

Season 3, Episode 1: Rooted in Community with Gladys Vega

Gladys: You know what? The metrics, the reports don't tell the story. Get out of your office. Come to my city. Allow me to walk you in my neighborhoods and meet my people so that you fall in love the same way I have fallen in love with them.

Grace: Welcome to *Giving Done Right*, a podcast on everything you need to know to make an impact with your charitable giving. I'm Grace Nicolette.

Phil: And I'm Phil Buchanan.

So many communities in this country were hit hard by the pandemic in a way that prompted an incredible response from nonprofits and donors, as they recognized the level of suffering and the disproportionate impacts of this pandemic, especially in those early days, on certain communities.

But as that attention has faded, the needs of those communities have not. They have, of course, continued. Today, we are talking to one remarkable leader of such an organization. Her name is Gladys Vega, and she runs La Colaborativa here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She was named a Bostonian of the Year by *The Boston Globe* and really is the embodiment of the kind of leader that donors would be wise to recognize, learn from, and trust as they try to make a difference in their charitable giving.

Grace: One of the things we try to do on this show is to bring you voices from the frontline of nonprofit leaders who are truly making a difference. And what does it look like or feel like as they are on that frontline? And so, this is the kind of conversation that will take you to the early days of the pandemic, some of the darkest places in her community. She wants to bring us along on a journey, and I think she'll speak for a lot of nonprofit leaders who want donors to come along on a journey.

Phil: That's right, Grace. As always, please send us a note if you have feedback—it's gdrpodcast@cep.org. I hope you enjoy this conversation with Gladys Vega.

Gladys Vega—Welcome to the *Giving Done Right* podcast. You are an incredible leader of this vital organization in Chelsea called La Colaborativa. Tell us what it is, what it does.

Gladys: So, La Colaborativa is this nonprofit organization that serves the Latinx community in the cities of Chelsea, Malden, Lynn, Everett, Revere, and part of East Boston.

And we work with the regular individual, the newcomer, the resident in need, to help them, whether it's on workforce development, whether it's youth development, providing a job—the way that we go about our business is that we provide wraparound service to that individual person in that emergency situation. And then, once we situate them, they're sustaining a little bit themselves, because we found them a job or we placed them in a hotel. Then we sort of do an assessment of what they need in order for them to get a good paying job, in order for them to finish their school, in order for them to get a trade. If they don't know English, there's 1,400 students, adult students, in our ESL classes. And what level of English do you need?

But we also do policy work. So, at times people love the work that we do. And at times, I have a group of individuals that wish that I'm in the Pacific Ocean in a box, because I question authority, people that are in the decision-making arm, I keep them accountable. I show up when I'm not invited.

Phil: It's so interesting. Because a lot of times people think about nonprofit organizations as either direct service or advocacy and policy. You're obviously doing both and you see them as linked. Tell us a little bit more about some of the policy, advocacy, and maybe some of the things that have made people want you to go into the Pacific Ocean. Like what are the unpopular stances that you've felt you've had to take?

Gladys: So, for example, an unpopular campaign that we work on was 14 workers—seven of them were documented, seven of them were undocumented, working in horrible conditions at a company...in Chelsea. We learned about them because one of the youth told us the situation, and we were there before because of fumes and chemical stuff. And we did, you know, for 23 years, we do environmental justice work, you know, that was organizing housing, et cetera.

Anyway, so we do workers rights. So, they told us they work in horrible conditions. They hid them in a closet. They were hidden while the U.S. Department of Labor also came as inspectors, and they hid them, and they were

not allowed to speak. And then we built this case, and we were able to get them U visas. So, we were first able to reward them for their violations. Between all of them, they got \$950,000 with the local police departments helping get U visas. And we taught them about worker's rights.

Those are the things. We teach people how to be a good tenant. If you are going to live in this apartment, treat it right. Treat it, you know, that's just your home. But it also means that that landlord has to give you an apartment free of housing code violations. And it has to be an apartment that is dignified of who you are. That's the work that I'm not popular for, but I don't care, because I represent the community. I represent the people of Chelsea. And people need to learn or know that when you work in poor communities, we are human beings. Don't treat us any different. I may have an accent. I may not know English. I may be undocumented, but I need that dignity as a human being that I deserve. And I think that that's what we do very well in La Colaborativa.

