

Ep 80 Unleashing Our Imaginations for Climate Solutions

Citizens Climate Radio

SPEAKERS

Sean Dague, Various Speakers, Zach Torpie, Lila Powell, Peterson Toscano, Hannah Pickard, Ruth Abraham, Tamara Staton, Dr. Natasha DeJarnett

Peterson Toscano 00:00

Welcome to Citizens Climate Radio, your climate change podcast. In this show, we highlight people's stories. We celebrate your successes, and together we share strategies for talking about climate change. I'm your host, Peterson Toscano. Welcome to Episode 80 of Citizens Climate Radio, a project of Citizens Climate Education. This episode is airing on Friday, January 27, 2023.

In today's show, Tamara Staton joins us for another installment of the resilience corner. You will also meet three new team members here at Citizens Climate radio, Ruth, Lila, and Zach are recent college graduates. They will tell you a little bit about themselves, and they will weigh in about the topic in today's episode. In today's show, we look at the power of imagination, something absolutely essential when addressing climate change.

Peterson Toscano 01:02

Sean Dague, a Citizens Climate volunteer in New York State, helps us to engage our imagination. He has a thought exercise that will give you a chance to travel to the future. Dr. Natasha DeJarnett, a leading environmental health researcher, will share her vision of the future. But first, a climate change communications expert updates us about what has happened since the last time she was on the show.

Peterson Toscano 01:31

Now when it comes to creative climate communications, no other episode has influenced me more than Episode 39, envisioning and communicating climate successes. In that episode, I shared a mind-expanding, future-imagining thought exercise conducted by Sean Dague. We also featured Blair Basarich from the San Francisco Zoo and Hannah Pickard at Boston's New England Aquarium. They are both part of a group called NNOCCI, N-N-O-C-C-I. Blair and Hannah stressed we need to pivot away from gloom and doom climate stories. Instead, we need to shift the conversation to the future, especially to the impacts of climate solutions. First, though, Hannah stresses effective climate communication begins with messages that are formed around our values, she shares two values that have been proven to move people to action.

Hannah Pickard 02:30

Protecting the people and the places that we love, and or responsibly managing our resources. Those are two values that are very strong within American culture. When I say American culture, I mean really broadly, it gets reinforced in a lot of different ways, protecting the people and the places that we love,

and or responsibly managing our resources. Those two values also allow us to align climate action with other social issues. And the more we can align with and connect social issues together, the better we're going to be in the better, we're going to find solutions that actually work for everybody. You don't go from why it matters to a laundry list of the things we're about to experience, or are experiencing, because that becomes really overwhelming. And we need to shift as climate communicators, as like a field, to painting the picture of what this looks like, when we've achieved our goals, because it's so much easier to sustain long term action when you know what you're, what you're trying to achieve, as opposed to what you're trying to avoid. How we center climate communications around the vision for the future. That's not just one of survival, but it's one where we would be excited to live in that.

Hannah Pickard 03:50

Oh, I actually want my city to, yes, be climate resilient- I'm not sure what that means. But then when somebody starts telling me, oh, that within five minutes of every, every person who lives in Boston, they'll have walking access to a park. That's the city I want to live in. Yes, I want faster public transportation, that's a city that I would want to make sure I stay in. The way I refer to it when it happened to me was that it like activated these kinds of civic muscles that I didn't know that I had or like that were just latent. And that just breeds more and more hope, which is what we need, and more and more community. It's our responsibility as climate communicators to be spreading climate hope, because otherwise, we're in trouble.

Peterson Toscano 04:58

More and more research confirms that a focus on a hopeful future based on solutions works. Hannah told me about some of the findings out of Yale climate communications.

Hannah Pickard 05:10

According to them, hopeful Americans are more likely to talk with their friends and family. They're more likely to support transitions to renewable sources of energy and act civically for change. That's what we want to be seeing.

Peterson Toscano 05:22

Hannah reveals another important reason for us to focus on a helpful future, especially for those of us doing climate work.

