

C-CHANGE: Climate Change 101

The GCA’s annual NAL conference in Washington, DC, is thought-provoking, eye-opening, and often game-changing.

This last was the case in 2014, when two members of the Garden Club of Princeton and two from Stony Brook Garden Club, both in Zone IV, attended the conference. They went home with a commitment to educating their communities about climate change. What started as a straightforward interest quickly turned into a passion. Kathleen Biggins, Pam Mount, Carrie Dyckman, and Katy Kinsolving started C-Change Conversations, a volunteer-led group that has developed two programs: one to promote nonpartisan dialogue and the other to provide educational tools for learning about climate change and its effect on our environment.

A dictionary definition for climate change is a change in global or regional climate patterns—in particular a change apparent from the mid- to late-20th century onward and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels. Scientists believe that we humans are speeding up the historically slow process of change with the burning of such fossil fuels as oil and natural gas, resulting in increased levels of carbon dioxide and methane being trapped in the atmosphere—hence the term greenhouse gas (GHG).

There is much that can be done to lessen GHGs and their effects. Education is a tremendous tool but, as Kathleen, Pam, Carrie, and Katy found out, climate change is a topic that can be quite controversial. So they, now joined by Sophie Glovier (The Garden Club of Princeton) and Harriette Brainard, developed a plan to learn

what people wanted to know about climate change. They found that if presented in a “nonpartisan credible way and wrapped together with a social situation” the dialogue flowed freely. C-Change Conversations was the result, and their volunteer organization offers two programs: Climate Change 101 and Conversations.

C-Change 101, a primer, was developed by Kathleen Biggins in conjunction with Climate Central, an independent nonprofit composed of scientists and science journalists who investigate and report on climate change and energy issues. Small groups of GCA clubs and other local organizations have been invited to hear presentations on the “scientific understanding of climate change.” At this year’s NAL conference in DC, Kathleen presented C-Change 101 to the 300 delegates. “She distilled dense, scientific, often hard-to-understand information into a very compelling presentation,” observed one delegate.

Eight C-Change Conversations have been held in the past two years, with more planned. These sessions feature experts who discuss climate change “as it relates to energy, national security, meteorology, sea-level rise, and business risk assessment and opportunities.” Each meeting is followed by a Q&A period and a social hour. Extremely engaging and informative, this series has attracted more than a hundred people per session.

Networking, brainstorming, and contact-sharing have brought many interesting people into the mix as speakers and advocates at C-Change programs. The hope of the six forward-thinking organizers is that other garden clubs across the country will follow their lead.

—Julie Badger, Sand Hills Garden Club, Zone VIII

I see climate change as a scientific and human issue, not an environmental or political one. We need to be clear-eyed in understanding the risks and assessing the costs of action versus inaction. To do that, we need to understand the complexity of the issue. Only then can we build the consensus to address it.

—Kathleen Biggins



Kathleen Biggins presenting the C-Change primer. Photo by Linder Suthers



The C-Change Conversations team at NAL (L to R): Katy Kinsolving, Pam Mount, Kathleen Biggins, Carrie Dyckman, and Sophie Glovier. Photo by Linda Suthers