Grace: Many listeners of the show may not know anything about Chelsea or the communities that you serve. Could you share more about the situation there? And I know that it's been in the news a lot more since the pandemic, but as you've said, you've been there for a long time.

Gladys: The city of Chelsea is the smallest city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. And I always say that because a percentage is also surrounded by water, and we have very limited access to water, we have, although we surrounded by water and it's a population in the eighties after the civil wars of Central America, we got a lot of newcomers coming and moving in.

Chelsea's historically been a city of immigrants. From many people from the Jewish community that build that foundation and that their experience is the experience that Latinos are having right now, in terms of feeling like they don't fit in. You know, I was only 22 when I began at La Colabortiva working as a receptionist, people were coming from El Salvador, Honduras, and Puerto Ricans that were established there. But you have to understand Puerto Ricans are citizens. I'm Puerto Rican. I'm a citizen of the United States. A lot of times I feel that I'm colonized, but I'm a citizen. And I always say to people, while you are in Chelsea, let's make Chelsea your home, regardless of what country of origin you come from, let's make sure that you get involved in the civic life of the community.

Chelsea's extremely poor, but it's a working community. And the people have this resiliency. We have this strength at, La Colaborativa has the strength of trust, we're the trusted agent. Listen, I have victims of domestic violence that

don't go to the Chelsea police department and go to La Colaborativa looking for me and say, "I want to press charges, can you please have a police officer come to our office because I need a restraining order." And that's the trust that we have built in our community.

Phil: That is so important. And one of the things that drives me mad is when there's this sort of assumption on the part of donors, especially, that bigger is always better and that we should have fewer nonprofits and we should just have the good ones scale, but in fact, an expansion can be good. And I know you've expanded, but you've remained rooted in community because of that trust. And that allows you, like you said, to do your work. People know that they're going to be safe and that they can trust you.

How do you think about building trust with donors and how have you fundraised, has that been difficult? I know that in the last couple of years, you've gotten a lot of attention because of your response, the amazing response, during the pandemic, but before maybe it wasn't always so easy to get attention. So, what has it been like for you to try to get the support that you need from donors?

Gladys: Before the pandemic, I was always doing this type of work, you know, the summer youth employment, having 300 young people working at the age of 14 and placing them in jobs and stuff. I've been doing this since 2001. And when the pandemic happened, I was like, wow, I am finally seen, our job is finally seen. We've been doing this for three decades. I've been there for 32 years. I began at the age of 22. So, I am 54 years old. I've been arrested in a correction facility when they were deporting undocumented workers. I was part of the Michael Bianco, helping people fundraise and getting lawyers, et cetera to help with the biggest raid in the history of Massachusetts.

I've been there, but I was never seen. And we were never seen because I'm a woman of color. I'm a woman that has a strong attitude. I'm a woman that questions authority. I'm a woman that tells a funder, if you're going to give me money, allow me to tell you how I want to use it. Because after all it's my community and it's our narrative.

I think the most fortunate thing about the pandemic is that the same way I took my strategic plan and tossed it, right, and created this wraparound service organization from the bottom up in order to feed my community, in order to be a lifeline, in order to get them vaccinated, all these things that we did for the first time, without a book, right, the foundations, some of them did the same. About time! About time, because you know what? The metrics, the reports don't

tell the story, get out of your office, come to my city, allow me to walk you in my neighborhoods and meet my people, so that you fall in love the same way I have fallen in love with them. Although they're poor, they may have issues of domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health issues—they're the most amazing people that need help, and they take the help, and you see the progress.

So, I think that for a funder, for me, the best experience that I had, that some of them changed the way of giving. And they're like, you know, rather than a report, Gladys, let me give you an interview. Tell me what is going on, et cetera, and that was extremely—but also, they gave me money with no strings attached.