Hannah Pickard 05:31

Thinking about climate change, even thinking about it regularly, is really difficult. And we want to invite more and more people into the space where we're talking about climate change. But that also brings some mental health risks, that we're inviting people into a space, into a community, that's suffering. We're seeing the effects of climate all around us, and we can't escape it. So being able to be in community be hopeful, find ways to support each other. These are all things that help build resilience to those mental health impacts.

Peterson Toscano 06:04

At NNOCCI, they realize they need to do more than train people on how to be effective climate communicators. They need to build a supportive community.

Hannah Pickard 06:15

Socially and emotionally supporting each other has always been very critical, especially to our training process. But in the last two and a half years, we've really turned a light on that as a focus for why we exist as a member organization, because it's not just this kind of evangelist, like, we're going to train you, you're going to be the best communicator, you're going to know how to tell a story. It's really hard because I don't think we're good at talking about mental health or about the benefits of being with each other in this. That's new. That's been since I think January, kind of my newest push beyond just we need to give people a vision for the future. It's like, we need to start being really vocal about how hard this work is, and the good things we get out of it personally, in order to refuel ourselves. Otherwise, we're not modeling that for these, these new folks who are coming into the fold and have no idea how to handle it.

Peterson Toscano 07:17

To learn about the work of NNOCCI and their excellent online training programs, visit climateinterpreter.org. I also have links to NNOCCI in our show notes.

Peterson Toscano 07:38

Sean Dague, is a software engineer. He's also the group leader for the mid-Hudson South chapter of Citizens Climate Lobby, and he has a superpower, Sean helps us unlock our imaginations. We featured him back in Episode 39, along with Hannah Pickard. Sean had us imagine a world without fossil fuels. For Hannah, this experiment had a deep impact.

Hannah Pickard 08:04

And really changed how I help other people come to the table and like I instruct people to listen, not even to me on the podcast, but the last 10 minutes. Because to me, that was a really important moment.

Peterson Toscano 08:18

Dr. Natasha DeJarnett also found the exercise very helpful. A frequent guest on the show, Dr. DeJarnett has spoken about environmental racism and justice, the health risk for coal miners and much more. In order to imagine a better world, we need to see the trouble we are currently in and to see it with clear eyes. When it comes to the current state of our world, Dr. DeJarnett hears it captured in a song.

Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 08:46

Marvin Gaye's What's Going On album keeps echoing in my head. And from "What's Going On", just some words are standing out to me: "Brother, brother, brother, there's far too many of us dying", "Picket lines and picket signs, don't punish me with brutality". And then from his song, "Mercy, Mercy Me", "Where did all the blue skies go? Poison is the wind that blows, from the north and the south and east". This is standing out to me as the current soundtrack. And these are beautiful songs, but they're capturing some heartbreaking times and still as relevant as when they were written as, as they are right now.

Peterson Toscano 09:29

At my breakout group, at the recent Citizens Climate virtual conference, I had the nearly 500 participants open up their imaginations as they walk through Sean's experiment. They got to travel to another time to envision a whole new world. So I invite you to take the next three minutes to let your creative mind wander, imagine and dream. I share with you Sean's experiment. What will the world be

like without fossil fuels? Then you will hear people reading some of the hundreds of responses I received from the participants in the online breakout session.

Sean Dague 10:07

When we talk about what the future looks like and climate change, we often talk about all the bad things that happen. And that's important. That's an important part of the story. But it's important to think about how the world would just change. And a lot of these are good changes, and really like, think through kind of all of our senses about what that would be like. Just imagine this whole new world. You walk out your front door, what would actually look different in a world where we've gotten off of fossil fuels? Like as you look around, as you look at homes, what's different about them? How are they different than they are today? What's in your driveway? How's that different? How do you get around? What do you see in the world that you didn't before? And what's missing? And not just what you see, but engage your other senses. What does the world smell like? What smells are missing, that were there before? What do you, what do you smell that you never could before, because it was covered over in pollution?

