

# All of Belfast Climate Dialogues ~ Final Presentation & Celebration

## Speaker Notes for Slide Presentation

August 29, 2023

### Slide 1 & 2 - (Brenda) Title + Agenda

Hello! And Welcome to the All of Belfast Climate Dialogues Capstone Presentation.  
Thank you all for coming.

I am BH program librarian here at the BFL and the manager of the All of Belfast Climate Dialogues *grant funded* project. I am joined tonight by my ABCD colleagues: Sarah Kirn and Misty Mallar. Together we will share with you the story of our accomplishments with the ABCD project.

[Review agenda]

### 3 - (Brenda) Genesis of ABCD idea

- In 2018-19 the library partnered with GMRI to promote a Citizen Science Project on Sea Level Rise. This was when I first met and worked with Sarah Kirn who was working on that project. It was also the first time the library collaborated with the City of Belfast's Climate Crisis Committee.
- Also, if you remember at this time few people were talking about climate change, in fact, during the former presidential administration federal agencies were banned from addressing climate change.
- In late 2019 Sarah approached me with a project idea - inspired by climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe to create a program to facilitate conversations about climate change that would broaden the conversation and normalize talking about climate related issues.

### 4 - (Brenda) Katharine Hayhoe

- Talking is one of the most important things we can do to support climate action. "The most important thing we can do about climate change is talk about it- talk about why it matters, and how we can fix it- and use our voices to advocate for change within in our spheres of influence."

## 5 - (Brenda) Why talk about climate change? (Yale quote)

- We were also influenced and encouraged by the reports from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication that their studies have found "Individuals, communities, and societies come to understand, care and act on climate change through their communication with others."

## 6 - (Brenda) Grant

- With these inspirations in mind, Sarah and I wrote a grant to the Institute of Museum and Library Services for an Accelerating Promising Practices for Small and Rural Libraries: Community Memory Project grant.
- In June of 2020, we found out that we got the grant for the All of Belfast Climate Dialogues Project- "to facilitate conversations among a broad cross-section of the Belfast community about climate change to ensure that all voices and views are heard."
- We began in the fall of 2020- in the midst of year one of the Covid 19 pandemic.
- **We felt and still believe that the ABCD project exemplifies the grant initiative to strengthen the libraries role as a convenor and facilitator of community engagement and dialogue about challenging, timely topics.**
- The rest of this presentation describes how we implemented the grant.

## 6 - (Sarah) Goals

- From the beginning, we've had four goals. We implemented them differently as we tried program formats and listened to feedback
- We're going to use these 4 goals as an organizing structure, share highlights
- We'll also be sharing the mic as we move through this talk.
  - The three of us came to this project from three pretty different places in terms of focus and knowledge and cares and worries
  - We've come to love our work and time together on this project - we are a pretty great team if we do think so ourselves! And we've proven to ourselves the idea we'll mention a lot today - that working together is the best antidote to despair.
  - We have been so motivated and inspired by working together and with members of the Climate Crisis Committee and others from Belfast.

## 7 - Getting started (Sarah)

- These have been three wild years. Maybe true of any three years? But think back to where we were in 2020:
  - Administration forbade the use of the term in federal agency writing
  - Start of the pandemic: isolation, fear, obsession with health statistics
  - Zoom was brand new to many of us! Figuring out what we could and couldn't do in video conferences
- "How many of you were part of our early experiments with paired discussion on Zoom up?"

## 8 - Project evolution (Sarah)

- Abrupt changes in the landscape in the first 6 months of project:
  - New federal administration, very different approach to climate change. As DC started addressing climate, Belfast was ready to do more than just talk
    - Surprised us how much the presidential administration impacted local conversation and attention.
  - Maine published "Maine Won't Wait," a groundbreaking statewide climate action plan. Came to guide much of our work
  - COVID became "normal" as did communicating through Zoom and other digital tools. That said, Brenda and I knew we needed help getting the word out to people, so on Earth Day 2021 we hired Misty to help with communications
- We'll start with Misty reminding us of some of our early moves to engage people in the region.

## 9 - (Misty) Engage

- One way ABCD began engaging with the community was through surveys, starting with a survey on Extreme Heat with the Belfast Climate Crisis Committee that reached over 60 people - at the Soup Kitchen, the high school, senior center and a local food cupboard.
- Brenda and I also had a table one day at the farmers market to chat with people and start getting the word out about the project.
- We also showed up at local events to support others working on climate related issues like the tide gauges and high water mark sign projects that were the efforts of the Belfast Climate Crisis Committee, and the high school engineering students in collaboration with many others.
- Brenda was featured at a Fireside Chat with an Earth Day-theme, sharing stories at Waterfall Arts.

