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Grace: [00:00:17] Welcome to Giving Done Right. A show with everything you need to know to make an impact with your charitable giving. I'm Grace Nicolette.

Phil: [00:00:22] And I'm Phil Buchanan.

Grace: [00:00:28] Today Our guest is Dr. Nashlie Sephus, co-founder and CEO of Bean Path, a nonprofit based in Jackson, Mississippi, that provides technical assistance and guidance to individuals and small businesses. Nashlie is a proud native of Jackson and she works as a technology evangelist and AI scientist at Amazon Web Services, where her work focuses on fairness and eliminating biases in AI. Bean Path's programs include a maker space, hosting tech office hours, creating engineering and coding programs for youth such as youth robotics clubs and providing scholarships and grants for students and other community organizations. In 2020, she also purchased a large tract of land near Jackson State University, one of the largest HBCU's in the U.S. to create the Jackson Tech District. Welcome Nashlie. We're so glad you're here.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:01:23] Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Phil: [00:01:26] Nashlie, thanks for joining us. And your story is so interesting and inspiring and your decision to really make a commitment to Jackson. Can you just walk us through like your path, how you got to where you are and how you decided that you wanted to start a nonprofit?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:01:45] I didn't know I wanted to start a nonprofit. I actually, when Bean Path first started, we had this idea after being in the tech industry for a while. I was actually a CTO of a startup company that we actually sold to Amazon in 2016, and then around 2017 I was like, hey, you know, there's something more to life. I think, you know, I have the job and, you know, I get paid pretty well, but I still feel like there's something more I should be doing. And so I got together with a few friends and we started meeting at local libraries in Jackson, Mississippi, which is my hometown. Granted, I didn't live in Jackson, I lived in Atlanta at the time. And so I would literally go back home once or twice a month to set up these tech helpdesk in the local libraries, and we would move around to different libraries and just help people with tech questions, whether it be a business that needed help with a website or an individual that needed some guidance in coding or or even a small business owner. And so we were wanting to pour into the community that poured into us because they were all looking for tech help. And for after a while, people were lined up at the library door to get tech help. We said, “Hey, this must be something you know people really want around here.” So, you know, maybe we can take this a step further. And so we called it the Bean Path. Most people think of bean as a seed. We put it in the ground, it grows into a vine. It takes its own path. I'm also a gardener, so I plant beans in spring. And on the other end of being is actually a computer programming term. And so it actually is a smaller piece of code that you can extend into other functions as well, you can build off of it. And so we were helping people find their pathway with technology. And so that's what the name Bean Path means. And we started the nonprofit and we've been going ever since.

Phil: [00:03:45] That's awesome. And going back even further to your roots in Jackson, I know you got your undergraduate at Mississippi State, but then you ended up going for a

master's and a Ph.D. in computer and electrical engineering at Georgia Tech. When you were a little girl, did you think you were going to work in tech or tell us a little bit about how you got to the line of work that you're in?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:04:08] Yeah. So when I was younger, we, I grew up with my mom, my grandmother, my sister, large family, not just immediate, but connected family as well. And so we did a lot of things at the house, mainly because we're a house full of women so we had to take out the trash. You know, you had to do all the things that people associate with men doing. And we just learned a lot about pulling up your sleeves and just getting in there, fixing the lawnmower, hanging the ceiling fan and putting up Christmas lights. And so I think that helped me grow into just this curiosity of how things work and always seeing how you pull them apart and you can, you know, make them come to life. And I remember my eighth grade science teacher sending me to a summer camp, which was about two hours away. It was actually at Mississippi State, which I ended up going there for undergrad, and it was a summer engineering camp for girls. And it was the coolest thing. I thought I was in heaven. And when we got there, they explained all the different types of engineering. When we got to computer engineering, that was mind blowing to me because I was like, okay, you can just type in these letters and numbers in this computer and you control all this stuff around us, and the rest was history. So I thought it was great not even thinking, this is, most of the gadgets and devices in the world would be controlled by computers. Not even thinking that, just thinking just how fascinating it was to me to learn more about that. And from that point on, I was like, hey, I'm going to be a computer engineer. Didn't really even know what that really meant. But from that point on, what I learned from that camp, that's what I want to do.

