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## **Four Bay Area Students Among 2021 International Young Eco-Hero Award Winners**

### ***Local Students Receive Top Honor for Contributions to Solving Environmental Problems***

San Francisco – Four students from the San Francisco Bay Area are among 25 young environmental activists from across the globe honored by Action For Nature (AFN) as 2021 International Young Eco-Heroes, an award that recognizes eco-conscious youth ages 8 to 16 who are taking crucial steps to solve tough environmental problems.

Winners of the International Young Eco-Hero Award are selected by a panel of independent judges, including experts in environmental science, biology, and education. Since 2003, Action For Nature has recognized more than 300 Eco-Heroes from over 30 countries and 25 U.S. states.

- **Aarushi Wadhwa, a 16 year-old from San Jose, won 1st place in the 15-16 year-old category for her project Aqua Pods.** Aarushi Wadhwa has long sought out opportunities to save our planet. With Aqua-Pods, she addresses one of the biggest drivers of water waste globally: the overwatering of plants. Since 2017, Aarushi has been developing an Aqua-Pod – a “sponge” made of 100% biodegradable materials such as coffee grounds, potato, and banana peels that are proven to retain water and increase soil fertility. Currently, the Aqua-Pod is being distributed in California, as well as in Kenya and India.

“The future of our planet is in the hands of today’s youth,” said Aarushi Wadhwa.

To read more about Aarushi’s work, visit [aqua-pods.net](http://aqua-pods.net).

- **Amelia Fortgang, a 16 year-old from San Francisco, won 3rd Place in the 15-16 year-old category for her project, Bay Area Youth Climate Summit.** Bay Area Youth Climate Summit (BAYCS) is an activism network that was born out of a need for impactful climate mobilization during the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2020, BAYCS organized a day-long virtual summit that united 280 young people from 88 schools, 14 states, and 5 countries. The agenda included 16 workshops ranging from coral reef protection to climate justice activism to environmental entrepreneurship. Since the summit, BAYCS has continued running monthly in-depth workshops on topics including air quality, Indigenous activism, and environmental justice that have attracted more than 950 participants.

“The climate challenges we face will require the broad and sustained involvement of our generation,” said Amelia Fortgang.

To read more about Amelia’s work, visit [www.baycs.org](http://www.baycs.org).

- **Romal Mitr, a 15 year-old from Dublin received an Honorable Mention in the 15-16 year-old category for her project, Reimagining Earth.** Reimagining Earth, strives to normalize the use of creativity to combat environmental problems. Reimagining Earth’s projects include mapmaking to account for global urbanization rates and to inform more accurate carbon footprint estimates,

hosting 15 youth filmmaking workshops that aim to galvanize action on climate change, and organizing volunteers to create and distribute 1,350 origami crafts using recycled materials.

Additionally, Romal approached her city's mayor and proposed the creation of an Environmental Youth Council. The proposal was adopted as part of the city's Climate Action Plan for 2030 and Beyond, and spurred the creation of similar Environmental Youth Councils in communities as well.

"After hearing that many of my peers wanted to join the environmental movement but were unsure of how to incorporate their diverse and seemingly unrelated interests, I established an organization that showcases how we can draw upon all of our distinct passions in order to innovate solutions to environmental problems like climate change," said Romal Mitr.

To read more about Romal's work, visit <http://www.reimaginingearth.org/>.

- **Ganesh Kumar, a 15 year-old from Fremont, received a Notable Mention in the 15-16 year-old category for his project, Goodbye Plastic Straws.** Ganesh is passionate about leading the fight against plastic pollution. Over the past two years, he researched ways to create affordable biodegradable straws and came up with an innovative straw design made from palm leaves.

To read more about Ganesh's work, visit [Projectjatropa.com](http://Projectjatropa.com).

"Kids like Aarushi, Amelia, Romal, and Ganesh have shown that the next generation of leaders is here, and they are refusing to wait to solve the world's most pressing environmental challenges," said Beryl Kay, president of Action For Nature, an international non-profit organization that encourages young people to nurture a love and respect for the Earth and to take personal action to improve the environment. "The projects that these young people created will not only have real, positive impacts on their communities, they will also help solve global climate challenges and inspire others – no matter what age – to consider what they can do to help."

To learn more about this year's International Young Eco-Hero Award winners, visit [actionfornature.org/eco-hero-awards/2021-awards](http://actionfornature.org/eco-hero-awards/2021-awards).

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*Action For Nature (AFN) is an international non-profit organization based in San Francisco, California, that encourages young people to nurture a love and respect for Earth's natural resources and to take personal action to better their environments.*