



Media Release – for immediate release

Date: August 8, 2018

Media Contact: Christie Lassen (410.313.7786 or 443.474.0740)

Victoria Goodman (410.313.7781)

Howard County Library System
HCLS' The Longest Table and Human Library
Inspire National and State Participation in Locally Led Initiative
HCLS Selected as Finalist
by American Civic Collaboration Awards For Its
Choose Civility Community Engagement Effort

Ellicott City, MD – Howard County Library System's (HCLS) Choose Civility initiative is one of 23 finalists for the 2018 American Civic Collaboration Awards (Civvys). The awards showcase exemplar, high-impact civic collaboration efforts that bring people together, engage communities in political and social action, and enact long-lasting change.

Choose Civility, an initiative founded and led by Howard County Library System (HCLS), celebrates diversity, inclusion and accessibility while promoting values of respect, empathy and compassion. Since the initiative began in 2007, HCLS has expanded and diversified the scope of its outreach to address topical issues while reinforcing its core founding principles. As part of the initiative's ongoing engagement outreach, HCLS became the first organization on the East Coast to host *The Longest Table*, and the first public library in Maryland to host a *Human Library*.

The Longest Table, a communal meal designed to build new relationships, encourage conversations, and increase civic engagement on local issues, was spearheaded by Christie Lassen, HCLS Director of Communications and Partnerships. Lassen both chaired the local event planning committee and developed a toolkit for Choose Civility Chapters and Affiliates nationwide to use in the development of their own Longest Table events.

The Human Library, an international initiative where real people are loaned to readers for one-on-one, face to face conversations, was initiated locally by Alli Jessing, HCLS Events and Seminars Manager. Jessing coordinated HCLS' Human Library event, developed a toolkit to help other libraries replicate the initiative, and created the Maryland Human Library Book Depot to connect Living Book volunteers to Maryland libraries planning Human Library events.

As a result of their efforts, Lassen and Jessing's work inspired the Maryland State Library (MSL) to provide grants to encourage other public libraries to create and implement Choose Civility

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activities and events. In doing so, Maryland became the first state to embrace and implement the Choose Civility initiative at the state level.

In November of 2017 HCLS hosted a Choose Civility summit for Maryland public libraries to share its expertise and experiences, lead brainstorming sessions, and inspire libraries to participate. Collaborating with MSL, HCLS then facilitated the statewide grant to enable other libraries to create and implement such events as The Human Library, The Longest Table, speaker series, book discussion groups, staff training around inclusion, exhibits, as well as activities around Frederick Douglass' 200th birthday.

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About the Civvy Awards

Now in its second year, the Civvys acknowledge inspiring work that is national, local, youth-focused or involves the political process. They are sponsored by three highly respected non-partisan organizations: the Bridge Alliance, Big Tent Nation and the National Conference on Citizenship.

Finalists were selected from a competitive field of exceptional submissions from all corners of American life. By recognizing projects and processes that emphasize collaboration, civility and on-the-ground impact, the Civvys are a powerful means to honor this work and inspire more of it.

An esteemed committee of reviewers – comprised of leaders in civic engagement, politics, research and community impact – will select a winner in each of 4 categories. Winners will be announced and receive their awards at the National Conference in Citizenship on October 18, 2018 in Washington, D.C.

The 2018 Civvys finalists in the Local Category (projects with a local, statewide or regional focus) include:

- Howard County Library System (Christie Lassen and Alli Jessing)
- Betty Knighton, West Virginia Center for Civic Life
- Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation
- Interfaith Works El Hindi Center for Dialogue (Beth Broadway, Peter Willner and team)
- Janet Harris, Winthrop Rockefeller Institute
- Make Shift Coffee House, Craig Freshley

All honorable mentions and finalists are listed at www.civvys.org. Follow the conversation around this exciting work on social media using #Civvys.