Grace: [00:05:47] Tell us about Bean Path now. What is it like? I know there's many different kinds of programs. It really grew from those meetings in the library, it sounds like? So tell us more about the work.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:05:59] Yeah, So the work started with us setting up a tech help desk, and we were helping people with a variety of things. We started tracking metrics and noticed that it was different buckets of things, but the buckets were pretty common. And so we thought, okay: We looked at our demographic: there were parents bringing their kids. To get help, whether they'd be homework or learning how to code. There were senior citizens, almost 50% were older adults, and they didn't know where else to go. They, you know, everyone doesn't have a grandchild that can, you know, show them how to use all the devices. And we also noticed business, small businesses that needed the help. And so we crafted our programing and further refined our mission around these three groups, because I felt like that was where the biggest gap was in terms of educating people on emerging technologies and how it can help them in their everyday lives. Another thing we noticed is that we wanted to be a very non-intimidating, safe space where people could come and feel like, you know, we're not going to talk down or make them feel bad for not knowing certain information, even if it's very commonly known. And so we adopted that principle of kind of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness to the community. We're very community first, and so we serve the community in the way that they best receive it. And so we crafted programs moving into our space, post-COVID that libraries actually closed. And so we had to figure out where to meet, where to go, which, ironically enough, people in the tech industry became even more essential. And those who were not already tech savvy heavily needed to learn how to become more tech savvy in order to continue operating. And so we became an essential business. People still needed help. So we had to figure out something. And so what we decided, even though we could have meetings online, do tech talks online, most of the demographics we were trying to reach didn't even

know what Zoom was at the time. So I went looking for space and I found a space downtown, very famous looking, interesting looking building. It looks like a barn. And we toured the building and the guy said, "Welcome to the bean barn. This is where we used to have our soybean grain." And I said, the bean barn, we're the bean path. And so he was like, oh okay.

Grace: [00:08:34] It was meant to be.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:08:35] Yeah. So it was like, okay, so and then the same guy that owned that building owned the majority of the property around it. And so, you know, fast forward, we ended up getting that space. I personally purchased that property. We're now up to 22 acres, actually, and eight buildings downtown, contiguous space. And the maker space, the Bean Path headquarters was born. So we have a 6500 square foot building where we do all of our tech training and classes, all of our events. We also opened our second building, part two of the bean barn, which we have polished the floors, added lighting in there, insulation, heating, all those sort of things. And we're able to have events over there such as robotics scrimmage games. We're doing things like, we had the Jackson Roller Derby practices there. We have food trucks. You know, expos and fairs that we're planning that we have lined up for this year. So it's a really exciting time. The Bean Path has just been taken Jackson, Mississippi and surrounding areas by storm. We had over a thousand people come to our maker space last year. Overall, through all of our programs, not just at our space, but through all of our contracts and things that we have. We've impacted over 4000 so far. It's been quite a journey.

Grace: [00:09:55] Wow. Congratulations. So tell us a bit about Jackson. I've been there once, actually. But like tell us about your community and it sounds like you're really meeting an essential need.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:10:07] Yeah, I would say so. Jackson is in the Deep South, as we say, its actually at the crossroads of two major interstates, I-55, which takes you from, basically from New Orleans all the way to Chicago and beyond that, and then I-20, Atlanta to Dallas and beyond. And so a lot of people come through there. A lot of people originate in Mississippi. Jackson itself is a majority black city in a lot of need. And Mississippi as a whole, over 50% of people live below the poverty line. And then really in terms of being exposed to technology and being progressive in that area, regardless of your social class, we have disparities, especially in terms of access to the Internet and understanding new technologies like AI and where that can take you. How to use that in your everyday life. And so we just wanted to be that pillar, Hey, we're in the community. We're here. If you need help, we're here. We have our robotics clubs, we have maker space classes or that we do 3D printing, laser cutting, we do pottery, we do sewing also. We also make sure we incorporate the arts because that's very much so technical and technology is very much so an art form as well. Especially when you're developing new technology. And then we also have our senior adult program we call OAT's: Older Adult Technical Services. We partner with AARP, and Senior Planet. We're now in our fourth cohort, 25 people each that have taken this class have graduated. They keep coming back. So we had to create a level two class, a level three class. And so that is one of our fastest growing classes, our Bean Path STEAMers of the month. We highlight a youth every month that is doing some amazing work. I mean, these folks, they had their own businesses. These kids, they are doing things that I was doing in my freshman year of college in computer engineering. They're doing it in eighth grade. And so it's really amazing to see just how, you know, when you shine a light somewhere, more people join, more people congregate around you and the

like is bright and brighter and is hard to ignore. And so, you know, you can't help but run across us if you're in that area.

