), also known as 'Hairoun(a)' or 'Yurumein' is located to the south of the Caribbean Sea and has a population of 110,000 people. SVG is a small island nation, but its history is quite remarkable and its landscapes are breathtaking.

This country has had a long history of resistance against European imperial powers. The people of St. Vincent, the Caribs, managed to protect their homeland from French and British settlement for 200 years. They were so vigilant, this territory became the last of the major Caribbean islands to be colonised. During this struggle, African slaves escaping from shipwrecks or the surrounding islands were welcomed to settle on the islands. They mixed with the Caribs and are now known as the Black Caribs or the Garifuna people.

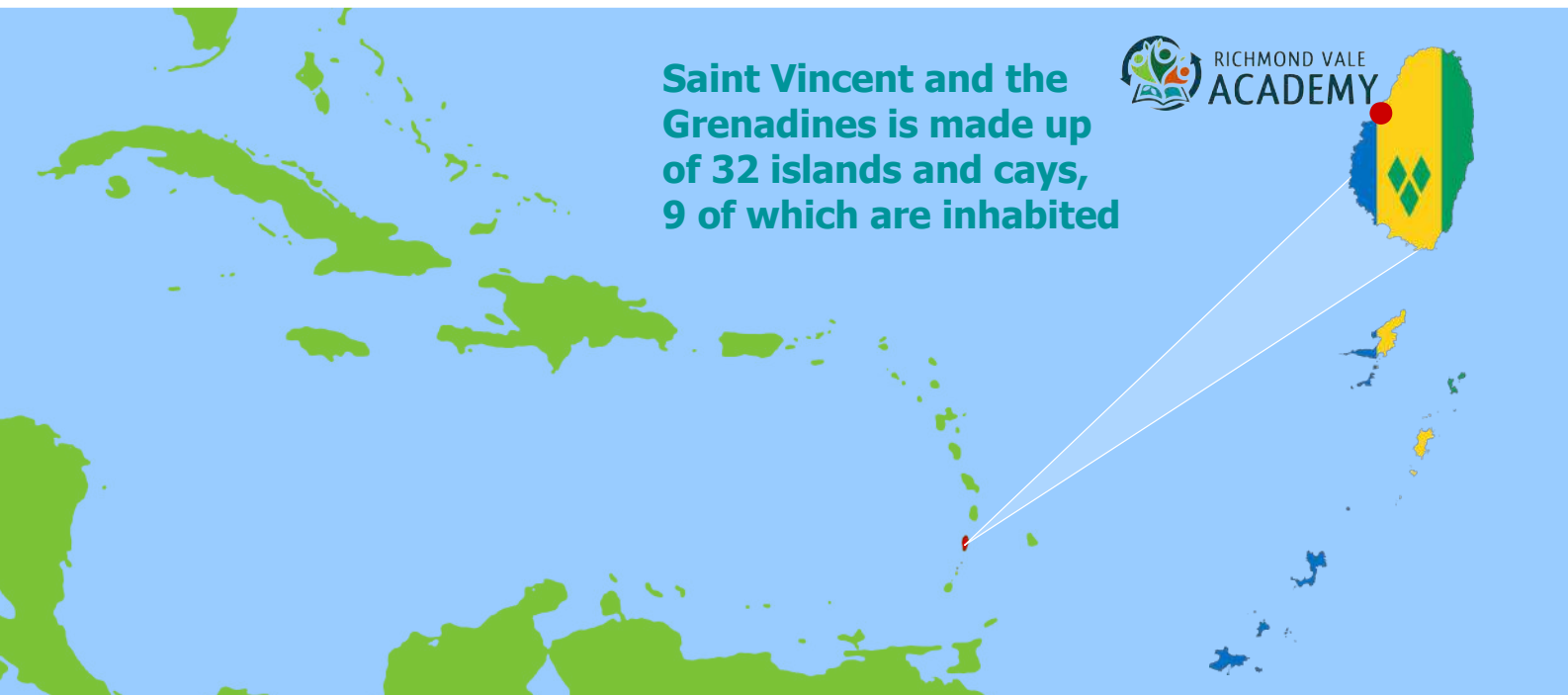
In 1719, Britain took control over the country and remained in power until 1979, when SVG claimed its independence and its right to control its own affairs.

The country consists of a main island called St. Vincent and 31 smaller islands and cays called The Grenadines.

The country imports the majority of the food, which heavily affects the local economy. Half of the population lives in rural areas of which 25% are employed in farming. The farming population is aging and few young people are going into farming.

The country is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuel for electricity generation, transportation and cooking. It has an energy mix of 90% fossil fuels and about 10% hydropower with an increasing contribution from solar photovoltaic (PV). Fortunately, this nation has many potential carbon neutral sources which include geothermal, solar and wind. In the mainland LPG gas for cooking and the use of home solar water heaters are common.

Currently, the government has installed solar panels in 3 government buildings and in a college; people are more aware of the benefits of using solar power. There are 3 hydropower plants in St. Vincent. With improvements and investment, they can provide up to 20% of the country's renewable energy. Additionally, the government has partnered with a private company to build a 10-15 MW geothermal plant which will be in operation by 2021.



When compared by area, SVG is ranked globally as the second most disaster prone country.

As part of the Caribbean, SVG is in the Atlantic Hurricane Belt. For this reason, damaging hurricanes and flash floods hit the area almost every year. Added to this annual threat, it is predicted that climate change will negatively affect the region by increased intensity of hurricanes, rising sea levels, decreasing rain falls and ascending temperatures.

With hurricanes and tropical storms getting stronger and more damaging, the country will see more landslides and soil and coastal erosion. Furthermore, sea level rise and storm surges will affect the towns and fishing villages all over the country. This will have a direct impact on 85% of the population.