### 10 - (Misty) Engage (newsletters)

- Our outreach included hanging event flyers in town, and engaging on Facebook and Instagram, and we also put together these monthly email newsletters.
- These let us reach out to people and share ABCD events, but also spotlight positive news and solutions, things happening in the community & State, and opportunities for people to get involved.
- The email list reached just about 240 subscribers, and the newsletters can all still be found on the website.

### 11 - (Brenda) Engage (art exhibit)

- We sought to Engage the community about climate change through art and poetry: Call for Art
- In late 2021 we put out a call for art about Climate Change for an exhibit called “The Art of ReClimation”
- How many of you came to this exhibit? Any artists in the room?
- The curated collection represented over 30 artists and poets and was on display in the Library’s Kramer Gallery and Abbott Room April- May 2022.

### 12 - (Brenda) Engage (art exhibit 2)

- The exhibit received a lot of visibility and positive feedback: I Love this quote from the comment book: “So many images and words, all connected by the common thread of climate change’s impact. Lots to think about. Thank you.” (Lesia Sochor)
- The Exhibit is also available as a digital exhibit in the ABCD collection website (which we’ll talk about more later in the presentation).

### 13 - (Misty) Engage (photo contest)

- Talking about climate change can be very serious work. We were feeling last summer that we wanted to do something on the lighter side
- Decided to run a photo contest about Celebrating Belfast - the places and the activities that bring us joy, inspiration, gratitude... the things we love about our little spot in the world here; what we care about and want to protect in the face of climate change.
- Had great response - rec’d 35 submissions!
- Partnered with Waterfall Arts program director Amy Tingle to judge the contest
- The winning photos are here at the top, and you can see all the photo submissions online on the ABCD Collection website.

#### 14 - (Sarah) Engage (Symposium)

- With the CCC we also hosted the Waldo County Climate Symposium in January 2022 on zoom.
- Members of the CCC wanted to bring all the orgs doing something related to climate change in Waldo County together to meet, share plans, and open an opportunity for connection and collaboration.
- 15 organizations attended the symposium: 5-min presentations about mission, current activities related to climate change, and future plans.
- A summary is available in the ABCD Collection.
- The symposium ended with an enthusiastic call for continued collaboration.
- Fact that it was the library co-hosted helped create an inviting, appealing, non-threatening space for this conversation

#### 15 - (Brenda) Educate (books)

- When we started the project in fall of 2020 we did what we could to start the conversation about climate change by adding books about Climate Change to the library collection

#### 16 - (Sarah) Educate (website)

- We created new web pages with information about climate change and the value of talking about climate change.
- We sifted through what was out there in 2020-2022 to add to our resources on the webpage.
- Resources are still available now! Newly re-organized

#### 17 - (Brenda) Educate (programs)

- Another Covid pivot was to host programs on zoom.
- ABCD was able to use this platform to create an event series **co-sponsored** with Belfast organizations such as the Garden Club and Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition.
- In designing the programs, we agreed to have the topics in the series be about climate change.  
Did any of you attend one of our zoom programs?

#### 18 - (Misty) Talk About It (farmer panel)

- We held a couple Zoom community panel discussions like this panel of local farmers from Daisychain Farm, Second Frost Farm and Bahner Farm.
- It was a really wonderful and eye-opening discussion about the farmers' experiences in dealing with the challenges of more extreme weather.

- The farmers appreciated the fact that the general public is now talking about - and acting more on - the climate crisis. They talk with a lot of their customers who are home gardeners, and who share some of the same challenges on a smaller scale.
- Naomi from Second Frost Farm said, “The more I hear people acknowledge the struggles, the less alone I feel” - really underscoring the importance of talking about it.

### **19 - (Sarah) Talk About It - Community Climate Conversations**

- Again with the CCC, we held a series of conversations to solicit community input on a climate action plan, which the CCC had begun to draft.
- June of 2022: general conversation about topics and ideas for the CAP.
- We identified guiding principles:
  - balancing human needs with environmental needs
  - thinking in systems - up and downstream (literally and figuratively), other networks exist with whom we can connect
  - equity - solutions must serve everyone, be accessible to everyone
- 4 conversations here in the Abbott Room:
  - Building Resilience for Big Storms and Flooding,
  - Modernizing our Homes and Buildings
  - Future of Transportation in Belfast and Waldo County.