Grace: [00:12:24] And, I mean, you left Jackson and you have a full time job at Amazon, you're based in Atlanta, but you made a decision to really invest back. I mean, even in the early days, volunteering at the library, that was quite a commitment. And your work is in AI, right? So it's not necessarily on the same plane as like "tech help". Tell us more about your motivation for investing in your hometown because countless people leave their hometowns and don't look back, right? But you have continued to have really strong ties there, even as you are on to doing other really big things.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:13:04] I'm heavily motivated by my family, my support system. The majority of my family still lives in Jackson, Mississippi. Younger cousins all the way to my grandmother, great aunts and uncles and our just, you know, really love to see. As you mentioned, my world is here, one of the largest AI companies in the world, always on the cutting edge. And then you got some people who, you know, don't have the Internet. And so I'm always trying my best to merge those two worlds and bring them closer together, you know, in ways that are fun, innovative, different. I often tell this scenario: If I were to sit on a corner, and say free AI help from Amazon in Silicon Valley, you know, we'd have probably all the startups lined up needing help or New York or somewhere where if you do that in a place like Jackson or some parts in Mississippi, you know, they will look at me a little crazy, like, first of all, what is she doing out there? This lady, you know, it's hot out there, or it's cold out there. And those aren't, you know, household conversations. And so I just wanted to bring that world to these people. And what we've seen, because we've been doing this, we celebrated six years in October. We've seen that this theory of change, as we say, it works. You show up in a way that is familiar to people, you reach them in a different way. They're more inclined to lean in and learn more and keep coming back. And they'll till somebody else and the pool of folks gets bigger and bigger. We've been able to help people understand, you know, first and foremost, regardless of what field you're in, whether you're a computer engineer, a computer scientist, or if you're in journalism or even in health care, health care is one of our largest industries. You will need to use technology. It'd be better if you understood how it worked. You know, the better off understanding you are, usually the better off you are in this society as we're constantly moving more towards technology. So that's what we're trying to accomplish.

Phil: Stick with us. We'll be right back.

BREAK

Phil: [00:15:10] It's so great and inspiring. And I love the way you work across generations and obviously you're working with younger people, but also you talked about older adults and the way that a lack of comfort with technology can contribute to their isolation and loneliness. So I imagine by helping those folks, you're helping in more than just the obvious ways. You know, so I think it's amazing. And I, I guess one of the questions I have for you is how you've built support for this, because there are a lot of folks who have great ideas about something that they want to do for their community and they can't get funding. They can't convince people that this is worth supporting. What was that process like for you? How did you make that argument and who is supporting you in this effort?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:16:16] It took some trial and error to figure all that out. You know, I still feel like I'm learning because my vision is here. Which is actually God's vision. I believe God gave me this vision, and I could be anywhere right now. I could have bought a

yacht or something, I don't know. You know, but this is where I feel like I should be. This is where I feel like my purpose is right now. So I remember trying to figure out how am I going to get all this done? And just trying to say, you know, okay, I have a schedule, I have a full time job. I have to take care of it. That's paying the bills right now. But what time can I allocate outside of this? And then what are those gaps in who can help fill those gaps? So I probably spent the better part of the first three years funding it myself because I already knew, okay, most of the time nonprofits don't get funding and we're a brand new nonprofit that we're still really trying to figure out what we're trying to do. So I didn't expect to receive much, if anything, the first three years. So I already had in my mind, okay, I'm probably going to bootstrap this the next 2 or 3 years myself. And then sure enough, at that point, about year three, we started gaining attention from some of those foundations. Kellogg Foundation has been one of our largest donors, even corporate sponsors like Amazon and also just local businesses and major donors. We started catching the attention of everyone. And like I said, when you have a light shine and more people that get together with their lights, the light gets brighter. And so I also knew I had to secure a solid team because we started growing so fast, especially after the pandemic. And when we got our space, we needed more help. We needed some full time people. I learned about employment, taxes and health care and all these things that, you know, a real business has to provide. And I never thought I would be doing any of this, but that's what it required. And so we were able to get a solid team and now we're off to the races. Those are my two formulas. You know, if you have the resources, the money, the expertise, you know, and then the capacity, then you can reach whatever goal.