The Saint Vincent Climate Compliance Conference 2012 – 2021



Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has been devastated by severe weather disasters year after year over the past 10 years. In response, Richmond Vale Academy took decisive action by initiating a programme called "The Saint Vincent Climate Compliance Conference 2012 – 2021".

The Climate Compliance Conference aims to bring people together to take action.

Since 2012, 300 national and international students and teachers together with thousands of people across St. Vincent and the Grenadines have answered to the threat of climate disaster.

During the past seven years:

30,000 trees have been planted.

- 30 tons of garbage collected from beaches, rivers and villages.
- 50 Organic Home gardens built with families in North Leeward.
- Six Bio gas digesters installed at farmers, schools and families.
- Numerous information leaflets, books, booklets, radio and TV programmes aired in St. Vincent and abroad, mobilising people to take local actions.
- Today more than 1000 people visit Richmond Vale Academy annually to learn about Global Warming and Climate Change; see results of the efforts made in the sustainable campus concerning renewable energy with solar and biogas, organic farming, agroforestry, permaculture, sustainable tourism and the importance of mangroves and reefs.

Get Involved!

The Saint Vincent Climate Compliance Conference Beyond 2021



After almost ten years of climate action a lot has been done and certainly more is to be done for all to be ready for climate change. Hundreds and Thousands of people are working to make their villages and island nations more Food, Water and Energy secure. People are taking action to meet the Climate Emergency. We can only see the Climate compliance Conference as a permanent action based conference continuing its efforts with the many ordinary people across St. Vincent and the rest of the Caribbean.

The Impact of GWCC currently and in the future in the Caribbean

In 2017, Hurricane Maria swept across the eastern Caribbean island of Dominica, taking lives, destroying homes, and damaging the natural landscape that sustains the tourism industry, which the 270-square-mile island relies on. The storm's overall cost to Dominica was an estimated USD 930 million, almost double the country's GDP. Maria went on to cause havoc in Puerto Rico, directly and indirectly killing more than 2,900 people. It was the deadliest storm Puerto Rico and Dominica had experienced in more than a century.

Just two weeks prior, both islands had been hit by Irma, which became a Category 5 hurricane during its life cycle. More than one hurricane of that magnitude in the same season had previously been unheard of.

Major hurricanes in the Caribbean since 2016

Source: Wikipedia.org



When Category 2 Hurricane Tomas struck St. Vincent in October 2010, there were no deaths, but two persons sustained serious injuries while trying to effect repairs to house roofs. The National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) declared all areas on the eastern and western sides of the island disaster Zones.

It was also reported that the agriculture sector sustained over USD 25 million in damages. Over 1,200 people were forced to seek refuge in hurricane shelters across St. Vincent. About 600 houses lost their roofs. A lot of downed power lines, trees and landslides made some roads impassable, but the main road was cleared by November 1.

Tomas also struck The Bahamas, the Greater and Lesser Antilles and the Windward Islands.

2016

- 1 Earl
 - Dates: 2-6 Aug • Category 1
 - Fatalities: 94 (81 Mexico; 13 Dominican Republic) 12 missing (10 Mexico; 2 Offshore)
 - Damage: USD 250 million
- 2 Matthew
 - Dates: 28 Sep-10 Oct • Category 5
 - Fatalities: 603 (546 Haiti; 47 USA; 4 Cuba; 4 Dominican Republic; 1 Colombia; 1 St. Vincent) 128 missing (Haiti)
 - Damage: USD 16.47 billion

2017

- 3 Harvey
 - Dates: 17 Aug-2 Sep • Category 4
 - Fatalities: 107 (106 USA; 1 Guyana)
 - Damage: USD 125 billion
- 4 Irma
 - Dates: 30 Aug-14 Sep • Category 5
 - Fatalities: 134 (92 USA; 42 Caribbean)
 - Damage: USD 77.16 billion
- 5 Maria
 - Dates: 16 Sep-2 Oct • Category 5
 - Fatalities: 3,059 (2,975 Puerto Rico; 80 Caribbean; 4 USA)
 - Damage: USD 91.61 billion

2018

- 6 Michael
 - Dates: 7-16 Oct • Category 5
 - Fatalities: 74 (59 USA; 15 Central America)
 - Damage: USD 25.5 billion

2019

- 7 Dorian
 - Dates: 24 Aug-10 Sep • Category 5
 - Fatalities: 84 (74 The Bahamas; 1 Puerto Rico; 9 USA) 245 missing (The Bahamas)
 - Damage: USD 5.07 billion

2020

- 8 Laura
 - Dates: 20-29 Aug • Category 4
 - Fatalities: 77 (42 USA; 31 Haiti; 4 Dominican Republic)
 - Damage: USD 14.1 billion
- 9 Delta
 - Dates: 5-12 Oct • Category 4
 - Fatalities: 6 (4 USA; 2 Mexico)
 - Damage: Unknown

In recent years, the Caribbean has seen its hurricane seasons become more destructive. The change has been attributed to global warming and climate change, a crisis that many have been warning about for decades; this could have particularly devastating effects for the Caribbean. With the glaring evidence of crushed infrastructure, homes, and lives, more people seem more prepared to listen and take action. But much of the increase in global temperatures seems irreversible, and effects will get worse.

What experts and activists hope for now is that temperatures won't rise to a point where they threaten the very existence of small islands like Dominica. "I come to you straight from the front lines of the war on climate change," said Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit, in a heartfelt appeal to the UN General Assembly, shortly after Maria's passage. "We as a country and as a region did not start this war against nature. We did not provoke it. The war has come to us. There is no more time for conversation. There is little time left for action."

