

Transcript

Policy Summit 2023

Opening Keynote: Elevating Community Voices for Impactful Outcomes

In 2021, Angela Williams became the first Black woman to be CEO of United Way Worldwide, the world's largest privately funded nonprofit. She devoted her first year to listening to what local communities need and how United Way can help shape solutions to their challenges. She opens the summit by sharing her experiences and insights about how government, academia, the nonprofit sector, philanthropy, and others can build stronger, more resilient, and equitable communities.

Moderator

- Sharon Sobol Jordan, President and Chief Executive Officer, United Way of Greater Cleveland

Speaker

- Angela F. Williams, President and Chief Executive Officer, United Way Worldwide

Announcer (00:00):

Good morning. Please welcome to the stage, Tracey Mason, Assistant Vice President of Community Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.

Tracey Mason (00:16):

Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Policy Summit is here. Yes. This is our 16th Policy Summit. This year's theme is Communities Thriving in a Changing Economy. This is our first hybrid summit, so thank you all for being here in person and I also want to thank our attendees who joined us virtually. I am Tracey Mason, the Assistant Vice President of the Cleveland Fed's Community Development Department. For those of you who are unaware of our work, community development departments exist in all 12 Federal Reserve banks, and we share an overarching goal to promote economic resilience and mobility of low to moderate income communities and underserved individuals. As a team, we believe that was very important to elevate community voice throughout the summit. So for the next couple of days, you'll hear from national and local experts from across the country on challenges and opportunities related to workforce development, small business and economic inclusion.

(01:33):

Later this morning, during the Fayette Listen session, you'll have an opportunity to share your insight, how to best support an inclusive economy, with Loretta Mester, our President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, as well as Michelle Bowman, who's a member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. We are thrilled to have representation from 35 states, plus Washington, DC. We have eight Federal Reserve Bank partners and several local community organizations supporting this year's summit. And they are posted on the screen as well as in your program.

(02:17):

Thank you to the planning committee, our session leads, volunteers, my colleague, Andrew Bennett. I want to thank them for their time, expertise, and creative phenomenal program that truly reflects a diverse perspective of the communities that we serve. To Emily Garr Pacetti, our Chief Community Affairs Officer, thank you for your guidance, support, leadership and planning Policy Summit.

(02:48):

Lastly, thank you to the Cleveland Feds leadership team, Loretta Mester, President and CEO, Mark Meder, first Vice President and Chief Operations Officer, and our community affairs members as well as the board of directors. Thank you all for your tremendous support of community development's work. Please join me in a round of applause and thank you each and every one of them.

(03:21):

For a little housekeeping, all plenary sessions will take place in the main ballroom, which is here. And breakout sessions will be held across the hall. If you have not done so, please download the Policy Summit app so you can get updates and access to all of our speaker bios. Please keep in mind the views that are shared during the summit are those of the speakers and not necessarily those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland or the Federal Reserve System.

(03:57):

Now to kick off the summit, we wanted to share this special video called Putting the Pieces Together. It is an incredible piece of work produced by the Cleveland Fed, to promote the program on economic inclusion. Without further ado, please play the Putting the Pieces Together video.

Speaker 3 (04:37):

A canvas can't reach its full beauty without every piece in place. Each texture builds off of another, and each brushstroke has its space. Our economy's like a canvas, one that isn't fully clear because we exclude vital pieces from its image. Every year, the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland studies our economy. They found it can't reach full potential without racial equity. They track systemic proof that these disparities affect us all and their program on economic inclusion shows where it's gone. Gender and race disparities hurt the economy we live in. Estimates of the labor gap could cost the economy trillions. People born in predominantly minority locations have lower access to wealth, and that ripples through generations. Education, secure jobs, high quality housing and credit, these disparities still stand from a racism that's systemic. It could be traced from employment to small businesses and wealth and still exist today in ways that still damage our country's health.