Phil: [00:18:23] And how many full time staff do you have?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:18:25] As of now, we have six full time, but total of about 50 between all our instructors and all of our contractors, even from people who clean up for us or manage events for us. So we have a huge team.

Phil: [00:18:42] And what's the annual budget, Nashlie?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:18:44] Annual budget is about 750K. Last year we hit our first million dollar revenue year in our sixth year, so we're happy about that. I didn't even realize it until we did the reports. So we'll probably likely increase their budget to keep our programs going and of course increase our fundraising that comes along with that.

Grace: [00:19:05] Congratulations.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: Thank you

Phil: [00:19:06] Yeah, I think one of the things that people sometimes don't understand when they talk about nonprofits is that the overwhelming majority of them are small and community based, right? People talk about the nonprofit sector and sometimes they think about colleges and universities or big national advocacy organizations. But actually that's not right. You know, like 90 plus percent, I think it is, have a budget of under \$1 million. And one of the things that's so interesting is people talk about that sometimes like it's a problem. Like what we really need is bigger organizations and let's scale everything because there are too many little organizations and there's too much overlap or redundancy or duplication. And that may sometimes be true, but I think what you're discussing in terms of the ability to create a space in a community in which people come in and feel comfortable and welcome and like they're talking to people who are talking to them in a way that they can hear; that's the beauty of smallness. That's the beauty of

community rootedness, you know? So I wonder how you think about size, like, what's it about to you? Is it about trying to grow or are you trying to just stay right there and go deeper? Like, how do you think about that?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:20:22] Yeah, well, you know, starting out I thought I would just be a few of us in the library, a couple, you know, weekends out of the month. That's kind of really where I wanted to stay. But, you know, it just kind of grew like the bean does. And so I have always thought, up until a certain point, I always thought that if we could do it in Jackson, we could do it anywhere. And so, there are a lot of places like Jackson, Mississippi. You know, the city has a lot of economic challenges. There's a lot of political challenges, and there's not a lot of people moving into the area. That affects things long term. That even affects how you do real estate development. My goal for the real estate vision, as I mentioned, I wanted to do housing, retail. I thought, hey, you know, within the last few years that was achievable, but it's been so difficult even just to get where we are with our two spaces. And so I do believe wholeheartedly that Bean Path can expand. We actually do quite a bit of contract work outside of Mississippi. People that hear about us, grateful for this opportunity even, that are people that are outside of Mississippi and outside of the south, you know, ask us to come and do workshops here and there to put on programming, even to train some of their people. So that's other forms of revenue they helps put back into our overhead. And we're able to see, you know, basically meeting the needs of the community. It'd be great if Bean Path didn't have to exist. And, you know, the school districts and the local city government already had incentives and things in place for us to always be on top of the cutting edge technology and how it affects us in our everyday lives. But until that happens, I think you can see a need for Bean Path in many places, you know, with the potential for growth.

Grace: [00:22:15] Because you have an engineering and business background, I'm curious, what surprised you most about starting a nonprofit and the skills that it's required, like what has translated from the business world and then what has not translated and kind of required a different approach.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:22:31] So nonprofit life is just like business life to me. I didn't expect that. When you think of nonprofit, you think, okay, you know, just a few people meeting up in the library. But it really made me put on a different perspective, you know, as CEO and we were able to hire folks who were dedicated, we had to create a company culture, even as a nonprofit. We assign, you know, principles and tenets and values to what we do. We incorporate that into everything. Actually, shout out to Praxis. We did several exercises while I was in the nonprofit cohort to establish a company culture in an environment that was enriching. Because you think about it like a lot of people, when they get skilled, they leave Mississippi. That's what most people do. That's actually what I did because there's not a lot of opportunity there for people, especially to make the salaries that you want to make. So we try to make sure we pay on the higher end. We also try to make sure that we create a great, excellent environment, a nonstressful environment for our employees, and we want to incentivize them to stay and let them know that they're part of not just an employee, but like a part of a family and that they, you know, see value in the impact and the work that they do. I don't know, I just never thought that a nonprofit would be that involved. But it is I mean, it's maybe even more so.