How climate change will affect the Caribbean: a timeline



- Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress.
- Seventy to ninety per cent of coral reefs will die at 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming, which is expected to happen by 2030; 99 per cent of coral reefs will die at two degrees Celsius of warming, which could happen by the end of this century.
- Major coastal defense projects will be required to protect hundreds of kilometers of vulnerable coastlines by 2050.
- By that year, significant relocation of people and existing coastal infrastructure will be necessary.
- The World Bank estimates that the annual damage to countries within the Caribbean community caused by climate change will rise to USD 11 billion by 2080 — eleven per cent of the region's collective GDP.
- The sea level in the Caribbean is expected to rise by more than 1 meter by 2100, putting many coastal towns and cities — including most Caribbean capitals — at risk of being submerged. Furthermore, more than 11,000 people will be displaced, 600 km of roads lost, 29 airports gone, 1,300 km² of land lost to the sea.
- There are so many facts on the table; therefore the St. Vincent Climate Compliance Conference will continue as a permanent standing action conference involving as many people as possible in the many years to come all over the Caribbean.

1ST MONTH:



“Gaia Warns You” 14 Days

On arrival, new participants are involved in an intensive one month study and research curriculum centred on learning and reflecting about global warming and climate change; both in the classroom and through research activities. During this month, the participants go through the following programme periods:

Throughout the programme, there are three anchor themes from where to choose all the climate compliance actions and research activities:

- Food and water Security
- Energy Security
- Ready for Climate Change

In this period, participants have structured teacher-led courses about global warming, climate change, sustainable agriculture, pollution, the oceans and other related topics. Participants also reflect on the actions that can be done together to adapt to the changing climate in the islands and around the world.

Digging deeper / Research activities 14 Days

In this period the team conducts research activities using RVA's digital and physical library as well as the internet. Each team makes their own self-organised study plan with scheduled tutorials, peer-reviews and group discussions.



2ND MONTH:

Making RVA Climate Compliant

In this period participants prepare and carry out the first planned Climate Compliance actions; using Richmond Vale Academy and the Climate centre as their testing grounds.

The actions done can include:

- Developing water collection systems
- Increasing the production in the organic garden
- Starting up a production of sheep
- Doubling up the number of plants in the nursery
- Developing the production of staples in the forest garden
- Setting up a new "on grid" solar system at one of the buildings

This period aims to: Enable participants to materialise the ideas generated in the previous periods, by transforming the theory learnt into a practical action plan.

In summary, during the first two months participants will be involved in gathering substantial quantitative and qualitative data at the school and nearby villages; through research and practical action.

The aim of the first two months is: To set the theoretical and practical foundation for the community actions to be implemented, during the remaining four months, in the rest of St Vincent.

RVA places considerable emphasis on the importance of:

- Working in close collaboration with community groups, individuals, ministries and schools.
- Using several data-collection techniques and methods during all the research stages.

This is done, not only to ensure that the Vincentians' vast knowledge and experience of climate change is considered and utilised but also because it enables the community members to be the owners of the projects as well as the solutions.



3RD AND 4TH MONTH:

Making St. Vincent Climate Compliant

Using RVA as a base from which to work from, the focus of this period is: To go out and engage the communities of SVG into working with the team; to achieve Climate Compliance for all.

This period is about leading by example, raising awareness and mobilising people to participate in community and individual actions. During this period and the following periods, team actions can include tree planting, setting up biogas digesters, assisting families making home gardens, promoting the use of organic farming and teaching in schools.





5TH AND 6TH MONTH:

Our Next Large

Endeavour #1 14 Days

In this period participants identify an outcome that is relevant to them in the overall plan and goals for the 10-year Climate Compliance Conference. They actively explore how the team's first "Large Endeavour" can help materialise the selected outcome.

Preparations for this period can be made during Period 4 and can include data collection, investigation trips and meetings with community leaders.

A Sweet Follow Up 14 Days

Building on the exploration activities in Period 5, the purpose of this period is to plan and implement one main action with two secondary or complementary actions. Of particular importance is to consider the people that have been met and those that worked along with the participants during the actions in Period 5 and thus coordinate plans during Period 6 to include them, or address their needs and concerns.

Our Next Large

Endeavour #2 14 Days

"Large Endeavour" is purely practical and aims to involve actions where a larger number of people are participating. This period is always a highlight for the team.

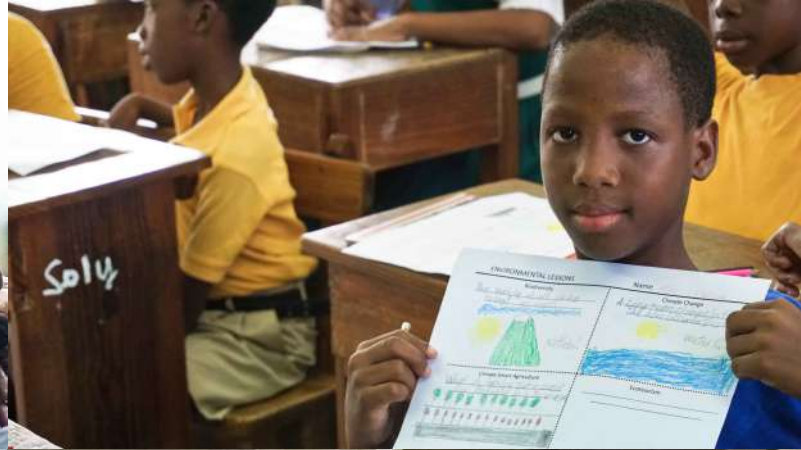
Our Proud Legacy 14 Days

In this final period, the team reflects on their 5 months experience and shares its achievements and lessons learned with other RVA teams and with the local communities. They do this by giving lectures, building user manual or dossiers, writing reports and making other communication materials (such as blogs, photo albums and videos).