I was looking at a report right before I came, because I had a meeting with a team of police officers. We are creating this task force because we want Latino police, six Latino police officers, to be at our fingertips, so that when we need a police officer to come with us as La Colaborativa and with the victim to take out their belongings, because they're being evicted or they have put a restraining order, but all their belongings is in the household of the guy who was caught molesting that little girl as the stepdad. So now, this is a case that we worked on: we had a woman whose daughter was being molested, her only family was his family, and she left with him. So, we needed to remove everything. We got the guy, with the police department and the District Attorney at that time, Rachael Rollins, incarcerated. But now we needed to go back and find her housing. She wasn't able to go back there. So, what we did was, we called our friends at the police department and we said, could it be possible for you to give us a police detail for members of our staff. So, you see this high heels here, I take them off and if there's a staff member not available, I put my boots on, and let's go and remove those belongings from the house. Let's get 20 minutes with the police officer, an hour, whatever they give us free of charge, and the police department is just there for security, just so the victim can feel safe. And then what we did was, she didn't have anyone here, so, we found out that her sister lived in California. We identified resources and nonprofits in California. We bought her the plane ticket. We gave her cash assistance the funders gave me with no strings attached, and I was able to use that to give her money so when she's in California, she can use it for transportation, move around, for those resources that we identify. This was a working family, and they were legal residents, but that is why we are so unique. We are different. And when I tell the funders, give me money, but this is who I am and what we do—we're not the box organization. We go out of the box. We actually toss the strategic plan, because we needed to be doing what our community needed. And if you're going to help us, help us within this format that is very organic and that is very different than every other community.

Grace: One of the dynamics that donors often wrestle with is whether to provide immediate relief or actually to get at root causes, right? And it strikes me that your work does both, like the food pantry you mentioned, has been so active, and yet you are also doing advocacy, which gets at root causes. Donors can wrestle with, well, sometimes I don't want to be involved in advocacy or actually all I care about is advocacy. How would you counsel donors to think about it, given that you do both?

Gladys: So, the way that we have organized ourself is that under our theory of change, that we did this because of the experience of the pandemic, we are getting a new building, right? So, we are building a building, and it was so fun to get a building. Whoa, 33 years and the organization never owned a building. Now we own it. But the nightmare of something not working, demoing something, and fundraising for that—but we're getting it done. But in this new building, we are calling it our survival center. And in our theory of change, the survival center would address that emergency need of you as an individual human being. What is it that you need? When I walked out of my office right now, four case managers, two young people being evicted, one victim of domestic violence, and another person just being evicted. So that's what I left my case managers with. In our theory of change, what we do is the survival, that immediate service. Let's go get you a hotel—you're sleeping in the car, you know, with your kids, let's put you in the hotel, then immediately evaluate tomorrow, come to the office at 11 o'clock, and let's see: childcare, what is going on with childcare? Are you working? Do you know English? Are you a citizen? Do you have papers? Do you not have papers? And then evaluate that, place them, so that is the sustainability and mobility. Like, how do you sustain yourself? How do we give you the skills so that you get a good paying job, so you don't have to work three jobs to earn a decent salary? That's that one. And then we go to leadership. Once that we already sort of like help you getting that carpentry job with the apprenticeship program that we have partnerships with our unions—it's an incredible relationship that I have built over 25 years—so now that we are getting you in the apprenticeship program and you're going to be earning \$32, and when you become a carpenter, you know, probably 40 or \$70, if you own your own business, how do you become now involved? How do you sit at the table where I've been sitting? How do we create you to become a City Councilor? How do you become a school committee? How do you sit in boards of commissions so that what happened to you doesn't happen to anyone else. So, let's build a community that can sustain ourselves.

