

Young ChangeMakers Promoting Climate Action: How Bryce Wagner Of Ecovision Is Helping To Protect Our Planet



Authority Magazine Editorial Staff

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As *a part of this series, we had the pleasure to interview Bryce Wagner.*

Bryce Wagner is a Tampa-based student inventor, entrepreneur and youth advocate working across medical technology, child welfare and food safety. He is the Founder and CTO of Ecovision Services, a company inspired by his mother's near-fatal experience with COVID-19. Ecovision combines virtual-reality nature experiences, guided meditation and a patent-pending scent device designed to support patients experiencing stress, anxiety and pain. As a founding member of See Us Now, Bryce has met with more than 80 members of Congress, contributed to the passage of the Find and Protect Foster Youth Act and authored the Stable Homes for Foster Youth Act. He was also selected as one of four U.S. youth delegates to the World Health Organization's first Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children and has presented at the United Nations. Bryce is also developing a patent-pending AI tool that screens food chemicals for potential safety concerns.

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Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit. Can you tell us a bit about how you grew up?

I grew up working with my mother on disaster relief projects across the country. We'd organize supply drives, sort personal hygiene products,

cleaning supplies, and food — whatever the need — and deliver them to areas hit by floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes. We'd also help clear debris and grill hot food for storm victims and volunteers. What I learned from those trips is that you don't have to be a certain age or have a phenomenal talent to help people in need. Sometimes just showing up means all the world to someone who just lost everything.

Is there a particular book or organization that made a significant impact on you growing up? Can you share a story or explain why it resonated with you so much?

On my way to school one day, I heard the story of Myra Ingram on NPR. She'd lost everything in Hurricane Katrina, including her daughter who had just given birth. After the tragedy, she moved with her newborn grandson to Baton Rouge to avoid the wrath of another hurricane.

Ten years later, she lost everything again in a flood. She sounded so heartbroken and lost. I asked my mother to help me track her down, and through the reporter, we did. We organized a supply drive, loaded up two busloads of volunteers and supplies, and drove from Florida to Louisiana. We spent days cleaning up her neighborhood, supplying local schools, and feeding the neighbors in her area. Before we left, we gifted her with new furniture, appliances, and books for her grandson.

I'll never forget the mixture of joy and relief on her face. She grabbed onto my mom and just cried. She couldn't believe that a group of kids from Florida would hear her story, track her down, and come to help in any way they could. I know Myra will never forget it, and we will never forget her. The disaster relief work I did was with BGOLD 501c3 as well as God's Pit Crew.

How do you define "Making A Difference"? Can you explain what you mean or give an example?

You know, making a difference can be as simple as reaching out to someone. Try to connect with those who are having a tough time, or step in if you see a

problem and can help. Don't assume someone else will handle it. Jump in and do what you can. It can be volunteering, delivering a meal, mowing the grass for a sick neighbor, giving a ride to the doctor. We can all do something, and together we can make an even greater impact.

Ok super. Let's now jump to the main part of our interview. You are currently leading an organization that aims to make a social impact. Can you tell us a bit about what you and your organization are trying to change in our world today?

As one of the lead advocates for See Us Now, a student-led foster advocacy organization, I've met with more than 80 Senators and Congressmen, represented the U.S. at the World Health Organization's Global Ministerial conference to End Child Violence, taught advocacy at the IB Global Conference and launched a National Awareness Campaign, lighting up cities blue from coast to coast to shed the light on more than 20,000 foster children who go missing every year, as well as the fact that they are being housed in hotel rooms, cars, and offices, and that a majority of trafficked children in the U.S. have been involved in foster care. We also collaborate with other foster and trafficking organizations to modernize the trafficking hotline, pass the Hidden Foster Care Transparency Act, and help recruit more foster parents. In our time, we have helped pass the Find and Protect Foster Youth Act through the House and the Senate. Before that bill, 48 out of 50 states weren't reporting missing foster children; they were classified as "runaways." Now, they must report, search, and conduct recovery interviews if a child is found. This bill alone is estimated to impact 8 million foster children over the next 20 years.