The team also hosts and organises an "open house event" at Richmond Vale Academy. In this event, guest speakers, local vendors and CCC participants get together to celebrate a big farewell amidst debates, tours and activities with more than a 100 people.

Besides being deeply involved with the activities and periods related to the CCC, participants also work during the week in the organic garden, make food production, do fitness activities, collaborate in running the school and much more.

All of these activities form part of the RVA experience and allow participants to develop their teamwork and overall skills.



Case Stories

from Climate Activists



Gustavo
Venezuela



Sebastián
Colombia



Malte
Germany

1. Why did you decide to become a volunteer?

GUSTAVO: I wanted to have the experience and learn about working with communities outside my hometown. I was curious about meeting and working together with people within the volunteering world; so many different cultures and languages but everyone share the same passion for helping and learning.

SEBASTIÁN: In 2016 I was working in a development bank after graduating from politics and International Relations. I had always been interested in how human actions affected nature, especially how it affected the relations between nation states. At the end of my university, I was closely following the negotiation process of the Paris agreement. As many others, I had hoped on achieving a strong and ambitious agreement. However, the lack of political will was evident. Our leaders missed the chance to send a message to the world, letting private interests win over the common well-being. It became clear to me that it was time to take action. Parallel to that conjuncture, I started getting into permaculture and acknowledging its potential to tackle most of the world problems.

The possibility of discovering the Caribbean and having the chance to learn the practical skills I was looking for came like if it was meant to be. I had to overcome many situations in order to stop what I was doing to go for it, but everything came through and at the end of June I landed in Kingstown.

MALTE: To give you the short story: Many things happened in my life and I needed a break. But simply doing nothing for one year does not look good on paper, so I decided to look around what else I might do for one year. I always thought about doing some kind of voluntary work, as I have done it in the past on a smaller scale and got much joy out of helping people. Nothing beats putting a smile on someone's face and hearing them say "Thank You!".

After looking at different places around the world, what they demanded and what they offered, I concluded that the Climate Compliance Programme best fit my personal interests and competencies.

2. What do you do now and what practical skills did you gain from this programme to prepare you for this?

GUSTAVO: I'm working as a engineer in Europe and during my time as volunteer I got better in my communication skills, learned English and basic Portuguese.

I think the most important skills I got are how to teamwork with people from very different backgrounds and cultures with tolerance and respect.

SEBASTIÁN: Along the programme I immersed more and more into sustainable agriculture. I participated in the establishment of Chateaubelair's Farmer's Market, something replicated back in Colombia on my return. Because of my experience in the Caribbean, I pursued a PDC in France and was able to achieve a job position with the local government of my hometown, where we promoted organic farming and in this way recovering degraded soil.

MALTE: I am currently repeating my A levels after failing it once before coming to St. Vincent. I'm doing really well in school and got to know lots of awesome people there! Staying in St. Vincent for 6 months changed me in a lot of ways.

It helped me to improve my English by a mile. I learned about many new aspects of climate change. I learned about basic gardening and how to increase your harvest. I learned how to be more creative when tackling a problem. All those things helped me improve my grades.

3. What would be an important moment, event, achievement or person you met during your time in the programme?

GUSTAVO: For me it was a very important achievement to learn English from 0 and after few months to be able to make presentations and communicate fluently with my teammates and the community. Also I met a lot of nice people from around the world and we still keep very lovely relationship and meet/talk to each other every time we can.

SEBASTIÁN: My experience in RVA was definitely a game changer in many ways. I immediately got into the garden team and fell in love with every plant we had in the 3 shade houses. I spent hours in the morning fighting bugs and looking for ways to improve the production. At this stage, Luke, our Permaculture teacher, played a very important role. Not only did he have incredible knowledge, but also his family and the way they lived were profoundly inspirational. One of the major highlights for me was the chance to learn from him and to see Permaculture in action for the first time.

As for my personal growth, I believe living in a community surrounded by people of diverse nationalities is one of the most enriching experiences one can have. You have to learn how to be tolerant to everybody and handle your bad moments so you keep the spirit of the group in balance. The skills I gained in human relationships have been something I have cherished a lot.

MALTE: The most important moment was our last trip to Bequia. It was at this moment I realised how happy I was.

At first, I isolated myself from the group. But being surrounded by my team every day made me break out of my shell that I build around myself over the years. I started being able to connect to people more easily and made many friends, but most importantly: I learned how to open up to people. That I could trust them with my problems and issues that they were always there for me when I needed them. Through all of that, I matured. I took on responsibilities I never dared to before, I spent time with people hanging out where previously I'd shut myself in my room. I started being happy living my life again.

Even now, thinking back, it was one of my greatest times in my life. I'd repeat it 10 times and not get bored. The people, the atmosphere, the nature - everything left a positive mark on me. I sincerely thank everyone that I had the joy of meeting for making my life more beautiful. Thanks Stina, Jesper. Thomas, Selly, Sara, Merijn, Casey... everyone.

Other than that, I had a few heartfelt moments with Merijn, Thomas, Casey and many others. Time and time again I was reassured that I am still important to them and that I matter. That making a mistake does not make any of my work or achievements undone. That it is human to make mistakes. And as long as we apologise and correct them, that's the best we can do.

One sentence especially sticks in my mind to this day. It was on our trip back to the airport when I went in the van, but forgot something in my room and ran back to get it. It is there that one of our cooks (I am so terrible sorry for forgetting your name!) said: "He came here as a boy and went back as a man". I wasn't told until a few hours later, but it made me very, very happy.