(05:52):

The more access to good work, the more our economy is stable. People can't participate if they're prevented or unable. Unless we have equal chances, change will only reach a handful, and these inequities will rear their heads in new ways. For example, the pandemic reduced employment in every ethnic group, but black and Hispanic workers have harder journeys to recoup. What can we do when research shows that people struggle to advance? Our canvas won't reach full potential if we don't have equal chance to high quality education and to labor opportunities, to economic inclusion in all our country's communities so we can combat poverty and work at high potential and build wealth, change our trajectory, strive toward new life credentials, close the pay gap, set up generational wealth for new families, intervene so our economy can thrive where it is lacking.

(06:52):

Take these broken and torn pieces and assemble something greater where we'd stand unequal ground, not racially divided craters where a new image will form out of these disjointed statistics. It is possible, it's reachable. It's more than optimistic. Part of the Federal Reserve's mission is to maximize employment and economic inclusion helps build this goal and deploy it. Their economists and analysts provide public with research from our region and our nation

where these facts are found and featured. Our divided systems can assemble if we get involved. A greater understanding helps us face these issues till they're solved, our economy can grow greater. For too long it has been severed. Change can come, but only if we all put these pieces together.

Tracey Mason (08:06):

Yes, this video has such a powerful message and I am humbled and honored to work for an organization that has prioritized economic inclusion as one of its core strategic goals. The video refers to a canvas. In your bag, you have a puzzle. Once it's completed, it has images of words and faces to illustrate the full potential of inclusion, as you can see on the screen. Now, I have the pleasure of introducing our keynote speaker, Angela Williams, President and CEO of United Way Worldwide, and Sharon Sobol Jordan, President and CEO of United Way of Greater Cleveland, who will facilitate questions from the audience for Mrs. Williams. Thank you both for joining us today.

(09:05):

Mrs. Williams was our first choice and we are truly thrilled that she is here today. Given our theme, Communities Thriving in a Changing Economy, and United Way's Worldwide mission to build equitable communities across the country, we felt strongly that Mrs. Williams' experience and expertise on elevating community voice were perfectly aligned to our mission for Policy Summit. In 2021, Angela Williams became the first black woman to be the CEO of United Way Worldwide, which is the world's largest privately funded nonprofit organization. She's devoted her first year listening to local communities in need, and today Mrs. Williams will share her insight on how government, academia, the nonprofit sector, philanthropy, practitioners and others can build stronger, more resilient and equitable communities. Please join me in welcoming Mrs. Angela Williams to the stage.

Angela Williams (10:28):

Good morning.

Audience (10:31):

Good morning.

Angela Williams (10:31):

Okay, that was just a little bit sleepy. Let's try this again. You've had a chance to have at least one cup of coffee. Good morning.

Audience (10:37):

Good morning.

Angela Williams (10:39):

Oh my goodness. I am so pleased to be here with you all today. It's an honor and a privilege and I want to thank Tracey for extending the invitation to join you. I must tell you that she was extremely persistent, and I'm also going to tell you why she had to wait so long before I could give her the answer. I had to choose between you or the Prince of Monaco. Yeah, I know. Wow. However, I think I'm in the right place at the absolute right time. Well, thank you.

(11:23):

One of the things that just really struck me is one, the theme of this conference, two, the words that were shown just now in the video as well as the visual, but third and I think most important is the people in this audience, this cross section of attendees to this conference. You all are a powerful group of individuals and the fact that you're signaling that you're looking in communities, you want to understand communities and you want to make sure that communities are thriving, I want to commend you. And I want to say that in the time that I have with you this

morning, I hope that you leave this conference energized and even more committed to ensuring that communities are thriving because communities are made up of individuals, families, and systems.

(12:32):

And so what I want to talk about a little bit today is first start by sharing with you my story, what goes into making Angela, Angela, why I am in this position that I find myself in now and then that will help color whether you accept or question what I have to say.

