END POO-LUTION: My Journey as a University Activist for Norwich's Rivers

Author : lewis

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By Rebecca Hardy, Aged 20, 3rd year Student at the University of East Anglia

As a third-year International Relations student at the University of East Anglia, I never imagined my academic journey would lead me to the heart of a grassroots environmental campaign.

It all started in my Activist Campaigning class. We had a guest speaker from River Action who painted a vivid picture of the challenges facing our local waterways. Pollution, habitat destruction, and neglect have heavily affected the rivers that once thrived in this region. Inspired and eager to make a difference, I joined a newly formed student group dedicated to campaigning for the health of our rivers.

Our first meeting was a mix of excitement and uncertainty. None of us had any real experience in activism, but we shared a common goal: to learn how to campaign effectively and bring about tangible change. We began by educating ourselves, diving into research about the local ecosystems, the impact of pollution, and successful environmental campaigns around the world. We attended workshops on advocacy and social media strategies, hosted by experienced activists and professors.

Armed with knowledge and a growing sense of purpose, we launched our campaign. We started by organising a week’s worth of campaigning such as creating and handing out flyers and showing off our fantastic placards (shoutout to the design team!) .

As our confidence grew, so did our ambitions. We created a petition demanding stronger environmental protections for the rivers. Our weekends were spent canvassing in busy areas, talking to locals about the importance of clean rivers. Engaging with the community was both challenging and rewarding. We encountered scepticism but also found allies who were passionate about our cause. As a result we garnered over 250 signatures for our petition which was a great result considering our campaign being short.

Social media has become a powerful tool in our arsenal such as creating Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts which got some attention. One of my most memorable moments was participating in an international conference in America where other

Campaigning students shared what they were working on. This provided a great learning experience and reflecting on what we have already achieved but also improve on next time.

Our efforts culminated in a hustings event with Green party member Gary Champion and River Action’s Chloe Peck. The hustings was overall a success with many willing participants and loads of questions which could have lasted more than an hour!. To our delight, the council acknowledged our concerns and promised to take steps towards better river management and pollution control.

Reflecting on this journey, I am struck by how much I have learned and grown. Campaigning for Norwich’s rivers has taught me the power of community, the importance of persistence, and the impact that a dedicated group of individuals can have. It has been a transformative experience, turning a group of university students into passionate advocates for environmental change. The rivers of Norwich are more than just waterways; they are lifelines that connect us all, and I am proud to be part of the movement to protect and revive them.