Phil: [00:24:02] That's what I always say. I always say it takes everything to run a nonprofit that it takes to run an equivalent sized business. And a ton more. It is harder, not easier, because you're working on the issues that haven't been addressed by the markets, that

haven't been addressed, to your point, by government. But before we continue on that, you mentioned Praxis, and I believe that's the connection here.

Grace: [00:24:25] Yeah, Yeah.

Phil: [00:24:25] Between you and Grace, you want explain what Praxis is?

Grace: [00:24:27] Sure I was going to jump in, so Praxis is actually how Nashlie and I know each other. It's a nonprofit that helps incubate faith-based for profit startups as well as nonprofits and Nashlie and I met because she was in one of the nonprofit cohorts and I was a mentor in that class.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:24:43] It was great talking to Grace is always and it was a great program. It just really had me thinking about this thing is, you know, this is a legit business, you know? And, you know, we got to do things a little differently to get to the next level.

Grace: [00:24:59] So now with the benefit of hindsight, what advice do you have for donors like you who want to start their own nonprofits? Like what do you wish you knew then that you know now.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:25:10] As soon as you can get a solid team. Because I think it's going to be tempting to try to do everything yourself and save money, but in the end, you're really not. And you're and you're getting burned out. And so finding people that believe in your vision, that have good work ethic, that are going to be about, you know, the mission, I think, is important to think about early on, even before you, you know, file all the paperwork, even. Most of the time when people start something new, like a nonprofit, they salute the board members, like their family members, like, you know, some people, not saying I did that. But you'll see, you know, as years go by, we refine who is it that's a good fit. And because we're evolving as a company and so that may change over time. And so also understanding that, you know, the people that you started out with, even if they're your friends, you know, sometimes they may not be the best person or the best people to team up with for this venture. And I also say that storytelling part is very important, especially for fundraising. We kind of caught on a couple of years in that, hey, we need to increase our marketing budget because, you know, the word isn't getting out like we want it to and we're doing great work, but you know, nobody knows about it. And this is helpful for us, you know, raising the funding somehow. And budgeting, financial. Just learning about the nonprofit financial world, which is slightly different. I think just educating yourself on that earlier rather than later is better.

Phil: [00:26:51] In a similar vein, are there things that you wish donors would keep in mind or practices that have been particularly helpful to you as a relatively early stage nonprofit or practices that have been frustrating to you on the part of donors or funders?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:27:10] I think you have to understand your market and your community and who you're marketing to, because the people that we serve with our programing is not necessarily people that we target for major donors. And so there's a difference in how you market that, there's a difference in how you tell that story. I had to learn this as well, like people want to invest in something that's going to be sustainable and something that is going to be impactful, but measured impact. And until you figure out how to measure your impact, you know, you're going to have some trouble probably fundraising. Unless it's just, people that just want to give away money. But I mean, really, to this day, we really haven't had a huge runway for spending. It's really just been a year to

year, you know, by the grace of God, we are still in this thing. And, you know, we're trying to figure out how to take it to the next level where we can get a three year runway or even a five year runway. That's all in the learning curve of things that I had to figure out.

Phil: [00:28:12] It just makes me think of like, the sustainability question can be so maddening for an early stage nonprofit. Obviously donors want to do their due diligence. They want to make sure that an organization is for real. And then and then also, you have these unbelievably promising, like new ideas. And yours is such a great example. Like, people had to take the risk and say, okay, yeah, they're not sustainable, quote unquote. Right? They actually only are going to be able to do the work if we take a risk and fund them even though they're new. And you got to just have some faith in the leader, some faith in the idea. And then you don't want to be silly about it. You want to make sure that there is some reporting back, that you're monitoring how things are going. You know, maybe you don't start with a seven year grant, but you give folks enough running room to see if they can make their idea a reality. And it sounds like there were at least a few donors who are willing to do that for you. But it can be so hard because there's so much creativity and imagination in every community, and it can be hard for the folks who have those ideas to break through and find the people with resources who will believe in them.