(12:53):

But my story starts where I was born, which is Anderson, South Carolina. In fact, I was speaking there just last Friday for a Juneteenth gala. My dad was a pastor, Royal Baptist Church. He was the head of the NAACP for the State of South Carolina. This was in the '60s. And as we know, the '50s, '60s and '70s were turbulent times and the vestiges of which we are still grappling with today. But because my dad was active in the civil rights movement, worked alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that made an impression on the young Angela. And what I saw was that I have to be that person that is the voice for the underdog, the advocate for people that are marginalized, the hands and feet to do the work that is required to make sure people are engaged and welcomed and fully functioning in society. And so because of their advocacy, I knew I wanted to do the same.

(14:09):

Now you may wonder, "Well, okay, so if I look at your background, how does that play out?" Well, I went to undergrad, University of Virginia, and then went straight to law school. But in law school I was a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force. And so upon graduation actually went on active duty as what is called a JAG. And my service in federal government from being a federal prosecutor to working in the White House, I've worked for three US presidents, working in the Senate Judiciary Committee for Senator Ted Kennedy. My commitment and service to seeing how systems engage and impact individuals, whether it's fighting for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for our country, whether it's working in the criminal justice system, whether it's looking from a policy perspective of the laws and the implications of laws and regulations on everyday people, because sometimes there's that disconnect.

(15:14):

But in all of that, that then led me to work in the nonprofit sector, having worked at the YMCA as the general counsel, then working for Easterseals, where we cared about people living with disabilities and those that support them. And then now here at United Way Worldwide, an organization that is intent on mobilizing the caring power of people in community. I don't know about y'all, but I'm living my dream. I'm just saying, I'm living my dream.

(15:51):

So what I want to talk now about is just United Way, some of the what we're seeing in communities, what people are experiencing and hoping to bring through stories, some things to life as you reflect on what you do on a daily basis, and where the intersection is. So United Way, we have 1100 local United Ways operating in 37 countries. Here in the United States, we cover 95% of communities. So my colleagues are the neighbors of the people that they serve on a daily basis. And so because we are in community, we're mobilizing the caring power of community, we believe that every person in every community should have access to healthcare, education, financial sustainability or economic mobility. And how do we create the openings and the platforms to allow people to have access, equal access and to take advantage of it should they choose to do so.

(17:01):

We have 29,000 local community partners. We have 1.4 million volunteers and we have 45,000 corporate partners. So United Way, if you didn't know who we are now, you should know that we are a worldwide system that has the ability to dig deep into communities, understand on a very intimate level what is happening by zip code, by neighborhood, but also have the ability to take the best and brightest ideas to innovate and to scale and to make a difference. So even as you all go back to your communities and think about things that you want to create or innovate or ideate about, then think about us as your partner.

(17:58):

So if I could go back in time and be my six-year-old self, and I will say to my six-year-old self, when you ask me what did I want to do when I grow up? I said, I want it to be president and I want it to be a nun. You laugh, but I technically am doing both. I'm married, however, I am an ordained minister. And so I have been bi-vocational for more than 20 years now. And I am president. And I told my staff, they said, "Angela, being president of the US is hard." I was like, "Yeah, but I'm president of the world." So my six-year-old self had these ideas of wanting to change the world and now being able to do so.

(18:54):

But here's the problem. In the last 50 years, despite all of the social progress, the technological innovation and the wealth that has just bloomed and taken over in that span of time of five decades, the percentage of Americans living in poverty would be virtually the same today as it was back then.

(19:26):

In a span of 50 years, the poverty levels in this country remain essentially the same. 37.9 million people are living in poverty across the US. That's 11% of our neighbors. And in 1970, that number was 12%. Black and Hispanic Americans are disproportionately impacted by generational poverty. One out of every 18 people in the US is experiencing deep poverty, which Princeton sociologist Matthew Desmond describes as a subterranean level of scarcity in this country. And I don't have to tell you that economic inequality has gotten dramatically worse. Our poorest neighbors remain trapped in poverty, with limited opportunities for mobility. The trend lines are not showing signs of meaningful change, only the American dream moving further away. In 2021, the top 10% of American families held nearly 70% of the nation's wealth while the bottom half just shared 2.5%. Poverty can be a series of abstract images in one person's mind and fixed as something completely different in another person's mind.