4. Has your work as a Climate Activist impacted your decisions for your future?

GUSTAVO: Yes. After learning and working in RVA my perspective changed on how I live my life and my relationship with nature.

I have a lot of empathy, respect and tolerance for others as a result of my days in RVA, around people with different cultures and passions.

SEBASTIÁN: I am currently in Brazil engaged in another experience and I am certain I wouldn't be here if I didn't have the experience at RVA. Being a volunteer is not only a way in which you give a little back, it's also a big chance to see the world through different eyes and learn practical skills that when multiplied can have a huge impact.

MALTE: I am more aware of how my decisions can impact nature and try to always choose the more sustainable way. I am also advocating green change (Friday For Future) regularly and, when I get a regular income, I will spent a portion of my salary on supporting environmentalist groups. Lastly, I will always look for ways to be more sustainable without sacrificing too much comfort. IMO, change can only happen slowly, even if time is ticking away. In the meantime, I will contribute in helping those in needs, may it be by teaching, supporting them or more.

Case Stories

from Climate Activists



Eylem
Turkey



Juliana
Brazil



Vivian
Paraguay

1. Why did you decide to become a volunteer?

EYLEM: Because I really wanted to help people in need and do something to support our planet and learn more as well. This way I could teach and give information to people who were around me; because when even one person becomes aware other persons will become more aware and this way we can become stronger to change the fate of our planet in a better way.

JULIANA: My decision to come to Richmond Vale Academy in March 2017 was aligned with my path towards getting more and more involved in the development sector. By then I was studying a couple of subjects of my Master of Development Practice by distance. I saw the opportunity to have a more hands on experience, so I enrolled in the programme. I absolutely loved my time as a volunteer student here. I learned so much, not only about climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives, but also a lot about myself!

VIVIAN: A long time ago I had this innocent idea that I wanted to make the world a better place, I wanted to go far away to Africa, to improve it, to change it. Fortunately life made me wait long enough to learn some things before.

2. What do you do now and what practical skills did you gain from this programme to prepare you for this?

EYLEM: I am still a student and I will be a volunteer for three months to help children who live in the rural areas, who need help. When I help them I will teach them and their parents to do something or become more consciousness about Global Warming as well.

I became a more active person in this programme to do things and change things that are wrong.

JULIANA: Over the last 6 months, I've co-led the Climate Compliance November 2018 team with two other teachers. We've had a big team of 30 students and this has been a great experience. The learning curve as a teacher has been steep, but I've surely used the skills and experience I had gained during my stint as a volunteer student. As a volunteer, I further developed my interpersonal and leadership skills; project analysis and implementation, including budgeting; events planning and coordination; community engagement and communication of complex topics such as renewable energy and climate change in layman's terms. These skills were readily transferrable to my position as a teacher and in this position I've also developed project coordination and team leadership further.

As I conclude my teaching period at RVA, I look forward to starting a new role as a Project Leader for Humana People to People in Brazil soon. I'll be located in one of the poorest areas of Brazil, in a project dedicated to organising small-scale farmers collectively as a means to improve farmers' resources and further agricultural production at the individual level. I'm excited for this new challenge!

VIVIAN: First, I learned that the idea itself of trying to improve, trying to change something besides myself is not right. There were already things that worked and were just right and good before people wanted to change and improve them, having in mind a single model that I wanted to copy. So, during this programme, I learned to listen, to observe, to debate, practice my patience and tolerance, probably not enough, but the most important was that I participated week after week in a cooperative construction of what we wanted to do as a group, as a community.

That was the greatest challenge all the time, getting out of our selves and our egoism to try to do something common with people from completely different points of view, culture, language, etc. I saw and got to know people who just gave the best of themselves, what they learned; what they loved to do, what they discovered, they were giving and providing most.

3. What would be an important moment, event, achievement or person you met during your time in the programme?

EYLEM: For me one of the most important things was to meet Martin, who is working in RVA because he is really hard working despite his age. So I realised that age is not important if we do the things we really want and love to do.

JULIANA: During my time as a volunteer student, I had the opportunity to implement one of the first five pilot home gardens at Yvone Roberts' place in Chateaubelair. I very much enjoyed working in this project because it involved the use of organic principles of production and crop diversification as a means for environmental protection from chemical fertilisers and climate change adaptation.

When I came back to RVA in November 2018, my team's main project was to develop 20 home gardens following a similar proposal to the home garden I implemented in 2017. The main difference - and highlight - this time round was that we had a Permaculture Design Certification course before we ventured developing the gardens together with the beneficiaries. We were without doubt a lot better prepared for the task! In total, RVA has implemented 50 home gardens in the North Leeward area and I am happy I have been an active participant of this process both as a student and then as a coordinator.

VIVIAN: I worked, and worked, and worked with my hands, with my mind, with my character and in the end I saw a beautiful garden full of vegetables, a modern chicken coop surrounded by trees, seedlings and I had the time of my life in the most incredible and beautiful place.



4. Has your work as a Climate Activist impacted your decisions for your future?

EYLEM: Yes I will be a teacher so I will have so many students and besides the usual lessons I will tell them what a beautiful world we live in and that we need to protect it.

JULIANA: Absolutely yes. It has consolidated a path that I have been following for a number of years. Living in and with a community of like-minded people has been a gratifying experience as I feel empowered and stronger. We share practical knowledge and tips about responsible and sustainable life-styles and have a much greater impact as a collective. As an individual, living according to my values and bringing awareness to others felt overwhelming and I always thought my actions had a fairly limited impact.

VIVIAN: Definitely yes. I just can't go back to the previous way of consuming things, to my silence about certain issues. My job as a teacher has a completely different way of seeing the objectives and priorities.