Sean Dague 11:57

What does the world sound like? What does your street sound like? How is that different than it was before? What new things are you hearing? In your yard? On your front door? In your neighborhood? You know, what do things feel like? Like when you touch them? Right? We used to have light bulbs that changing a light bulb would burn your hands, and we don't anymore. Just everyday objects in our, in our homes, outside- How do they feel different? How does just walking along the street feel different? And how does that make you feel? What are the things that, that we have gained? What are the things that we have lost? Just imagine this whole new world because if we can't imagine this world, we can't create it.

Peterson Toscano 13:10

As we did the breakout session, people in the chat section of Zoom, typed in what they imagined would be in the world and what would be missing. You won't hear those loud lawn mowers and leaf blowers waking you up when you want to sleep in. You won't see or smell the exhaust from cars, trucks, and buses burning fossil fuels. You won't feel it burn your throat and lungs or constrict your breathing. Parking lots will be cleaner too without all those oil and grease stains. More importantly, though, a world without fossil fuels is full of wonderful things.

Various Speakers 13:50

Family and friends outside together. Seeing mountains that were once invisible behind the smog. Bike lanes in every city and town. Clear blue sky. Clear blue sky. Clear blue sky. Children running and playing without asthma. Rich loamy soil that sequesters carbon. Reliable and clean public transportation. Windmills. Open window. People walking. And solar panels on every roof. Birds. Stars. Fresh air. Bees. Birds. Birds. Quiet. Bicycles. Stars. Quiet. Fresh air. Bees. Birds. Bicycles. Stars. Birds. Fresh air. Flowers. Bees. Stars. Fresh air.

Various Speakers 14:44

Birds. More birds. Stars. Stars. Fresh air. Quiet. Bicycles. Birds. Flowers. Bicycles. Cool crisp air. Birds. Quiet. Birds. Fresh air. Stars. Flowers. Fresh air. Fresh air. Birds. Flowers. Bees. Birds. Flowers. Flowers. Flowers. Flowers. Quiet. Cool crisp air. Birds. Quiet. Blue skies. Stars. Quiet. Stars. Fresh air. Birds. Bees. Bees. Bicycles. Flowers. Children running and playing without asthma. Stars. Fresh air. Bees

Peterson Toscano 16:22

And for Dr. Natasha DeJarnett, what does the future look like? Smell like? What does it sound like?

Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 16:31

In short, what I want to see is a more beautiful world. But not just that. I also see a healthier world. I see a world with less asthma, less heart disease, less complications with psychotropic medications and hate, less injuries. Less destruction in the places where we live, work, learn, play and pray. That's what the world looks like to me. It sounds like Louis Armstrong's "What A Wonderful World", "I see trees of green, red roses too. I see the bloom for me and you, and I think to myself, what a wonderful world". That's what I hear. But more tangibly I hear the sound of children playing outside, laughing, free from environmental induced asthma, running around with not a care in the world, healthy. What does it smell like? It smells like fresh air. It smells like no toxic industrial fumes in our neighborhood. To me, that smells like possibility.

Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 17:44

We can't address climate change without addressing inequities. So 100 years from now, I see a more just world. I see our most vulnerable populations with enhanced quality of life. I see children, older adults, people of color, people who live in lower income communities, I see them having better quality of life, because they are at the center of the decision making when it comes to addressing climate change. I see our frontline communities, no longer living on the fence line of polluters. I see our coastal communities no longer displaced by sea level rise. I see former coal mine communities thriving with new, well paying industry. I see communities that were former burdened with injustice now achieving equity. Communities that utilize health and all policies framework and emphasize health equity for all. These societies will have policies that ensure climate action, protect health, and protect equity. All policies protect health and equity, and it protects our most vulnerable.

Dr. Natasha DeJarnett 19:16

And I see this underscored by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's wise words, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". So I see that be what underscores how we move forward.