We passed a federal law before we could drive a car. And we did it because these kids don't have someone looking out for them. We wanted them to feel valued, seen, and protected, and we are still working at it every day.

Besides public policy, I love all things tech and business. It's truly what I'm known for, and I try to use that ability to solve problems every day. For example, when my sister was diagnosed with scoliosis, I designed a school

locker to follow her instead of carrying a heavy backpack.

Then, my mother nearly died from Covid, and when she returned from the hospital, she was bedridden for weeks and slowly sank into depression. I knew nature had always been a place of respite for her, so I created a nature-based VR program to bring the outdoors to her bedside. I overlaid breathing exercises, guided meditation, and even puzzles and games to help stimulate the production of positive neurotransmitters in the brain.

Her recovery was astounding, so I thought this could help millions of people suffering from chronic illness or depression. I partnered with three talented students, and we launched Ecovision Services, LLC. Since then, I've designed an olfactory device to trigger additional parts of the brain, which is now being studied at Atria Research Institute and compared to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy because of limited access and the expense of CBT. But what's most thrilling to me is that I'm working with National After School AllStars to implement my VR device nationwide to help battle anxiety and depression in teens.

Can you tell us the backstory about what inspired you to originally feel passionate about this cause?

When I was just 10 years old, my sister discovered foster children living in tents near our home. We got together with some other students we'd been working with on disaster relief projects and decided to dive in and find out why this was happening. We uncovered a critical shortage of safe, consistent housing for foster children across the country and quickly got to work forming See Us Now.

Truly, I believe everyone has power, influence, and a voice. We just have to be brave enough to use it.

Many of us have ideas, dreams, and passions, but never manifest them. We don't always get up and just do it. But you did. Was there an "Aha Moment" that made you decide that you were actually going to step up and do it?

What was that final trigger?

I've thought about this a lot. For me, I can trace it back to responding to a flood in South Carolina. I was just in elementary school, but we'd seen on the news that this small town, Johnsonville, was getting hammered. It was close to the holidays, and I was afraid those kids wouldn't get to have Christmas. We put together a gift drive and raised money to buy Christmas dinner for the whole town. We loaded up a bus of volunteers and drove up to the Palmetto State, excited about all the presents we had in tow.

But the most memorable event was when we arrived. I remember this big, tough guy with a weathered face fell to his knees and said, "You came. We didn't think anyone even knew where we were, and you came." Tears slid down his face, and in that moment I realized just the fact that we showed up meant the world to him. That's when I knew you can always do something — anything — just help and do what you can. We wound up spending the next two days helping clean up their homes after the waters receded, hosted a dinner for the entire town with presents for the kids, and even had a guest appearance from Santa Claus.

Many young people don't know the steps to take to start a new organization. But you did. What are some of the things or steps you took to get your project started?

The first thing is to do your research. Knowledge is power, and it gives you credibility. Get to know the problem you want to solve intimately. I meet with experts in the field as well as those most impacted by the issue.

Next, recruit action-oriented people. You'll need help to get it off the ground. Diversify your talent pool, collaborate with like-minded organizations, and organize your information into pitch decks and educational materials. Just like a business, pick a name, logo, and brand yourself. It's not for self-promotion; it's to help drive awareness of the problem and your proposed solutions.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company or organization?

We reached out to Lin-Manuel Miranda to see if we could get permission to host a “Hamilton” Sing-a-Long during its 10th season celebration, because Alexander Hamilton was an orphan and his wife established the first foster home in NYC in his memory. Miranda not only granted us this incredible event but also posted on our behalf and raised money for that orphanage, “Graham,” which is still operational today.

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Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson or take away you learned from that?

Falling asleep in a Senator's office after crisscrossing the Hill all day, or having my device die (because I hadn't charged the battery) when I was presenting before MSK in NYC. I learned that rest and water keep you on your toes, and that you should always check and re-check your device before big meetings.

None of us can be successful without some help along the way. Did you have mentors or cheerleaders who helped you to succeed? Can you tell us a story about their influence?

My parents. My mom (my biggest cheerleader) is constantly wanting to save the world, and my Dad is constantly reinventing it. My mom grew up in a small rural town where people just helped one another without ever being asked. If someone was sick, you drove them to the doctor, mowed their

grass, or fixed them dinner. They were a community and truly lived every sense of the word.