The more I think about it, is that we are in a sustaining mode, and what I tell my board of directors, Dini and I, our chief operating officer that is amazing, Dini Paulino and I are always thinking: after the pandemic, we need to sort of like slow it down, take a look at what we have done and where we are in our growth,

because we cannot be everywhere. Right now, we are like sustaining, but in terms of the funders, how do you sustain a movement like the one that we created that works? And then also, we never stopped doing our policy work. Listen, during the pandemic, we worked on the pilot project so that every tenant in the Commonwealth had access to a counsel, because we know for fact that when you have a lawyer, and the landlord has a lawyer, that whole eviction can be stopped, or there's merit to say no, no, no, there's something more happening here. When our community residents don't have lawyers, they don't win. We don't win cases without a lawyer. So, the right to counsel is something that we want to be able to institutionalize as part of the fabric of the Commonwealth, The expungement bill—during the pandemic, we also worked on that because there's a bill that once you're evicted, your whole family in that lease, is named on a database, on a Commonwealth database. So that means your 15-year-old daughter, when she turns 21, she goes out to college and graduates, in 20-years she wants to get her own apartment. She will have an eviction record. That is unheard of. Why a young person, when their mom got evicted for most of the times no fault of their own—I'm able to proudly say no fault of their own because we take our time also to educating our tenants, how to be a good tenant? How do you not get evicted? How do you pay your rent on time? How do you make sure that your apartment is up to code? And how do you return that apartment in the same condition they gave it to you?

So, in La Colaborativa the issues that we work are human rights type of issue. It's the human being. My policy director, who happens to get elected for the first time as a city councilor, her name is Norieliz DeJesus, was that 14-year-old that came to my office. When her mother and I, the night before, had a conversation that she was losing her to the streets and she says, my daughter is very smart, but she wants to leave school. She got a scholarship, I put her in a private school. She doesn't want to do it. And then she says, can you give her a job? Of course, she's going to get a job. And then when she came to the interview, Norieliz, if she was sitting here, she'll tell you, “I did everything wrong in that interview not to get that job, because I didn't want to be hired. I wanted to be hanging out in Washington Street with my friends, skipping class.” And we gave her a job. And now today she's my policy director. She works on every bill that we need to get changed in the State House, does my housing organizing, and, of course, is an elected new city councilor.

Grace: Wow. That's an amazing story. Can you share a specific example or two of a donor that has been helpful and effective to you as a partner? Like what's an ideal donor like to you.

Gladys: So, this incredible donor helped us with access to food and cash assistance. So, I think that right at the beginning of the pandemic, people didn't even have money to buy diapers. And the fact that they came to the city of Chelsea, they matched different funding, they brought other funding, and we were able to provide cash with no strings attached. And we actually, I had a few donors that did that to us, and there was a fund established, three organizations had access to the fund and then it was distributed according to the needs of our individual community.

What La Colaborativa did in addition to that was that whenever someone gave me money, so my campaign for the food pantry was like, listen, I did the food pantry from the porch of my house on March 5th, because my people in the Produce Center, my workers, they were getting sick out of the New England Produce Center.

So, they were already being sent—before the Governor closed the state, I sent everyone home, my staff, on March 4th, I sent them home. March 5th, I get a donation from a truck of food. So, I said, you know, bring the food to my house, and I'll donate it. I'm like, I've never done food before. So, I did a Facebook post, and they came in, got food, and I saw 250 people looking for food.

The most impacting thing that I saw there, was that those people were looking for food were not the produce center. They were people that were paraprofessional legal assistance. And I said, oh my God, if these were the people that were getting paid a little bit more, what is going to happen to the ones that actually work in those low paying jobs, or under the minimum wage? And what I did was that, when that funder gave us that cash assistance, approximately was like \$300,000 for us to give—every other person that said Gladys, use the money for whatever you need. I would then put it in cash assistance. And we gave over \$1,117,000 of cash assistance. And like, they also tossed their guidelines, and they were very creative about giving. We were able to do that and continue to do that until this day.

Phil: It seems to me that part of what you're saying is pretty simple, which is, “trust me. Trust me. I know what I'm doing. I know this community. I've built trust,” right. And you're obviously, I mean, you're a really inspiring leader. And one of the things that I think gets in the way of the trust is this belief that is either implicit or sometimes it's set out loud that a lot of folks have, that nonprofit leaders shouldn't be trusted, or that they're not quite as effective as maybe the leader of an equivalent-size business, or they don't have the discipline or the rigor. And of course, you talk to someone like you, and you

realize that's absurd, right? Your job is way harder than it is to run an equivalent-sized business.