### **20 - (Sarah) Talk About It - Transportation**

- We developed a strategy of we brainstorming ideas in three areas:
  - things individuals can do alone
  - actions we can do as a community together
  - Big ticket, complex, municipal participation required projects.
- Feedback, ideas, perspectives raised in these meetings went both into reports in ABCD collection AND into draft Climate Action Plan
- And we'll share some big takeaways from these meetings a bit later.
- All of the notes, recordings and full reports are available on our ABCD collection site linked to from the ABCD dropdown menu.

### **21 - (Brenda) Talk About It - CAP Presentation August 8th**

- There was a lot of interest in the community to hear from the Committee about the final draft of the Climate Action Plan that was submitted to the city on June 4, 2023.

- So on August 8th, we hosted a “Standing room only” presentation of the City Of Belfast Climate Action Plan with the Belfast Climate Crisis Committee (now the CEUC) here in the Abbott Room.
- It was great to shine a light on the CAP- it was the Completion of a body of work that ABCD Project supported with the Climate Conversations.
- Great discussion, we heard again from attendees an interest in becoming further involved through creating a climate action advocacy organization.

## 22 - (Brenda) Talk About It - Sustainable Communities Day

- Earlier in the summer on June 1, 2023 ABCD co-sponsored the Sustainable Communities Day organized by the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition.
- Held in conjunction with the Pen Bay Stewards Training, this event was intended to create connections among organizations with a sustainability-related mission and showcase their work for the interested members of our community.
- I gave a presentation about the ABCD project which was followed by a panel discussion where some good ideas/questions emerged:
  - What would it take for Belfast to be a sustainable city?
  - Making “Sustainability tied to economic development.”
  - What are the next steps to forming a coalition of climate action groups? Who or what organization might fill this role?
- In the next few slides we’ll talk about the fourth goal of the project - which was about documenting: capturing and archiving the community’s current thinking at this particular point in time about climate change.

## 23 - (Misty) Archive (Youtube + ABCD Collection)

- Early on in the project we were able to create this online collection space where we invited Belfast area residents to share writings, letters, artwork, poems, photos - anything that captured their observations, fears, hopes, or their priorities about Climate Change.
- In addition to individuals’ stories & reflections and other items such as our community survey results, the website captures and archives all the programs & events that ABCD held (many of them in collaboration with other partners), and the community conversations that took place as a result.
- All those recorded events are linked from this website archive, available for watching on the Library’s YouTube channel. Many of the events have detailed summaries that we wrote up as well.

#### 24 - (Misty) Archive (ABCD item examples)

- Here are just a few examples of some stories in the ABCD collection:
- A letter to the editor of the Bangor Daily News from the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Belfast, marking the third time in the church's 28-year history that the congregation spoke out about and took a stance on a social justice crisis: "the desperate threat of climate change."
- Another story observes the steep drop in the number of bees.
- And the last example here - if you didn't experience last December's huge storm firsthand, you can check out the flooding photos and videos from my coworkers at Nautilus.

#### 25 - (Misty) Archive (ABCD 8 collections)

- There are 120 items and stories on the website.
- You can browse through the pages of individual items.
- We also organized the site into 8 topical collections which you can browse through: Historical Perspectives on climate change in our area, impacts on residents' Health, Climate Art, Farms & Gardens, Forests, Oceans & Stormwater including sea level rise and flooding from extreme weather, Community Climate Conversations, and Local Voices individually speaking about climate change.
- The ABCD Collection website will remain as an ongoing resource (not just a dusty archive).
- As a body of work, it really captures a picture of what has been happening around climate change in the Belfast area over the past 3 years, and people's responses to it. It creates a snapshot in time (from an archival perspective for the future) - but it also provides a really rich, locally-focused resource for education about climate change.

#### 26- (Brenda) Updated ABCD pages on the Belfast Library website

- **Please go check out the ABCD collection - so much good stuff there!**
- **Keep in touch on the Library ABCD pages- I'm going to keep them up to date highlighting events and more.**

#### Brenda - Project takeaways- 5 - introduction

- We learned so much from doing the programs we've described and all the ones we didn't have time to mention tonight. As we've thought about what we've done and what it means, we've come up with five important takeaways or lessons we've learned that we want to share. The first is:



## 27 - (Brenda) Project takeaways (1) (“We don’t just want to talk about it...what can we do?”)

- Early in the project, as we presented ABCD as a “community memory” project we heard from community members that they didn’t want to share memories, they wanted to learn what to do to take action.
- We changed our focus / approach to offer more educational and resource-based events about solutions and actions - for individuals, working with others, and on a municipal or policy-making level.