Grace: [00:29:58] I always cringe a little bit when I hear donors asking about sustainability, because basically I just want to say to them, nonprofits will be sustained when donors sustain them. You are the answer to the question that you're asking, right? And so and you know, it's interesting like listening to you Nashlie because I do think like there's several times you refer to the organization as a business and it's an organization and there's so many things that are similar, right, between running a nonprofit and starting like a startup for profit business in terms of like the values and the structure and the governance and all of that that you've mentioned. This piece, I feel like perhaps, is quite unique to running a nonprofit is like the whole philanthropic fundraising, which is, you know, quite different even then, like, you know, private equity fundraising or kind of seed funding that small businesses can seek. And so dealing with that whole arena, I mean, that's the hope right through this podcast, is that we help donors to understand what it's like to run a nonprofit and actually to support nonprofits like yours better.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:31:01] And I think, you know, sometimes as the leader, you have to figure out, okay, realistically, what do we have to cut back? Because we're not sure if we're going to get this funding yet. And you have to kind of switch from the ideal person to the person who executes and actually is more of the operator. So skim, you know, makes things a little bit more skim so that you can be, you know, that runway can be a little bit longer until you do get that funding. My background is the startup world. I've been there and it and it is different in how you raise capital because we can say, hey, we approve of this business, we have these revenues, you'll get your return or maybe you won't get your return, but if you invest this much more, we'll be able to point directly to this return. And the nonprofit space is very different is actually one of the reasons we try to incorporate the real estate, because we now have two, essentially two event spaces now. We make quite a bit of revenues on just bringing the space out for events because we're located downtown. Everyone knows about Bean Path, they want to support, so they'll have their gala there or they'll have the baby shower there or something, you know? So, you know, we want to make sure that we're creating these revenue streams to show that, hey, you know, if we keep going at this rate, eventually maybe we will be able to sustain at least our overhead or at least a portion of this and that, and then just bring in programs as we get more funding for specific programs. So it's like, you have to think about it in segments separating the budgets with the programs, creating sustainability in overhead and adding more

revenue streams. One thing I will add is that because we're a tech nonprofit, we have a lot of tech people that come in and they're like the experts. They teach the classes. And so we actually have done a couple of contracts with larger companies where we develop software for these companies and we can make a profit that way, too. It's really just trying to think about, you know, hey, whatever it takes, we want to make sure we stay around and serve the people.

Phil: [00:33:03] I think that's amazing. And that also I hope that your donors will recognize that if you're doing a good job executing against your mission and you're educating folks about technology in the ways that you set out to do, then they should worry a little bit less about whether at some level your organization is dependent on that philanthropic funding and a little bit more about just being dependable because dependable supporters of you doing what you do, which is delivering results in the community. And so I've struggled with these same questions, leading a nonprofit, which is, you know, you want a diversified revenue stream and you don't want to be overly reliant on philanthropic funding. And then sometimes you just want to say, well, we're delivering exactly what you say you care about. Why are you so worried about continuing to fund us to do that thing? Because we're not, you know, like in your case, you're not serving customers who are paying. That's not the point. This is different. This is different. This is mission driven work. So I just think it's so helpful just to illustrate challenges that you face that donors at any level need to be sensitive to. Like this is a hard thing that you're doing and that you have done.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:34:25] Yeah. Well thank you.

Grace: [00:34:27] To close I'm wondering, tell us your hopes for Bean Path and the tech community in Jackson for like the next 25, 50 years. Like where do you see the organization going long term?