Because you're not just running something where you've got to make the numbers work on the financials. You're also a fighter. You're a politician, you're a counselor. You're all of these things wrapped up into one person. So how do we get donors to stop walking into the room with nonprofit leaders, assuming that they shouldn't trust you, or that they know better than you, or that maybe you're not as good a leader as they were when they ran XYZ business, when it's—the opposite is true. So how do we change that dynamic?

Gladys: So, I always say, you know, I'm not the person that is going to give you a glossy document to highlight my work. I'm the person that is going to tell you, come to my city and see us at work. I'm the person that you can walk in our office at any time of the day, and you're going to have the perfect narrative of the story of La Colaborativa and the struggle of our people. That's who we are. I don't need to create a \$20,000 brochure to impress you. You know, that doesn't work for me. And even when funders do those annual reports that are so glossy, I'm like, that probably cost them \$50,000. Can you imagine how many diapers I was able to buy with that amount of money? And I'm telling you, I always say—allow me to teach you what I'm doing, but, you know, get out of the office, come to our city. Recently The Boston foundation was in our, in the city of Chelsea and they did an amazing block party, but it took a pandemic for The Boston Foundation to come out. You know, there was a huge team. It was beautiful. They raised \$850,000, you know, at the beginning of the pandemic for many organizations, I think it was 16 organizations, but it took you that long. I've been in Chelsea all this time. Chelsea is all I know you get me out of Chelsea, I get lost. And I've been yelling for justice.

This whole thing of what happened with the pandemic—listen, the blanket of poverty was there. What happened was the pandemic lifted the blanket of poverty and the negligence that for years has happened in our community, in communities of color. That is the case. So, let's get out of our comfort of our offices. Let's go to our neighborhoods. Hear our stories. You don't have to hear it from me. Hear it from my people. They talk about it all the time. Tonight, we are having a meeting about guns. We probably have over 200 people coming to our office with the chief of police and the city manager. Those are the things we do.

I don't have all the answers. All I know is that I am boots on the ground. I am not a politician and I, my daughter's a city councilor and my niece is a city councilor. And another member of our staff is a city councilor. I can never be a

politician because, if I have to tell you the truth, I don't want the strings attached.

I am bold. When ARPA funding, when we were given approximately \$9 million after we were the epicenter of the pandemic, and our three members of the federal delegation, they didn't respond that as prompt, and that's the best they can do for me. That was an insult. That was an offense. You came to my city when we were the epicenter, and that's the best you can do? So, no, I went out in the street, we organized a protest the next day when we found out and we called them on it. And then the Governor, Baker, which I'm extremely grateful, he stepped it up and he says, I'll give the four cities that were most impacted, 40 million. Other cities were getting a larger amount. And everybody said, "there's a formula that we need to change in the federal government..."—don't give me no excuses, you know, find the money because our people were dying, and our people have been neglected for decades. So, I think that in communities of color, just come to us. We're here. We've been here. We've been telling the story. I was finally seen.

Phil: It's interesting because obviously what you're saying is very powerful and I was watching a video in which you were speaking in a very hopeful way about the way you believed that during the pandemic people did step up. And I found some solace in those words, because it feels kind of bleak right now in so many ways in our country. And it feels like to me, anyway, maybe we're not coming out of the bleak times in the way that we thought we would, right? And that the division is great, the hate, the racism is deep. Are you hopeful in this time, as you were saying in that video that I watched, or, you know, how do you maintain optimism given that, to me, it feels like we maybe had a moment where people were paying more attention to some of the systemic inequities that had been ignored, but it feels like that attention is fading now. Do you agree? Are you hopeful?

Gladys: So that issue keeps me at night up a lot. And that is because I was very optimistic that that switch was not going to be turned on quickly. Because poverty doesn't get erased, especially in communities of color where there has been generational poverty, right? And I feel that there's always a trend, and funders go with that trend, and forget about what just happened.