(21:07):

This is problematic. When we are attempting to build solutions on top of preconceived notions of how poverty manifests. There are people that will say, "Why can't they just do better? Why don't they just stay in school? Why can't they just stop having babies at such a young age? Why can't they just pay attention in school?" We ask a lot of questions out of ignorance because a lot of us don't want to be ingrained and in relationship with those that are our in deep poverty. We don't take the time to spend time to go to their homes, to break bread with them, to listen, to engage. And if we were to do that, then some of the questions that we ask academically as educated people we would recognize are the stupid questions that shouldn't be asked.

(22:12):

I just want to give you a quick personal side note and also a little insight into my marriage. So my husband has been working in prisoner reentry ministry for a long period of time. He's also an ordained minister and he'll tell you when he meets you, he's like, "Yeah, Angela is that person up

here. I'm the grassroots guy." And what has been fascinating is to watch my husband at work, he works in Chicago in the projects and does a lot of gang intervention work, but he is actually physically housed where we do ministry in downtown Chicago in one of the HUD homes where there's deep poverty there, where there are three, four generations living in one cramped space. And he only has as his workers, the people that live in the building, none of them have college degrees. None of them ever thought about going to college. Some of them have finished high school, some of them are still working on their GED and they're in their 40s and 50s.

(23:25):

But what he does is he brings them in on Tuesdays and Thursdays for trauma healing discussions and they begin to unpack why they are where they are at this moment in time. And it's in that listening and being in relationship and understanding what goes into poverty, the trauma that it creates, the multi-generational. And he works with the kids three times a week. And I would say about half of those kids have seen a sibling, and these are kids ages, like 6 to 17, I would say at least half have seen a sibling or a parent get shot in front of them. So you're talking about poverty, you're talking about having undiagnosed dyslexia or undiagnosed autism, where they're not even getting the support. And so trouble in school and you see this and it compounds and compounds and compounds.

(24:27):

And so that's one real glimpse of this, what's going on in communities. Another one is a child that goes to bed every night without enough food to give them the comfort of a full stomach. And yet, this same child then wakes up and goes to school and is expected to perform at the same level of his or her peers. And then they have a mother who may be just barely graduated from high school who's working one, two or three jobs just trying to make ends meet. Sometimes they may be sleeping, and I've seen this because I've been in relationship with these individuals where they're sleeping on a friend's couch because they need a place to stay, or the kid has been kicked out of the home and looking for somewhere else to be, or they spend a little bit of time on the streets. And then it's just cyclical and it just goes on and on and on.

(25:21):

But no matter how you or I may define poverty personally, it not only disenfranchises individuals but entire communities if we're not thoughtful and real about it. I look at the steel towns in the Midwest and the coal towns along the Appalachian Trail and throughout many city landscapes. It's not an urban problem, it's a rural problem, it's a tribal problem. And poverty is an intractable and stubborn problem in the US and throughout the world. But I'm here to tell you it does not have to stay that way. It should not stay that way. And I like to tease a lot. So I'm just going to tell you, I'm going to get the registration list and I want to know from y'all, you can contact me, what you're going to do after you leave this conference to make a difference.

(26:20):

I'm going to be like Tracey. Tracey was hounding me to get here. So now it's my turn. I'm going to hound y'all, okay? Because we, in this room and online, have the ability to make a difference. I like what the American poet Gwendolyn Brooks said. She says, "We are each other's harvest. We are each other's business. We are each other's magnitude and bond." That's you and I. Whether you know it or not, we're in fellowship together now. We are.

(26:57):

And as we kick off this policy summit together, I want to share with you three lessons I've learned about ensuring opportunity for every person in every community, and I hope you'll carry these with you. So here's the first lesson, lead with listening. We can't build an inclusive

economy without listening to the voices of those who are currently excluded. I can't tell you how many well-intentioned policy conversations I've been a part of that talk about impacted people but not with impacted people.