Even though I hate to write, I did it for the two most wonderful women from the North. Big hugs to both.

Case Stories

from Climate Activists



Ato
Ghana



Tobias
Germany



Camille
France

1. Why did you decide to become a volunteer?

ATO: I had just finalised my undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies and I felt the need to apply what I had learnt in a practical manner. A job seemed likely, but then the rigidity of it put me off a little. It was during an enduring search that I saw the opportunity to volunteer and it immediately peaked my interest.

TOBIAS: I never really decided to become a volunteer it just kind of happened to me..I just finished school and I wanted to spend my gap year somewhere abroad doing some kind of work. I honestly didn't have anything particular in mind, so I was just browsing the web when I found a website that had a display of one of your programmes at RVA. So I did some research and contacted you (and I'm really happy I did). You contacted me back very fast and so I became a volunteer at RVA.

CAMILLE: Passionate about biology and a little naive, I decided to work in research, in order to help medicine breakthrough and eradicate diseases. The reality is a little different and despite the noble intentions of researchers in general, it is difficult to grasp the real impact of our work. Developing a new drug takes years and is a very tough process, not a lot of (what-seem-like-promising) compounds make it to the patients in the hospital... Through personal reflection, introspection and a lot of external input, I am also coming to the conclusion that, even though it's extremely important to work on finding cures to cancers and all sorts of nasty diseases, it should be a priority to live a healthier life, more respectful of nature and of ourselves. We should fight the causes (before the consequences!), of all the illnesses that arise in the world, think twice about our way of life and be more mindful of our surroundings.

Participating in a volunteering mission would allow me to use and improve certain qualities and skills that I did not truly exploit in my previous work. And to find a path for my future professional journey that is in accordance with my sensitivity and my values.

2. What do you do now and what practical skills did you gain from this programme to prepare you for this?

ATO: During the programme, there were a number of skills I picked up including Project planning and execution, Community Engagement, Climate Education and other practical hands-on skills.

TOBIAS: After I finished school I had no idea what to do next (which is one of the reasons I decided to go abroad), of course I did have some plans but nothing meaningful. After coming back from SVG I knew I wanted to do something ecological/environmental, maybe something with renewable energy...So I moved from Hamburg to Lübeck and I'm studying environmental engineering and management in my second semester. I really enjoy it. I gained so many new skills in SVG so there is no way I could list them all. But I think the one with the most impact on my life is planting knowledge and farming/gardening. We now have a bed in our garden and my dad is getting into gardening now as well. April is the time in Germany to start the seeds and I'm looking forward to putting them into our garden and harvesting them when the season ends.

CAMILLE: I am now a leader for the November 2018 climate compliance conference team. Together with Jesper and Juliana, we led this team for the past 6 months through the different phases of the programme. I work with young people from all over the world and with all backgrounds imaginable, to try and make a difference! Crossing to the other side and becoming a team leader / teacher / facilitator is a great challenge.

It's quite a learning process... I am leading a group of 10 amazing students that are super fun to work with, in a really nice atmosphere and with a lot of ideas!! We learn a lot from each other. And after six months, I can really see how all of us are evolving, gaining confidence, improving our English/communication Skills, and opening up to the community!!!

3. What would be an important moment, event, achievement or person you met during your time in the programme?

ATO: Our team organised the first Farmers Market Eco-Fair for Chateaubelair. This fair was an incredible achievement that brought many people together in a moment of community unity. The fair was an opportunity to apply all the skills I had picked up from my 6 months in the programme, a platform to engage the community further and know people within it on a much personal level. That being said the people I met during this event were some of the most positive and warm-hearted people I had ever met.

TOBIAS: For me it was always an important moment when we worked together with the locals, like working with them in the home gardens and teaching them permaculture skills, they also taught me new things. Building the classroom together with the students of the Petit Bordel School was an amazing experience.

CAMILLE: The Permaculture Design Course with Luke was a very important step for me and it was a great opportunity. We learned about the philosophy behind permaculture and it is just so appropriate to the community life that we are living here together! Earth Care, People Care, Fair Share! It is such a down to earth, simple, and straightforward philosophy that it sounds like it should be Common Sense. And yet it is so far from the "modern" life we are living. I hope that I can apply this philosophy to my life, learn from it and lead a more fulfilling life thanks to it.



4. Has your work as a Climate Activist impacted your decisions for your future?

ATO: My work as a climate activist definitely impacted my career in the sense that it reinforced it. I currently work as a consultant for an environmental service firm particularly working hand in hand with NGOs and CSOs in Environmental awareness campaigns. It is a career I'm extremely proud of and hope to grow in.

TOBIAS: As I already mentioned without RVA I wouldn't be studying environmental engineering. Also I'm growing my own food now (at least some of it) and I'm living so much more aware of my surroundings.

CAMILLE: Being a climate change activist has proven that this is the path I want to follow. I haven't decided yet what the next steps will be, but for sure my life will be full of people making the world a better place, full of gardening and producing my own food, full of respect for all forms of life, full of knowledge sharing and full of continuous learning! I am excited to see where that leads me!

Case Stories

from Climate Activists



Tobias
Norway



Calvert
St. Vincent



Katrine
Denmark

1. Why did you decide to become a volunteer?

TOBIAS: I wanted to experience different cultures, see new Places in the world and help other People at the same time.

CALVERT: I wanted to be a volunteer because I find it interesting and I always wanted to try it.

I was just out of school and didn't really have any plans – a person in my town who knew RVA suggested I should join. He said I could meet people from all around the world. I thought I could make a change for myself, and the people I was going to help.