So, I urge the funders: don't forget that we cannot build something that was destroyed and ignored for decades, and then a tsunami comes and destroys even more. So, we are not able to even stand up, and we already been turned to the next page. That pandemic era is fading quickly away, and I'm still feeding people. I'm still putting lights on. I'm still feeding—yesterday, we had over

4,000 people from 4:00 to 6:30. We had to close our food bank because we had no more food to give. And we do that three times a week. And we're not any different than the other food pantry. The crisis in the economy is hitting extremely hard. You go to the supermarket with \$100 and you're like, what the hell did I buy? Right? With the gas, everything. So, it's very unreal for anyone to think that we are fine, that we are better off, or let's move into the next issue. The next issue should not be next because you haven't fixed anything that has been broken for so many decades.

My best, *best* experience from the pandemic is the people in United States—and I have to say, especially the people of this amazing Commonwealth—is that, in Chelsea, they saw the human being. They didn't see borders. They didn't see documents. They didn't care about immigration status. They care about that human being. And I think that that's what we need. We are better people. We should continue with that mindset that that makes the Commonwealth better—to give without strings, to give in the organizations and the communities that are in need, and to follow those communities because our pain and our cry for justice has been there for a long time and the pandemic made everything worse. And this crisis that we're going for a recession, right? It's not leading us to any best. So, what makes you think that our problems are solved? So, it's not easy when you get a woman—she owes \$7,000 of rent, that was the case that German [case manager] was working yesterday. She owes \$7,000, and in order for us to do a RAFT application, we need to find out how you're going to sustain. How is she going to sustain, when she has three children and has to pay for daycare, has to buy food, has to pay \$2,200 for rent. Right? And then pay utility bills. It's unrealistic for her. What type of job am I going to find her? And until we begin to evaluate that reality of that individual, it's very hard. It's close to impossible to do the job that we do, but I've been blessed that I have the staff that I have and my Chief Operating Officer Dini, and the support that I have from each other that we do whatever it takes, and we take a leap of hope, of faith. I always say, God, you know, I closed the office only had \$200,000 in the bank when we closed and sent everyone home. And when people began to call La Colaborativa that they had no food, I'm like Dini, buy them food. I'm doing Instacart orders from Walmart, from Market Basket, and Dini was like, Gladys, be careful, we only have, you know, \$200,000, we have all these invoices, but they have not been paid. I'm like, I don't care. We need to feed people. We're going to feed people. And so, I think that, you know, allow me to take that leap of faith, but support our work because our work is not done.

Grace: You've described your work, and I see because there are so many facets of how you support people in need, that it can be a lot. It can be all consuming, maybe even draining. How do you support your staff and yourself for the long term in this work?

Gladys: Coping, self-care, we have done trainings with the staff on self-care. We have given them time off. We took them away. You know, for two years, I worked, a couple of us worked, 16-hour days.

And I think that one of the things I always think is, our staff takes that stuff home. Like it's so hard to disconnect when you live in that same community, when you go to church in that community, it's very hard to disconnect and not to feel the pain and suffering of others. I mean, it's inhumane for you to think that you're that strong.

I think that coping comes from understanding that it's hard work, but that we love this work. It's in our blood. And the victory of finding a person from a car, right, parked in front of the police department, a family of three sleeping in the police department, two children and woman. She parked herself in the front of the police department because she felt safe there. We found out about her, a police officer called us. We got her into a hotel. We got her into a little apartment. And knowing that three months from that, when the Salesforce tells us to check on this woman to find out—she's doing better. She's in school. She got a part-time job. The state gave her a voucher for daycare. Those are victories, and I think that that fuels the work that we do.

