Giving Done Right, Season 6, Episode 10 – On the Front Lines With Susan Rosas

Susan Rosas: How could so many systems fail all at the same time? Where, where is the humanity here? And also, we are the humanity, and if we give up and we decide we're tapping out and we're not gonna be a part of it, then who's gonna do it? And so I think that's been a major driving force is that we have to stay in this. We have to push these efforts forward because the consequence of us standing down is profound, and people lose lives over decisions like that.

Phil Buchanan: Welcome to Giving Done Right. I'm Phil Buchanan. By the latest estimates, as we record this in the early fall of 2026, the federal government has cut nearly two hundred billion dollars in federal grants. What is the impact? What does it look like for community-based organizations providing vital services that have been on the receiving end of those cuts? Is it even possible for nonprofit leaders to navigate these cuts, working collaboratively with other similarly situated nonprofits? What are the effects, not just on organizations, but on the people and communities they serve? And most significantly, for those of you listening right now, what do individual donors and grant makers need to understand about those realities? Today, I'll talk with Susan Rosas, CEO of the YWCA Kalamazoo, who has spent the last year and a half navigating these challenges. The YWCA in Kalamazoo is the city's primary provider of certain services for survivors fleeing violence, serving more than six thousand individuals a year. Its work spans a 24-hour crisis hotline, emergency shelter and housing, maternal and child health programs, childcare, and system-level advocacy. Welcome, Susan.

Susan Rosas: Thank you.

Phil Buchanan: Let's dive right in. You're leading this organization that does crucial work in Kalamazoo. What happened since January 2025? What have you been dealing with?

Susan Rosas: It was only a couple of days after inauguration that anybody who was receiving federal funds suddenly saw their funding frozen. And as a nonprofit that focuses predominantly on equity work, the immediate thought was, "Is this just us? Are we being targeted in this moment? What does this mean for the broader sector? What does this mean for us as an organization?" And it was profound for us. We are, as a victim services agency, among the many services that we offer, it's predominantly federally funded, so it was a huge impact for us right off the bat at the entry of this administration, and that just began a spiral of many, many events to follow.

Phil Buchanan: So that initial federal funding freeze, that got overturned pretty quickly, but then there were other successful efforts to cut your funding. Is that right? And can you contextualize, like, how much are we talking about?

Susan Rosas: Sure. So in the first year of this administration, we saw the ending of our human trafficking cycle. So anybody who had been funded in the year that we had been funded for human trafficking work, the request for proposals was just never reissued. And so it, in effect, ended a third of human trafficking services across the country that was federally funded. For us, that was nearly a million dollars in our various grants that we had received from the Office for Victims of Crime. So it was a tremendous hit on the victim services front really early on.

Phil Buchanan: What services had you been providing that you were then unable to provide? And what did that mean for victims and for the community?

Susan Rosas: YWCA Kalamazoo is the only human trafficking service provider for the region. And for the state of Michigan, we are the only residential provider for survivors of trafficking who are labor trafficked and who are men. So to have suddenly lost the significant funding for human trafficking work, now the entire state of Michigan was impacted in what services were made available to folks who really didn't have access anywhere else.

Phil Buchanan: For those who don't understand much about this issue, can you explain what it is that somebody might have been able to receive in terms of help? Like, what did that look like? Describe sort of the work that your team did, and then what the difference is now without that being available.

Susan Rosas: We offer the full range of service from the moment a person is identified as having been victimized, so that could mean the emergency response. It could mean the emergency housing, the federal law enforcement engagement, the local law enforcement engagement. It also means the basic needs support, making sure that when they flee the circumstance they're in, that they have a roof over their heads, that they've got access to food and clothing, and that they've got legal representation to fight the exploitation that they'd been experiencing and to hopefully recoup some sort of settlement so that they can get back on their feet. It's a wide range of service that folks need after such a traumatic experience, the therapeutic support, the social network building, the credit recovery. Sometimes if they don't have citizenship status, it's also securing protection while they're undergoing legal proceedings. The needs are profound, and when we saw this impact with our federal funding, we suddenly had to determine how can we try to keep some of these services going because nobody else offers them. And how do we keep the organization afloat knowing that if we continue service that's unfunded, it might mean then we have to reduce operations somewhere else within the organization? And so we were put in this position now to triage all critical services across the institution

Phil Buchanan: So how have you done it? Have you been able to maintain these services? Have you found funding elsewhere? Or is it the case that there are literally people, survivors who would have otherwise been able to access your services who now can't?