## 28 - (Brenda) Project takeaways (2) (Many local orgs were already working on climate change) - “we aren’t alone!”

- In the course of shifting our focus to offer more educational programs - and as a result of the Waldo County Climate Change Symposium, We learned that many local organizations were already working on climate related issues.
- By 2022 the national conversation around climate change was prevalent, and more normalized. And many local organizations were adding climate action as part of their mission and outreach.
- Our successful educational series of programs is one example of how ABCD collaborated with local orgs to “lift up and amplify” these community efforts.
- **We learned the importance of using the ABCD platform to connect the dots between individuals looking to learn about climate actions and the resources and organizations that are available to help.**
- **We - the library - will continue to do this!**

## 29 - (Misty) Project takeaways (3) (Don’t reinvent the wheel)

- Takeaway #3: Don’t reinvent the wheel!
- When we dug in, we realized there was already so much good work to build on - from local organizations, other municipalities, and the State of Maine. Lots of examples, tools and resources to learn from and use as a model.
- I’ll highlight a few here that really impacted and moved along our work on the project:
- The Maine Won’t Wait 4-year climate action plan helped us to decide on topics and structure for the Community Climate Conversation events ABCD held with the Belfast Climate Crisis Committee.
- We also took a lot of inspiration from some other communities’ excellent Climate Action Plans that were already written, and we shared these documents with the Climate Crisis Committee as they were drafting the Climate Action Plan for Belfast.

- We also discovered A Climate To Thrive. They are a non-profit organization, which formed initially as a grassroots group of concerned citizens, and they're working to transition Mount Desert Island off fossil fuels. Their focus is to build a model of climate action that other communities can replicate. Brenda, and many of the Belfast Climate Crisis Committee members, have been regularly attending their monthly [Local Leads the Way](#) meetings.
- Those are just a few highlights, and links to all the orgs on this slide can be found on our website.

### **30 - (Sarah) Project takeaways (4) (Local AND national action needed)**

- Local AND National action needed:
  - In CAP conversations, we focused on local action, and felt the energy around community, collaborative actions we might take. Occasionally, someone would ask - will this change the future?
  - On the other side, some climate activists emphasize the need for federal governments to act to change emissions, saying local actions won't make a difference.
  - Our takeaway is that BOTH are necessary.
    - We need local action for mental health and local quality of life
    - and we need federal action to curb emissions.

### **31 - (Sarah) (5) Project takeaways (Use your power)**

- Headline: Who has the power?
- This question raised most clearly in a Community Climate Conversation
- We need to re-learn how democracy works, what's our roles, responsibility as citizens
- Lots of ways to engage! Something for everyone.
- Finally, circling back to our inspiration, Katharine Hayhoe - make your actions contagious by talking about them! Help other people feel that taking action is normal.

Those are our 5 takeaways and I'm going to pass the mic to talk about what we hope will happen next.

We've had the enormous privilege for the last 3 years thanks to IMLS:

- spending time each week thinking about climate change,
- how it impacts communities, and how communities might respond,
- And reflecting on our programs, what gives people energy and excitement.
- We've shared our big takeaways, or a-ha's, lessons learned.

- From all this, we have 5 wishes, 5 juicy opportunities for the Belfast region going forward:

### 32 - (Sarah) What We Hope Will Happen Next

#### (Municipal decision-making that integrates climate change impacts & resiliency)

- **Climate can't be an afterthought. It must be embedded in all decisions made by municipal leaders.**
- Already see this approach in the new draft Comprehensive Plan - adopt it!
- The Volunteers on the Comp Plan Committee included 22 climate solutions strategies in the city's new draft Comprehensive plan. This is exactly the approach we'd like to see: climate change being considered in all decisions made by the municipality, from the vehicles municipal staff drive to budget decisions.
- Also adopt & implement Belfast CAP!

### 33 - (Sarah) What We Hope Will Happen Next (Take advantage of funding)

- Programs and opportunities are emerging to help individuals and municipalities reduce their use of fossil fuels - funding from state and federal government for weatherization, heating and cooling, electric vehicles and more. Take advantage of these!
- **Shout out to the City** - joining the State of Maine's "Community Resilience Partnership," the state's program to connect and support municipalities who are taking steps to address climate + applying quickly for a heat pump grant for city buildings.