(27:32):

And in order to advance economic mobility and opportunity, we need to make sure our efforts are shaped by the perspectives of those not with just lived experience, why don't we call it lived expertise, and who have borne the brunt of economic exclusion and oppression in the first place. People who are experiencing economic hardship, hunger, and other nexus events due to poverty have a deeper understanding of the survival tools and opportunities that actually work. We need to be constantly asking ourselves, "Are we engaging the right people in what we do and how we do it?" Always look around the room, always look around at who's seated at the table. Are these the right people? Are these the people that are closest to the problem that can help us design the solution? That's why United Way's local infrastructure, community connections and leadership are at the core of what we do and how we do it well, because as I said, we cover 95% of the United States. So anywhere you are, you will find a local United Way.

(28:41):

When we listen first, we develop a deep understanding of real needs and can begin to see how they are constantly changing. For example, a local United Way can leverage their knowledge of how discriminatory lending or redlining has impacted local housing markets and strategically deploy resources and administer housing solutions exactly where and when they are needed most.

(29:05):

For example, I canceled my vacation last week because Secretary Fudge of HUD convened a small group of us to come together to talk about affordable housing, to address what's happening with seniors that are aging in low income housing and how are we thinking about developing wraparound service for these seniors. And what else are we doing to help create economic mobility pathways for those that are living in low-income housing? How do we create affordable housing for those that are devastated, for example, because of hurricanes or other natural disasters in Florida or Texas when they're getting priced out of the market, can't even afford rent? What are we doing about those that are living on the streets because they have nowhere else to go? What are the systems that we can help not only tweak, but even disrupt to make sure that we're doing things differently and not just working around the margins and the edges and tweaking the edges?

(30:04):

And so we continue at United Way to raise awareness about these unforeseen challenges. We like to socialize these problems and we like to confront them head on understanding that people are facing benefits cliff, and we know you know the story because of where you all sit and what you all do. So navigating this, we have to do together.

(30:27):

And so here's my second lesson. We need to reimagine cross sector collaboration, and that's what I really appreciate about being in this room with you all today. This is a cross-sectional audience of people from diverse backgrounds, experiences and jobs and expertise. And so there is wealth in this room, literally. Each of you is an asset. And when we combine you all together to work collaboratively, I'm telling you again, we can solve for so many of these issues. We can do the change that is required to build an inclusive economy. And if we don't do it in isolation, we can be successful.

(31:14):

As you can tell, I like quotes. So I want to tell you what this Methodist bishop says. He says that no one can whistle a symphony. It takes an orchestra to play it. So whatever instrument you are together collectively, we can make things happen that we can go farther if we go together. And so we all know that closing the wealth gap, alleviating poverty and creating a more equitable economy will require more private resources and expertise, more policy change and better coordination with governments at every level of our country. And so organizations like United Way can serve as a catalyst for making the work happen. We fill the gaps created by the blind spots of governments and the limits of the private sector's pursuit of profits, and we can bring together a diverse set of actors.

(32:11):

I like to say we are the world's convener. For example, we've worked with companies like Wells Fargo since the late 1800s to connect people to job coaching and training, get on the path to financial stability and feed families across the country. When we create relationships, they're for the long term. And so I want you to know that in us being together today, we are in this for the long haul. In a single year, we've helped over 100,000 children get an early education. We've connected hundreds of thousands of people to job training, providing children with economic enrichment. We've worked together to create a financial capability network, which has helped low and moderate income families with a financial coach in communities across the country. And we've helped families achieve their financial goals from increasing their income, reducing their debt, and improving credit scores and saving smarter. So this kind of hands-on cross sector work can really help us build back communities.

