

TIME

FOR KIDS

HEROES FOR THE PLANET

THE AIR

Not Too Young to Fight!

ONE DAY, WHEN KORY JOHNSON was 12, she called her school and said she was too sick to attend. Whoops! The next day, her picture was all over the newspaper: she had spent the day protesting a hazardous-waste-burning factory near her home in Phoenix, Arizona.

Luckily, Kory's teachers weren't too angry. Her protest helped stop pollution in the school's own backyard. Since then she has challenged other big companies to stop polluting. Now 20, Kory gives hope to kids everywhere that they can successfully fight for the good of the planet.

Local Action, Global Effects

Kory was 9 when her sister died from heart problems that her family believes were caused by chemicals in the drinking water. Kory discovered that other people in the area had health problems that might be related to pollution. She grew angry that her neighborhood was used as a dumping ground for toxic waste.

Kory decided to take action. The fourth-grader created a group called Children for a Safe Environment (CSE). Kory was working with CSE when she learned about the toxic-waste plant that was about to open in Phoenix. With a lot of hard work, CSE persuaded the Arizona government to buy the \$44 million factory and stop it from running.

"We fought for two full years," remembers Kory. When CSE finally won, "it seemed too good to be true!"

In 1990 she turned her attention to getting McDonald's to stop packing its fast food in Styrofoam, which stays on the earth for good once it is manufactured. CSE unloaded three refrigerator boxes full of Styrofoam on the front lawn of Joan Kroc, whose

husband founded the McDonald's chain! The fast-food giant soon switched to the more environment-friendly packaging it uses today.

Kory has also educated her community about recycling and how to fight back against industries that pollute poor neighborhoods.

Kids Can Make a Difference

Since 1988 about 300 kids have joined CSE. Most of them live in poor neighborhoods that are targets for bad environmental practices. They have inspired other children in the U.S. to form similar organizations, and they often ask Kory for tips on how to bring about change.

What advice does she have for kids who want to become heroes for the planet? "Find out anything you can do to help," she says. "One kid can make a difference, even if it's the smallest thing you start."

Kory has won many awards for her heroic work. Last April she won a Goldman Prize, one

of the world's most important environmental honors. As one of six winners, Kory received \$100,000. Getting that much money is "scary," she says. She is still trying to decide how to spend it wisely.

Thanks to Kory's hard work, the future looks brighter for folks in her Arizona neighborhood. Now at college, she's not yet sure what her future holds: "I take it one day at a time." One thing is certain: she won't stop fighting for a cleaner, healthier planet. Kory says, "I'm in it for life." —By Sarah J.M. Tuff. With reporting by Laura Girardi/New York



Kory Johnson hopes to see hazardous-waste sites like this one replaced by parks.