

Letter to Editor: Listening to our youth

Jill Higgins

Mount Desert Islander

January 4, 2019

<https://www.mdislander.com/opinions/letter-to-editor-listening-to-our-youth>

To the Editor:

Last year, A Climate to Thrive brought Shaw Center researcher Madelyn Woods to Southwest Harbor to present the results of their research on microplastics in Blue Hill Bay.

I was sickened to learn that every sample they took off our beautiful shores, and every mussel they dissected, contained small pieces of plastic, pieces that contain endocrine disruptors, carcinogens and other toxins and will always remain plastic, no matter how much they break apart.

I also learned that only a small percentage of plastic is recycled and that the amount of plastic being used for a few minutes and then thrown “away” every day is increasing exponentially worldwide and continuing to accelerate what National Geographic, Pope Francis and many others are calling a crisis and emergency.

When Madelyn asked if there were any questions, there were a few moments of heavy silence, and then a young girl in the back raised her hand and asked, “Do you have any information about what one person can do?”

She and three of her classmates had done a research project and had become deeply alarmed and compelled to act. With encouragement and information from their teacher Bonnie Norwood about how citizens can affect change through our local governments, the MDI Plastic Project was born.

Since then, the girls have done compelling presentations around the island and to the Boards of Selectmen or Town Council of all four MDI towns, pleading for action to protect the ocean, wildlife, and their and our health and future.

They co-wrote ordinances and succeeded in getting single-use carryout plastic bags and polystyrene foam containers banned in Southwest Harbor as of Earth Day, 2019.

There will be a public hearing and vote on Jan. 15 to see if Bar Harbor will become the twentieth Maine town to do this.

These town actions will likely have impacts that reach far beyond the towns, because when a tipping point is reached, there will be enough support to pass statewide ordinances in Maine like California and Hawaii have done.

In conversations and polls of business owners around the island, the only opposition we’ve been hearing is from people who would rather the problem be addressed through consciousness-

raising and voluntary action by businesses and customers instead of ordinances.

I would agree if we were not facing a crisis of epic proportions that is already having serious effects on the health of our population, especially our babies and young children (see the warnings about plastic in the latest report of the American Academy of Pediatrics) and on the environment that is our life support system.

Consciousness-raising and voluntary action are not fast and effective enough, and plastic bans work. I urge you to heed the call of our children and grandchildren and tell your town leaders that you support these ordinances. We didn't create this crisis intentionally, but we need to do our best to take responsibility for it.

Jill Higgins
Bernard