(33:23):

And so finally, I believe that the big change starts with small steps. And while we know economic equality won't happen overnight, we can't forget that big change starts with small steps. And as Marian Wright Edelman said, "We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make, which over time add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee." All of our stories are inextricably linked. There is a bond that we have with each other. Each of us has a role to play in showing up for our neighbors. Now more than ever is the time to see our neighbors' burden as our own and live our days with eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to feel the enormous need all around us. Change happens one conversation at a time, one helping hand, one neighbor at a time. And together we'll make it through.

(34:40):

So as this policy summit gets underway and you hear from some of the smartest, most influential policy makers, leaders, and experts in this country, don't lose sight of the stakes. Never underestimate your power to do good. Are you all ready to do good? Are you ready to do good? Well, thank you. Thank you for having me. And please feel free to reach out to me. Feel free to reach out to your local United Way because we want to partner with you and together we can make the difference. Thanks.

Announcer (35:25):

Please welcome to the stage, Sharon Sobol Jordan, President and CEO of the United Way of Greater Cleveland.

Sharon Sobol Jordan (35:37):

Thank you. Thank you. Good morning everyone. Angela, thank you for those inspiring remarks. That was amazing. Can we have another round of applause for Angela?

As you know, I recently joined the United Way of Greater Cleveland primarily because I believe, as you do, that we are uniquely positioned as a significant force for real change here in our community. We work together with local partners across sectors, on solutions that are identified and designed locally, but we have access to this amazing global network of thought partners and experienced professionals. As Angela noted, 95% of the US is covered by United Ways, including 37 countries and territories. So Angela, I am excited to reimagine the power of our network with you, particularly as you alluded to, systems change. It's very exciting for all of us. (36:30):

So here in Cleveland, for over a hundred years, we've helped people in crisis with immediate relief for basic human needs. And we do that by tapping into the collective ability of our community to respond. Now, we also are focused in on how do we get out of crisis mode? How do we create the conditions and solutions necessary for people to reach a level of income, wealth and power that will withstand a crisis and lead to economic and social mobility? Here we have an exciting initiative, the Social Determinants of Work initiative, a great example of how we're using this two-pronged strategy to collectively make community change happen. Together with many cross-sector partners, including the Federal Reserve of Cleveland, we are supporting agencies to prepare and connect people to good jobs, while at the same time tackling the policies and practices that greatly influence our success at work, particularly the systemic and structural barriers like the benefits cliff that Angela mentioned. (37:32):

So I am delighted to be here with you today to continue this important conversation and open the floor to questions a bit. So I'm going to join Angela, and we'll start off with a question. So Angela, you gave us a lot to think about. I wanted to go back to this two prong strategy and really talk to you about how we all are supporting essential services for immediate needs, but also really looking at the structural and systemic barriers that need to be cleared for people to be successful, particularly as you noted, for economic mobility and social mobility. So what advice would you have for leaders about taking the short and long view as they tackle this problem of creating economic equity and economic mobility?

Angela Williams (38:22):

Thanks, Sharon, for that question. I will tell you all that one of my personal concerns is that we have to pay more attention to the younger generation because as we are aging, they're going to be our next leaders. And I'm concerned that we're not equipping them or giving them the supports that they need to really lead in this rapidly changing world. And so when I think about the work that United Way does and what I appreciate so much like what Sharon is doing here in Cleveland, the social determinants of work, we also hear about the social determinants of health, both of these concepts basically recognize that it's about different wraparounds for people in helping them to achieve. (39:18):

And so if we're engaging in the broader thing of wealth creation, well, that starts with teaching kids financial literacy at a young age. There are incredible programs that our partners do to help those kids learn how to manage money. There are programs that we can do together about helping adults fix their credit. There are incredible programs out there to help people be prepared for homeownership. But again, it starts with even the basics, showing up with a full belly in order to go to school and to learn. So we have to, when we think about systems as well as the individual, understand where they intersect, understand where the system creates unnecessary barriers, and there are quite a few. How do we simplify that? How do we make government or

programs less complex and complicated and more accessible? And that's where I think NGOs, nonprofits, do a wonderful job in helping to do that translation and simplifying and also bringing people together to make that difference.