### 34 - (Brenda) What We Hope Will Happen Next (Community driven climate action for Belfast) People- do something join other people inaction

- As you all know, efforts come and go, and things evolve...
- For example, ABCD benefited from past work by the Belfast Area Transition Initiative that created a lot of energy / connections and tangible projects; we hope ABCD sets up future efforts in similar ways - one reason why we've archived so much of our work online!
- We're aware that there are multiple efforts underway already and new groups emerging- we would like to see them work together, or at least know about each other, find opportunities for collaboration and maybe form a network
- We'd like to point out that we can't afford to be in silos. There's so much to be done, it's great to see new efforts pop up!

### 35 + 36 - (Brenda) What We Hope Will Happen Next (Join others in action!)

- There are so many orgs and projects happening here.
- We hope all of you join a group already in action to do something - because we know how good it feels to join others taking action
- working together alleviates despair

### 37 - Personal Reflections

- **Brenda:**
  - A lot more people are talking about Climate Change now than three years ago! We did a great job normalizing the conversation!! Kidding aside, I believe this is true locally and nationally.
  - I am proud of the work that the ABCD project did to engage the community on a difficult and multi-faceted topic- Climate Change.
  - I have learned a lot about the realities of climate change and the changes needed on every level to reduce our use of fossil fuel and thus our carbon pollution. Sometimes I am discouraged by this, it seems impossible to do. But when I see what others are doing and how many organizations are working on solutions- the youth activists are the most inspiring- I am encouraged.
  - We have tried to prioritize the solutions in our messaging- the actions you can take to make a difference and overcome despair. The library will continue to be the place to convene conversations and connect people to local climate action.
  - I believe it is going to take all of us working together to make these changes- to support each other, find the right solutions and learn to advocate for a climate resilient future.
- **Sarah:** I have a two part reflection.
  - First, way back when we responded to the proposal call from IMLS, it was obvious to me and Brenda that a library would be the ideal home for an effort to engage the community in challenging issues and from which to issue an invitation to people to come and be heard, share ideas, etc. Looking back on these three years, I'm more convinced than ever of the central role of libraries in Maine communities facing change. Why we're writing up the "ABCD model" for other communities to follow. I only wish I lived in Belfast or had a grant and relationships in my own community to follow suit! And I just might work to make that happen.

- Also - Kudos to Steve Norman, Brenda Harrington, and the library board for saying yes to this opportunity! A library is an obvious home for this work, but this work never promised to be comfortable. The Belfast library leaders deserve a big round of applause for taking this project on.
- The second part of my reflection I owe to the Belfast community and in particular, something I heard in the Future of Transportation Community Climate Conversation. We had such a great crowd for that event, with so many great ideas for alternative transportation, active transportation, public transportation, ride-sharing. In the middle of this conversation, I realized that all these great ideas had something in common: each of these lower carbon emission ways of getting around take just a tiny bit more time. Not what America was built on - we're about going faster, farther, getting ahead. We need to adjust our priorities to put our planet, our well-being alongside our financial success, productivity, individual achievement
- Path forward is working together - can't change culture alone!
- **Misty:**
  - I wasn't thinking a lot about climate change before this project. I didn't even pay much attention to the news before Covid, honestly. I've learned so much about the climate crisis, and become so much more aware, on a daily basis.  
I'm not sure exactly what I want to do now that the project is coming to a close. I know I want to keep doing something to help.
  - We've been talking lately about the rising feeling of fear in people. All summer, so many places in the world are flooding or on fire. I've felt that fear and malaise on a personal level with our health in the hot temperatures; our gardens and properties with all the rain.
  - Personally I have a tendency to put my head down and just pay attention to what's close to home that I feel like I might have some control over. But I feel an urgency and awareness now that I didn't before. This isn't just about me and my corner of the world. And we have to work together to survive this.
  - I was looking for pictures recently of local climate action, I came across the Keeping Belfast Maine Beautiful cleanup weekend photos. And I

thought to myself, if 800 people can accomplish that much in one weekend, what could be accomplished if that energy and that level of organization were sustained? Community organizing is hard. But could Belfast do something going forward together with that kind of group energy?

- My path forward personally is stay focused on solutions, on feeling hopeful and not despairing, and remember that I live in this community with a lot of really wonderful people who also care. We're not alone.

### 38 - (Brenda) Project Partners

- Thank you to the many local organizations & others we have collaborated with on educational programs and conversations about climate action
- **As your local library, we're here to continue being a *trusted space for community engagement and dialogue*.**

### 39 - (Brenda) Conclusion

- In conclusion: Working together is the antidote for despair!

### 40 - (Brenda) Thank you

- Thank you IMLS for the project grant
- Thank you everyone for your support and involvement - and stay in touch!