Ruth Abraham 19:34

Hi all, I'm Ruth Abraham, a recent graduate of Washington and Lee University. I studied and hope to continue studying the intersection of economics and environmental studies. I hope to use that knowledge to then propel a career in environmental policy. And this thought experiment really spoke to my past self. In my senior year, I remember vividly sitting in my Climate and Society class poring over reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. And they summarized what would likely happen to the Earth if we persisted in using fossil fuels at the rate we were now. And the promises were very bleak. Their forecast was intensified storms, melting ice caps, and higher sea levels. The climate doom story, sound familiar?

Ruth Abraham 20:20

But then, Sean Dague got us thinking about a world without fossil fuels. I loved how this exercise flipped the script, and centered on what good could come out of the innovations that we are currently pursuing. I was forced to remind myself that hopeful people are the ones on the ground. It's hope that has us out there doing great work, and not fear. When I was first deciding to major in environmental studies, I myself struggled with identifying environmental optimism as a reality. A core member of mine

is me in my sophomore year yourself, listening to my department head deliver a talk. He centered his speech on this quote by Paul Hawken that I'll leave you all with because it nicely sums up the episode we're revisiting. It's this quote, that is my personal message to myself, and to all who are moved to do meaningful work. "If you look at the science about what is happening on Earth and aren't pessimistic, you don't understand the data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this Earth, and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse".

Zach Torpie 21:29

Hi, my name is Zach Torpie, and I'm a project manager for Aurora Water, with a master's in environmental management from the University of Maryland Global Campus. I am a big believer in designing integrated systems and building with nature. The Earth has had billions of years to evolve its systems and has created some ingenious methods of managing its resources. I agree with Hannah Pickard on the importance of positive messaging when discussing climate change. If we tell people that all is lost and give voice to defeatism, it pushes people to give up hope, and then all is indeed lost. We need to keep people inspired and motivated to fight for the future that they envision. When I envision a world without fossil fuels, I imagined biking to work and protected biking lanes. Traveling between connected and integrated communities. These communities provide the necessities where people live and are more connected to each other. I imagine hearing the sounds of animals and bugs everywhere. As these communities are designed to accommodate and support them. It is important to change people's perspectives and how they're thinking about climate change and the different futures that are available to us. Nothing is destined, and every step we take now is worth 1,000 more in the future. We are here to inspire action and change. I hope we can help in spreading that message.

Lila Powell 22:50

Hi everyone. I'm Lila Powell and I just graduated from William & Mary. I studied kinesiology, which is health science, and environmental policy. I'm interested in how environmental health affects human health. And I plan to pursue a master's in public health with a concentration in environmental health. Our health is intertwined with the environments, from air pollution affecting respiratory health, to an absence of green spaces affecting mental health. It's all connected. And it can be really overwhelming to constantly hear what's going wrong and what needs to get fixed. So I really resonated with this episode's theme of imagining a better future.

Lila Powell 23:25

I imagine a future where I'm surrounded by nature. I want more public parks. I want more community gardens. I want flower patches. Remembering both sides, where you are and where you want to be has helped me not get bogged down in climate gloom and doom. Sean's exercise does a great job getting you to remember what you're working towards. During my junior year, I took a science communications course. We worked on taking scientific articles and turning them into stories. Giving the research a narrative makes it more interesting. It helps readers, or listeners, better understand what they're learning. This train of thought connects to Hannah's hope for the future of climate communicators. We want to inspire hope in ourselves and in others. And we can do this by explaining climate goals in tangible terms to help people better grasp what they're working towards. Like Hannah said, we want to spread climate hope.

Peterson Toscano 24:17

And what about you? What did this experiment stir up in your imagination? I want to hear from you. Feel free to email radio@citizensclimate.org or leave a voicemail of three minutes or less at

518-595-9414, +1 if calling from outside the USA. That number again is 518-595-9414. Many thanks to the folks who read the responses about the future. These include Liz and Petra, Ann Piper, Tammy Simpson, Sally Stewart, Christine Robinson, Kathy Habegger, Phillip Davis, Charlie Sullivan, Sharon Elliot, Ann Evans, Douglas Aleve, Ellen Wages, Wesley Jacobs, Wendy Slaughterbeck, John Kelly-Worrell, Carol Bates, Alice Jones, Steve Riege, Mike Cooper, and Kathy Macease.