Sharon Sobol Jordan (40:37):

Thank you, Angela. And there are micro runners around the room for those of you in the ballroom. So just raise your hand and they'll come to you if you have a question. Angela, while we're doing that, I know that you as we are, are very focused on making real measurable change and we could hear that throughout your remarks today. Could you talk a little bit about how United Way measures impact and how the pandemic, if at all, impacted what success looks like in your view?

Angela Williams (41:06):

What I love about United Way worldwide is that we are a global system. And so we are not only a global organization, but a local organization simultaneously. And because of the breadth and scope of our areas of focus around health, education, economic viability, the environment, and basically the fundamentals in community, we have the ability to work together collaboratively with leaders to say, "What are the pressing issues in our community that we want to work together? How do we want to measure impact in those communities?" And there are examples not only here in Cleveland but across the country of how, for example, we're setting standards around we want to reduce homelessness or we're setting standards around food insecurity and partnerships with our food banks and with government. During the pandemic, for example, because of our ability to understand what's going on in communities, local governments asked us to help identify the people in need in their communities so that ARPA funds could be distributed. (42:14):

We also run the two in one call center system in the US. About half of the call centers are run by United Ways, and we have call operators that take 50,000 plus calls a day. On average, we're almost at about 20 million calls from Americans every year. And we can tell you by the calls what's an emerging need in the community. We take calls for people saying they can't pay rent, they can't pay their utility, they need medical support, they don't have transportation. (42:52):

So that data that we collect from our two in one call centers really share what our emerging trends. And now 988, which is the mental health hotline, is also tied into our two in one call line. So it's a health and human services call line, but we take those calls daily during disasters, we take those calls. Where 911 is overloaded, those calls come to us. And so because we have real time data on a daily basis, we can tell you what's going on across the country. And so we want to actually expand our capabilities in collecting that data and analyzing it. True confession. As a nonprofit, we sit on a gold mine, but we don't know how to mine the gold. So we have to do better at that and really do better at even with this data, how do we analyze it, who needs to have access to it, and how do we then use it as part of the solution making.

Sharon Sobol Jordan (43:53):

Wonderful. Is there a question we have?

Marquis (43:59):

Hello, Angela. Hi, my name is Marquis [inaudible 00:44:01]. I'm from Wilmington, Delaware, and I appreciate you being here to share your perspective. Now, when you just spoke of earlier about the unemployment rate being 12% 50 years ago, 11% today, when you think about the social injustices within the black communities, the riots in the '60s, 50 years later, we have Black Lives Matter. I wonder, do you have any advice as we're looking at cross-sectional collaboration

in this realm with many different stakeholders, how do we avoid some of these barriers from still being in existence 50 years from today?

Angela Williams (44:37):

Thank you for that question. What I think some of us resist is having frank conversations. And we have resorted in this country to soundbites and tweets. And we have gone away from saying, "You look different than me. You live in a different neighborhood than I do. You speak differently than I do. And so because of that, I'm done." As opposed to getting past that to address each other and listen and learn from each other on a very fundamental human basic level. (45:30):

And so even if there are opportunities in your communities to foster listening sessions, getting people together from diverse backgrounds that have opposing views to say, what is it on a very basic human level that we care about and how can we get past the sound values and engage in civility? That's what we need to do. And there has been, I think, a reversion and going backwards in this country to, "I don't like you because. My way is right, your way is wrong." And the absolutism. And one of my dreams has been, but I just haven't had time, I wanted to actually go around the country and start fostering these civil dialogues and community. But since you all heard me say what my dream is, I am now commissioning you all to do it.

Shalimar Thomas (46:30):

Thanks. I'm Shalimar Thomas, with the North Broad Renaissance here from Philadelphia, and we are also a partner with our local chapter on the Promise Initiative. I have a question about where we are right now in society, in the world, what do you think our strengths are in moving this narrative around poverty and where are the weaknesses that are holding us back and we still need to address?