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:34:38] So I would love to continue developing our whole tech district where we have housing and we incorporate tech programming into the housing. Maybe that spins off as its own revenue stream too, or we scale their programming across all, you know, multifamily housing throughout the city. We also would love to impact more people if we had our third building renovated, we could bring in 4 or 5 times as many people as we do now. So we're already at about 1000 people a year. We could increase that. And I think the program is there. The proof of concept is there. We have results. We have students that receive scholarships in year one, that are now working at Fortune 500 companies in engineering and sciences, and they come back and volunteer for the kids that are coming along. And we have testimonials from our older adults. A lot... some of them are still working. Some of them are taking care of the grandkids and they're able to say, Hey, I learned skills at the Bean Path that helped me in my job and I'm able to be more fruitful and a more productive person because of that. And I think, you know, we love to be able to say that, you know, we picked Bean Path up and planted in other cities, too. And we're able to see those fruits in an impact or on a much larger scale. But even if that doesn't happen, even if it happens in Mississippi, I think that alone benefits the entire country. And that's who we're hoping for.

Grace: [00:36:11] I'm so struck by almost that like full circle of like you went to a camp run by the Society for Women Engineers, right? So in some ways that was probably a nonprofit and philanthropically funded. That changed your life, and now you are impacting through Bean Path the lives of countless young people to pursue their paths and dreams in technology, which is really cool.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:36:34] Yeah. Thank you. It is a wonderful thing to see too. And it also makes me realize how much older I'm getting too.

Phil [00:36:41] Thank you so much for spending this time with us Nashlie, this was great and thank you for the work that you do.

Dr. Nashlie Sephus: [00:36:47] Thank you all. Thank you for the opportunity.

Grace: [00:36:50] Wow. So, Phil, with that, that was our last interview of this season of Giving Done Right.

Phil: [00:36:56] I think is a great way to end because I think Nashlie represents the best of what the nonprofit sector supported by philanthropy in this country can be. And people like her, as remarkable as she is, so I don't want to take anything away from her because she's remarkable, and there are people like her in every community doing amazing things.

Grace: [00:37:17] Yeah. I love just yeah, how real she was about her journey and the challenges. And our hope is that this season has brought many different kinds of voices to listeners and that provide both inspiration but also really practical things to keep in mind when we're thinking about giving.

Phil: [00:37:34] Yeah, I do too. And I don't want to be overly dramatic here, but I am worried about the future of the nonprofit sector in our country. And it feels to me like it was a given 20 or 30 years ago that we valued nonprofits nationally, talked about bright lights, and it made me think of Republicans like George Bush Sr talking about a thousand points of light in every community. Or Democrats like John Gardner, who was in LBJ's cabinet, who talked about the sector so beautifully. In one of my favorite quotes, he says, we have nonprofits that find cures, console the incurable deal with the ancient impulse to hate and fear the tribe in the next valley. To prepare for tomorrow's crises, preserve yesterday's wisdom. And this is the best part: to pursue the questions others won't pursue because they're too busy or too lazy or too fearful or too jaded. And this notion that there's this broad swath of different ideas, different people, different perspectives. Gardner said at one point, If you don't know of a nonprofit that you detest, then something's wrong, right? Like we all understood this, and now I fear that there is this sense of almost politicization and a lack of awareness of how badly we need this diversity of perspectives and ideas and organizations in every community.

Grace: [00:39:05] Yeah, that's such a good reminder. Well, listeners, we want to be in dialogue with you. We want to understand what are you thinking in terms of your giving? What questions have we answered this season for you and what questions do you still have that are unanswered that we can address the next season? Please do email us at gdrpodcast@cep.org, because we love hearing from you. We do listen to your ideas.

Phil: [00:39:28] And Grace, this has been a lot of fun. Thanks for a great season four , just amazing episodes. Really fun to do this with you always and can't wait for season five.

Grace: [00:39:37] Yup. Thanks, Phil, So long for now listeners, thanks again.

Phil: There are so many resources about effective giving on The Center for Effective Philanthropy's website, cep.org, as well as givingdoneright.org, where you'll find all of our episodes and show notes.

Grace: You can also send us a note at gdrpodcast@cep.org.

Phil: We want to thank our sponsors who've made this season possible: the Fidelity Charitable Catalyst Fund, Fetzer Institute, the Walton Family Foundation, the John Templeton Foundation, Stupski Foundation, Colorado Health Foundation, and Archstone Foundation. If you liked the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcasts... or invite a friend to listen.

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