I grew up alongside my mom's initiatives to put kindness back into the world, such as the America for Boston Prayer Canvas after the Marathon Bombing. She started it with six other moms, and it grew to fill the entire Boston Common. Her idea was to show there is more kindness than evil in the world, and it became a healing labyrinth of support for the city of Boston. There are so many other things I can tell you about my mom helping others.

My dad came from a steel mill town. He's a problem-solver and a disruptive entrepreneur. He's always challenging the way things are being done and how we can do it better. From streaming media to food safety, he's the guy who sees a wall and decides he's going to go under, over, around, or through it — that wall won't stop him.

Without saying specific names, can you tell us a story about a particular individual who was impacted or helped by your cause?

Years ago, I was giving chess lessons at a foster group home. There was a little boy there who kept shaking the table, making the pieces fall off the board. I was just a kid myself, but I went over to him, laid my hands on his, and asked if he wanted to beat his sister at the game. Of course he did, and I told him I'd help, but we'd lose automatically if he moved the pieces. We bonded in that moment and went on to win the game.

Due to the nomadic life of foster kids, he was moved, and I have no idea where he is today, but when I go to DC and advocate for protective laws, I hope that it helps him or someone like him: the child carrying all their belongings in a garbage bag, or the kid who doesn't know where they will sleep tonight.

Are there three things the community/society/politicians can do to help you address the root of the problem you are trying to solve?

Community: Volunteer, foster, donate, mentor, or adopt. If you're unsure where to start, go to www.seeusnowusa.org. We have a list of organizations that may be in your area.

Politicians: Pass the Hidden Foster Care Transparency Act. Every child removed from home should have an intake form, be tracked, and checked on. We can track an Amazon package, but we lose foster children for days. 55 will go missing today.

Society: Let's prioritize these kids and let them know they matter. If we help them develop into the amazing people they are, it will cost society far less in the long run.

What are your “5 things I wish someone told me when I first started” and why? (Please share a story or example for each).

1. Listen

Even when you don't agree with someone, you will still learn something.

2. Keep trying

Even when things don't work out the first time, pivot and try again. Tenacity is key.

3. Work as a team

The old proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together,” is true. A team opens up all kinds of talents and gifts, and you keep each other going when things get tough. Network, network, network.

4. Think outside the box

It's okay to shake things up. When we started See Us Now, a lot of foster and

trafficking organizations were in silos. They were doing incredible work, but mainly on their own. We thought, “Why not unify and lift each other up along the way?” As we learned what each organization specializes in, we discovered the power of cross-promotion. For example, Safe House Project has an incredible app called “Simply Report.” That app could modernize the Trafficking Hotline and help officials with intake forms, response times, services nearby, and accurate data. So, when we spoke with Health and Human Services, we brought in that partner to promote its transformative potential. At the same time, the One Child One Family One Church organization has an incredible support and recruitment model for foster families. We’re educating mayors across the country on the power of this program. And the list goes on.

5. Learn to negotiate

Search for what you have in common with the person that you’re trying to move the needle with. In the beginning, when a bill didn’t pass, we’d just move on. What I’ve discovered is that it’s usually a small issue that can be addressed or reworded to get the same effect.

If you could tell other young people one thing about why they should consider making a positive impact on our environment or society, like you, what would you tell them?

Do something. It doesn’t have to be complicated. Mentor a child, read a book or play a game with them, or help them with homework. Deliver a meal to a shut-in or mow an elderly person’s lawn. If we truly treated others the way that we want to be treated, the world would be a different place.

Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would like to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them. :-)

I admire people who use their platform to give back or make a change. One

person who immediately comes to mind is former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger for his work as Governor, bringing people together, and founding After-School All-Stars and Policy initiatives. I believe our next big challenge is global policy, and we've got to find a way to work together.

How can our readers follow you online?

The best way to follow my work online is to stay up to date with everything we're doing through See Us Now and Eco Vision Services by following us on social media using the handles @see.us.now and @eco.vision.vr.

This was very meaningful, thank you so much. We wish you only continued success on your great work!