In times of crisis, we cry. When I'm in the food line, and I ask, “Hey, how was your grandmother? Haven't seen her a long time.” You know, Latina grandmas are, they're like, you know, matriarcas, they bring strength to their community. Right. And when I ask them, they tell me, you know, “oh, she passed away. She's no longer here.” It's heartbreaking. But at the same time, it's real. It's what a pandemic did in our city. And I remember when Maura Healey and Racheal Rollins and the carpenters were volunteers right at the peak of the pandemic, they would come with their mask and stuff, and just seeing, you know, a person like them helping us, and risking their life for people of color that are poor, that live in overcrowded conditions—and when I saw doctors, you know, not working and coming to the back of La Colaborativa to do food distribution for the people that we had home-bound because they had COVID, for me, that's what keep us going. I think that my highlight was that, that I was able to witness after 33 years at La Colaborativa, I was able to witness the best of the Commonwealth residents that, you know, they risk their life to help my community—and I forever will be grateful.

Phil: Gladys, I think what you have done is obviously nothing short of, and I know you would object to this word, but heroic, the work that you and your team have done.

And I think that it's also frustrating that it has to be done, and that as a society we have allowed for the kind of suffering and inequity that you in your decades of your career have sought to address. And we can talk about all the systems that need to change, and they do, and you're working on that, but we can also talk about the organizations that need support every day and making sure that this attention that was given to you and your community does not turn out to have just been a blip. And just because the pandemic isn't in the headlines in the same way, doesn't mean that the need is any less. So, I hope that donors, including those listening to this episode, can remember that, both about La Colaborativa, but also about the other organizations in different communities all across this country and around the world.

Grace: Gladys, at the end of every episode, we ask each guest the question, giving done right, to you, is about: fill in the blank. How would you answer that?

Gladys: So, for me, giving done right is about trusting me. I am from the community. I been doing this work and take a look at our journey and come out and see our community, see the struggles of our people. And I tell you that when you meet our community and see our residents and meet our staff, you know, this journey will be sustained. So, trust me, I know what I'm doing.

Grace: Thank you, Gladys, for being with us today.

Gladys: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Phil: Thank you, Gladys.

Grace: Phil, I think that was the first interview we've done where all three of us actually ended up in tears. It was that powerful.

Phil: It was because Gladys is just such a powerful leader, and she's a moral voice for her community. She believes so strongly in what she does. There's so much frustration, I think, in the fact that needs have been ignored or exacerbated by policies, but also hope about the response and this incredible mix of both direct service work that La Colaborativa undertakes, as well as the kind of out there accountability, bold advocacy that they're willing to do, which has implications for donors.

Grace: She has a bullhorn hanging in her office that she's not afraid to use. And I think if you had asked me, you know, a few years ago, whether I'd felt comfortable giving to advocacy organizations, I have a bucket for political

giving, a bucket for charitable giving. I wouldn't have necessarily put advocacy in my charitable giving bucket, but through her, you see the need, you see why she's doing it.

Phil: And why donors need to then trust that she's going to make the calls that need to be made for what needs to be done in the time that those actions need to be taken and to give in a way that allows for that flexibility and creativity and responsiveness that organizations on the ground rooted in communities with deep relationships that they need in order to really thrive and not just respond to needs, but make change to systems, which is the way it finally gets better.

Grace: It's frustrating to me when she mentioned that sustainability is sort of what keeps her up at night, that despite all of the attention she's gotten as, you know, Bostonian of the year by the *Globe* and all of that, that donors are not sustaining her work now that the pandemic is perceived to be quote unquote over.

And so, I think that's something for us to reflect on how are we sustaining these vital community organizations?

Grace: Thank you for listening to *Giving Done Right*. You can find more resources about effective giving and the podcast on givingdoneright.org. You can find us on Twitter, I'm @gracenicolette and Phil is at @philxbuchanan. And if you like the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcasts, it really helps.

Phil: Listeners, we want to hear from you. Tell us what giving done right is about to you, what it really means, and we'll feature some of our favorites on the show later this season, just send us a short voice memo—one minute or less—to gdrpodcast@cep.org.

Grace: *Giving Done Right* is a production of the Center for Effective Philanthropy. It's hosted by me, Grace Nicolette, and Phil Buchanan. Our executive producer is Sarah Martin with mixing and engineering by Kevin O'Connell and additional editing by Isabelle Hibbard.

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