KATRINE: I became a volunteer for many reasons. I knew that I wanted to live abroad for a while after finishing my degree and it was important that there was a bigger purpose behind it. I wanted to make sure I was learning and developing skills that were relevant to my degree and the type of work I would like to do in the future, namely entrepreneurship and innovation with a social purpose.

I knew that we would be learning how to initiate and manage new solutions to modern societal problems connected to climate change and that we would be doing this in collaboration with locals from St. Vincent.

2. What do you do now and what practical skills did you gain from this programme to prepare you for this?

TOBIAS: Now I am finishing off my job back home in Norway, because I got myself certified as a dive instructor. From the programme I got a more broad knowledge about the effects the climate change has around the world, knowledge about how you can grow your own organic Food, how to make a home garden and more about how to live a more sustainable life. Hopefully I will go back to RVA to start working there, so all this knowledge will be good to already have, but this knowledge is good no matter what you are doing.

CALVERT: I work at the guardsman company in town, I don't think I would have had the courage to apply nor get the job if I hadn't been at RVA because during the 6 months I matured a lot and I also understood that you need to put goals for yourself. I gained a lot of practical skills as well like farming/gardening, leadership responsibility and more.

I also learned a lot of facts - when I went back to my village my mom was burning garbage and leaves and I told her it didn't make sense to burn them when you are messing up the air that you have to breathe, I told mom to make it into compost and she listened. The community is hard to change but I will try anyway because everyone knew I was in the climate programme and that it has changed me and I'm glad that I had the chance to study with all of you climate change lovers at RVA.

KATRINE: After finishing the CC programme at RVA, I was keen on exploring more of the world and I felt that a solo backpacking trip to Latin America was just the challenge I needed. Living in St. Vincent for 6 months, experiencing a very different lifestyle than of a typical middle-class person in Europe made me want to explore how other people in developing countries live. I wanted to talk to people firsthand and to learn about the world from their perspective.

My experience at RVA and the solo trip has given me a lot to think about. I am definitely not the same person now that I was before coming to St. Vincent. Therefore, I am taking some time to process my experiences and to find out what my next step will be.

In terms of new skills, I am sure that, whatever I do next, I will bring forward a more nuanced view about solving social problems, which I see as a highly practical skill in the analytical work that I see myself doing in my next job.

3. What would be an important moment, event, achievement or person you met during your time in the programme?

TOBIAS: Just to be a part of the programme and learn how much our actions can damage the world we live in was an important event. To make two home gardens to families that needed it was a really good experience as well. A person who had the most effect on me was Danail Petrov, who was my teacher there for six months. How he always had a speech with a good impact on people was brilliant.

CALVERT: Accomplishing the first home garden was a moment of victory. It was really good because I learned a lot from it and from our garden family, how to do different gardening and how the plants work together. In my first garden it was like a forest, grass and trees all around and I asked myself, how are we going to make a garden in this back yard, but we succeeded by working together.

Doing the PDC course made it easier to put everything together. I'm so happy that I got this opportunity to go to RVA and I enjoyed it all with the friends I made and I have grown a lot since I joined.

KATRINE: I would say it's difficult to pick just one. Even though I'm not currently in St. Vincent, RVA is still a big part of my everyday life. I still think about all the people I met whom I never imagined existed. If I had to pick one particular memory that I still think about every day, I have to mention a young and talented man called Aster.

Aster just finished high school and started working in RVA's organic garden around the same time my team started the programme. Aster has become a good friend of mine because he is one of the most caring people I know and I'm pretty sure that his smile is the biggest thing that's stopping WW3 from happening.

What I'm most happy about is the way that RVA has taken him in. It has been such a pleasure to see how Aster is growing into adulthood, which would have looked very different if he hadn't been given the opportunity to work at RVA. Aster wants to do his best and I really applaud my former teacher, Dani, for seeing the light in him and pushing him every day to excel.

4. Has your work as a Climate Activist impacted your decisions for your future?

TOBIAS: It changed my future plans completely. I now decided to change my occupation and my everyday choices are a lot different now as well. You start thinking more through the choices you make and chose the more sustainable ones.

CALVERT: Yes, I decided during the programme that I wanted to travel in the World to know more, so I found a job. I work at the guardsman company in town, I don't think I would have had the courage to apply nor get the job if I hadn't been at RVA because during the 6 months I matured a lot and I also understood that you need to put goals for yourself. I gained a lot of practical skills as well like farming/gardening, leadership responsibility and more.

KATRINE: Definitely – especially my considerations about food and the agriculture industry. After completing a Permaculture design course, I think more about what I put into my body and I try to buy as much organic produce as possible. After learning a lot more in depth about the consequences that pesticides have on our earth and climate, I really want to do what I can to prevent more damage.

Case Stories

from Climate Activists



Negar
Iran



Merijn
Belgium



Muharrem
Turkey

1. Why did you decide to become a volunteer?

NEGAR: For me being a volunteer was a great chance to develop new skills in a practical way, and also it is super nice to become part of a local community and help others by making a difference.

MERIJN: Before arriving at St. Vincent I was volunteering with Oxfam and Greenpeace, interested in sustainable development and looking for a first experience abroad. I bumped into RVA online and figured that the 6 months course was exactly where I wanted to start. One could say it was a career choice.

MUHARREM: Well, I would like to start with my previous life before coming to Richmond Vale Academy. I had a quite usual life that does not have any kind of excitement at all. I had a life that is just formed from school and home where I live. Seeing a new country, which is a completely different world than what we are used to, would be something that I extremely wanted to experience. Also, I was thinking how much it would be amazing to meet different people with many various ideas, traditions and so on. I knew the volunteering projects would represent and offer a good chance for that. I wanted to have some skills about anything that would help my future for sure. I wanted to make sure that I would be more responsible in future years. So, I was looking for new adventures, findings which would give me a better perspective of life, good understanding of nature and society and in addition, feeling of capability of doing something. Richmond Vale Academy was a perfect place for me to make my dreams come true. RVA is a place where nature meets to many international people that are integrated with each other with respect and life. I admired the way they are doing things all together with patience, dedication and determination.