Angela Williams (47:01):

So thank you for that question. I'm going to start with a letter that I found in my parents' attic that my dad wrote in 1957 to the secretary of the NAACP, to all of the pastors and said, "Now is the time for us to be brave and courageous. We can't look for other people to do the work. We have to do the work." And I think it's important that we all get in our minds that we have to do the work. I am so clear where we sit today, the solutions are here. But what are the barriers? And I'll go back to the fact that... I mentioned children. When I was the CEO of Easterseals, post George Floyd, I was like, I want to really do something and what is my call to action? And so I launched what I called the Black child Fund.

(48:01):

And the reason I did that was because I looked at the numbers in this country and most of the kids in elementary school, junior high school that are put in the alternative schools or failed out or end up being juvenile delinquents, a lot of them are children that did not get early intervention because no one knew to diagnose them for an intellectual disability. They were just labeled immediately as bad kids.

(48:33):

So whether they had ADHD or dyslexia or other disabilities that had not been diagnosed and treated and intervened, then they were spiraled. But that's unacceptable because we know what the solutions are and can actually do something about it now. And then once we get the early intervention, the child can learn, can grow on to be that innovative and creative person that can potentially change the world. So the solutions are here, it's the will to do the work that I think is lacking in some sectors and in some parts of the country, just like healthcare. And we really saw, during the pandemic, everything was just blown wide open. And you could see front and center

all of the disparities and the brokenness of our systems. And it's sad, but again, I'm hopeful that we can make the change. And I will just say this, I really love this country and I love the potentiality and the opportunity that we still have in this country to do the right thing.

Sharon Sobol Jordan (49:48):

It's great to hear you say that the solutions are here. That's very inspiring to me. And I'm sure everybody here we know through collaboration and working together, we can find them. And you're seeing that all around the world. So that's terrific. Maybe we'll just end with one question for you to motivate us to continue. What does inspire or motivate you as you search for these solutions and build these solutions around the world for economic opportunity and mobility?

Angela Williams (50:20):

It's a four letter word. You ready for it? Love. It's about loving your neighbor as yourself. And when we operate from that perspective, then we're open to seeing people and caring for people in a different way. And it doesn't matter what your job is. It doesn't matter where you sit, what you eat, who serves you in restaurants, who's driving the bus or the public transportation, who's greeting you at the counter when you check into the hotel, who's greeting you at the counter when you're go into the airport, who's scanning your bag at TSA. It doesn't matter what your position is, you are still interacting with people that may not come from your socioeconomic background, may not have had the experience that you have, but they are human beings. And so again, I go back to the children. What can we do now to shape the education system, to shape their little minds, young minds, to ensure that they have the opportunities that every one of us in this room and online have had to be able to thrive?

(51:47):

So I again commission you all to do a couple of things. One, have civil conversations. Create a space for conversations for people that are different from each other and begin that dialogue. Do it from a place of love your neighbor as yourself. Second, work with your local United Way to figure out how can you help convene the appropriate partners and people to collaborate and solve problems locally. Three, look at the systems that are in place with a critical analytical eye to see where the challenges and the opportunities and put together a team that's going to work towards simplifying it and making it better. You all have the ability to do it. And then can you just do me a favor and email me a report on how you're doing? Thank you.

Sharon Sobol Jordan (52:41):

Thank you so much, Angela. This has been a fascinating conversation. Please join me in thanking Angela again.

Angela Williams (52:49):

Thank you. Thank you.

Sharon Sobol Jordan (52:53):

It's wonderful. So what a great start to the Policy Summit. Thank you, it couldn't have been better. The next session is Fed Listens: Transitioning to the Post-pandemic Economy. This is an interactive session, so in the time, there's a few minutes to just transition, please stay in the room, but please introduce yourself to your table mates if you haven't done so already. And thank you very much.

Angela Williams (53:14):

Thank you all.