Tamara Staton 25:13

Hi, I'm Tamara Staton, CCL's education and resilience coordinator, and this is the resilience corner. I want to do everything that I can to see that you have what you need to stay strong and steady in the important climate work that you're doing. Last month in the corner, we reviewed five key steps to deepening resilience, noticing, accepting, seeking help, practicing and repeating that process regularly. And then we took a deeper look at that third step, seeking help. Once we're able to notice, accept, and get help where we need it, we are more able to take action in the ways that support our well-being. Which brings us to our focus today on the third step, practice.

Tamara Staton 25:53

A number of years ago, I felt really burned out, and it was clear that I needed a break from some of my climate advocacy. I was struggling with if and how to step away, though, I was anxious about the hole that I might leave if I did. Creating some space was definitely a challenging decision. But creating the space ultimately helped me find the energy that propelled deeper climate work that is more personally fulfilling for me. This is the beauty of practicing resilience. When combined with a sense of self awareness, it affords us opportunities that didn't exist before- learning to say no, creating space and boundaries, slowing down or speeding up. Practice is similar to action, which we often talk about as being the antidote to despair. But unlike action, practice conveys a sense of regularity. It also sends the message that we don't have to get it right, that we can make mistakes and learn.

Tamara Staton 26:47

In her fantastic book, *Widen the Window*, Elizabeth Stanley speaks to this value of practice. Rewiring the brain and body to improve our performance and build resilience, she says, requires an integrated training regimen and consistent practice over time, just as muscle growth and improved cardiovascular functioning requires months of consistent physical exercise. Next month, we'll take a look at the last step. But for now, consider what practices might help you stay strong and focused in the face of climate change. Then try one or two of them this week. These might be ongoing practices or something you try in the moment, like breathing deeply when you feel frustrated. Maybe you spend more time in nature or make time to read a book that you love. Maybe you set up a recurring lunch date with a friend or co-worker. Or maybe, just maybe, it's all about creating more fun, laughter, and joy in your work. Whatever you choose, have faith in its value because we need you and your deep commitment to a livable planet Earth.

Tamara Staton 27:49

I'm Tamara Staton with the resilience corner. I thank you for being here, and for your commitment to progress. To learn more about tools, trainings, and resources for deepening resilience, check out our resilience hub at CCLusa.org/resilience. From there, you can also access and share resilience corner videos with friends and family who might be interested. And until next month, remember this, you are strong, you are resilient, and you've got what it takes to make good things happen.

Peterson Toscano 28:23

Thank you so much for joining me for Episode 80 of Citizens Climate radio. Next month, Lilace Mellin Guignard will share her experiences alone in the wilderness. She is the author of the book, *When Everything Beyond the Walls is Wild: Being a Woman Outdoors in America*. Here at Citizens Climate Education, we want you to be effective in the climate work you do. So we provide training, local group meetings and many resources. They're all designed to help you build the confidence and skills needed to pursue climate solutions. Find out how you can learn, grow, and connect with others who are engaged in meaningful work visit CCLusa.org, that's CCLusa.org.

Peterson Toscano 29:05

Special thanks to the members of our Advisory Board: Tamara Staton, Meggie Stenback, Katie Zakrzewski, Sharon Bagatell, Caillie Roach, Solemi Hernandez, Hannah Rogers, Sean Dague, and Brett Cease. Citizens Climate Radio is written and produced by me, Peterson Toscano. Other technical support from Ricky Bradley and Brett Cease. Social media assistance from Ashley Hunt-Mortorano, Flannery Winchester, Katie Zakrzewski, and Steve Valk. Creative input from Ruth Abraham, Lila Powell and Zach Torpie. Moral support from Madeline Para. The music on today's show comes from epidemicsound.com. Visit CCLusa.org to see our show notes and find links to our guests. Citizens Climate radio is a project of Citizens Climate Education