2. What do you do now and what practical skills did you gain from this programme to prepare you for this?

NEGAR: As I became interested in practicing skills I gained, I am reading more about global warming effects and following up on the News.

Also I am making some short tutorials about what I learned in RVA in Persian to share my knowledge with some people in my country.

MERIJN: After the course I continued volunteering, getting temporary paid missions every now and then. It's not the easiest and certainly not a straightforward path but I feel all time spent on track is spent well. Very fulfilling work! The experience at RVA has undoubtedly helped me to keep going with dedication as it strengthened my belief in the grassroots, bottom up approach on change.

MUHARREM: I am currently studying my own subjects as well as others that are related to climate science though. I started new local volunteering activities where I am with many people arranging different activities for kids and having classes about the bad effect of plastics, importance of taking care of environment, being respectful to animals and so on in the community where I earlier didn't attend any kind of volunteering projects. Richmond Vale taught me, gave me a lot of skills, knowledge and experiences. It is way easier right now what I am doing and being aware of it. I feel more responsible for this, environment, nature and our future. Hence, I have the conscious of being involved more in the kind of projects where I will feel like I am doing something good for our future generations. RVA helped me know better than many others how to survive in a community since it had many people around. You know, we had the opportunity to express ourselves in common meetings, where everyone discussed about things happening in the school; that was crucial for the improvement of us and the community. Well I have got many practical skills though such as: using drilling machine, using different wood workshop materials, making tables, painting and so on; meanwhile I got many theoretical skills as well that will help me in my daily life. So I am very much glad for the 6 months that I spent in Richmond Vale Academy helping me in my current life.

3. What would be an important moment, event, achievement or person you met during your time in the programme?

NEGAR: Actually being familiar and living with people from all over the world, in different ages, cultures and backgrounds, was a perfect experience for me; also living in the local community and two villages during which we helped some families making their home gardens. Absorbing the results of our efforts, the green vegetables and herbs, and of course the happiness of the families was the greatest moment I had in my time.

MERIJN: What I find most important in the course are the people I got to meet. The international team that gets thrown together connects people that would otherwise not meet. I feel I have made friends around the globe and while I don't communicate with all of them on a regular basis, the connection feels solid and easy to pick up.

MUHARREM: Well, obviously, there are many important moments in RVA but I want to say that, when I got used to the school environment and ambiance let's say when I got the feeling of knowing that I am not a visitor in the school anymore. It was so nice to know my way around, know the workers in the school, know my friends and teachers. So, it is the milestone that I kind of felt local and home. Basically, the moment, which transformed me from a person who does not know much to a master that is releasing good energy around, was the best and most important for me.

I am very much proud of my home gardens where I spent lots of hours putting energy, love and hard work into it. It is an unbelievable feeling to see the improvement that you make in the garden. When I went to my garden and saw the beautiful herbs were growing, flourishing amazingly, I felt quite glad. Besides that I would like to talk about the good people that I met from programmes. I had an amazing roommate who was a person that made me feel home. He was very open minded person and taught me a lot of things.

The enthusiasm that he had inspired me. I met another person that made me feel the best time in my life. We were pretty open to each other, doing many things together, enjoyed the moments together. Seeing the world in a better perspective together, a better understanding of people. I shared many things that I have never mentioned before because I felt a genuine energy from that person. I can write pages about that person. You will be amazed the amazing people that you meet in new communities.

4. Has your work as a Climate Activist impacted your decisions for your future?

NEGAR: Absolutely, it has impacted in many aspects of my life such as consuming less energy, using less plastic, not buying anything other than the essentials etc.

MUHARREM: Richmond Vale Academy definitely gave me a lot about having thoughts about my future since it's diversity in terms of educating people in many ways. I had the awareness of how much we damage, how much we ignore the Earth and I am more conscious. I would like to be more part of this kind of organisations to help out, and to spread the awareness of climate change and global warming.

My main objective is to be a teacher and I believe that the information that I got from RVA will help me teach the students about not only what my department is but also about climate change. I would like to contribute to making this earth greener since we only got one world. It would be amazing to see your students doing something for a better world that we are living in. I see a future where rather than ignoring the world; I would stand against capitalism, processed food, inorganic chemical herbs and poverty. I will do as much as I am capable of.

Finances and Enrolment

Finances

The programme costs USD 3,800 as a student payment. This covers your basic expenses for the 6 months at Richmond Vale Academy, which includes a shared room with another person, 3 meals a day and team programme expenses such as books, films, transport and stationery.

Enrolment

- Contact us by email and we will email you detailed information.
- Connect with us on Skype, Facebook or WhatsApp for a short talk about the programme and answer any immediate questions you might have.
- Fill out the application form online if you want to go ahead.
- Arrange for an online meeting where we present the programme, discuss the requirements and answer your questions. During this meeting you will also get closer to deciding which team you want to join.
- We will give you one or more alums with whom you can communicate throughout the process.
- Paperwork & Payment. When we have had the final talk we will send you the payment methods and enrolment papers.
- Reserve your spot. When we have received the initial USD 500 enrolment fee and the signed enrolment papers you have reserved a spot on the team.
- Prepare your Travel. Now it is time to get ready for a life-changing journey! We will be available to support you throughout the process.





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Chateaubelair • St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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