Susan Rosas: I think if that had been the only impact, we might have been able to figure it out. But it wasn't the only impact. So-

Phil Buchanan: Okay.

Susan Rosas: While that was our immediate funding loss with direct federal funding, we also saw some of our funding interrupted or paused, so we weren't able to access those dollars for several months at a time. So those were dollars that impacted therapeutic programs, that impacted housing. So we knew we couldn't pull funds from other places to try to make sure survivors had their needs met. But then those federal funds that had been funding the state that were then passed through to nonprofits like ours, then those funds got interrupted. And so we saw, first, we saw the wave of federal funding loss with direct grants to the organization, but then we saw state losses later that fiscal year as the state was responding to their own losses from the federal government. So now suddenly we lost millions more in state funding as it related to several of our programs, ranging from maternal child health to victim services. Then that sent the entire sector into a response where foundations then responded because they were needing to fill gaps that were critically important to the community, not just from us, but for everybody else that was just in chaos in the moment. And when we saw that happen, then we saw foundation funding loss because folks were reprioritizing and trying to figure out where they wanted to re-strategize and direct their funds. It was a moment in this sector where nothing was dependable anymore.

Phil Buchanan: So is it sort of both? Like some funders stepped up, some stepped out?

Susan Rosas: Absolutely. We had a lot of very short-term emergency response interest across the community, which was amazing and an absolute need in order to stabilize organizations like ours that had suddenly lost millions, and it was short-term. So the longer-term impact then of foundations on re-strategizing and thinking through a different longer-term plan, for many organizations it resulted in a net loss over time or the end to longer-term programs. So we as an organization had several waves of impacts that impacted all departments across our organization, whether it was victim services or maternal child health or early childhood education or just general infrastructure.

Phil Buchanan: So help us understand then, because I kinda jumped us right into this story of what has happened. The organizational structure, like, how many staff did you have as of January 2025, and, you know, where are you as of fall 2026, and what does the revenue picture look like as well?

Susan Rosas: We've lost roughly a third of our revenue. We were at 19 million. We're now at 13 and a half as an annual budget. We dropped from about 200 personnel. Right now we're at 112.

Phil Buchanan: Wow. That is, I mean, that is hard to imagine how difficult that has been for you as a leader, and maybe we'll come back to that. But let's talk about the community impact in terms of the loss of services that your organization provides, but also you're in a sort of ecosystem, for lack of a better word, of other nonprofits, some of which I imagine are also similarly dealing with the impacts of these funding

cuts. So when you look at the community, are you starting to see this play out in terms of impacts on people and families in ways that you can really understand, and can you describe that?

Susan Rosas: I think we won't fully understand the impact of all of these changes for many years to come, but we have some short-term observations of what at least YWCA has acute visibility of in the types of services that we offer. Because we are involved in anti-violence, we have very close visibility of the incidence of violence, the severity of violence, and we are seeing a tremendous rise of severity of violence within the community. And there are lots of factors that contribute to the emergence of violence in a community, but often it's because of various forms of strain. So if we see folks experiencing higher unemployment, if we see folks having less access to basic needs, so for example, when SNAP benefits are interrupted, that's a tremendous strain on families. When we see housing crises get worse, we will see the emergence of violence. That's kind of the end result of lots of community strain. And all of those things are currently true, not just here in Kalamazoo, but everywhere. So when social services are impacted to this degree, and suddenly the people who carry the burden are the people who live in the community, and often it is our most marginalized families who have nowhere else to turn. And we are seeing that in spades right now. The need for our services is skyrocketing just at the time that we have seen such dramatic reductions in funding. And it has meant it's a reckoning for the entire sector on what will we do about this because lives are at stake.

Phil Buchanan: Is it crime statistics? Is it just incoming calls or requests for service? How do you know that there has been this massive uptick in violence?

Susan Rosas: We are the area's only victim service provider, so when folks are fleeing violence, they come to us, and that gives us initial visibility of when we start to see trends. So when we started to see increases in hospitalizations, and in particular, we were noticing increases in the rates of strangulation. Now, in the domestic violence realm, strangulation is the highest indicator of likely homicide to follow. So when we see rates of strangulation increase, we get very, very nervous as a provider. So when we started to see those trends within our internal data, we reached out to local law enforcement across the county and the city to see if their statistics looked similar to ours, and indeed they did. We are often the first observer for these things to happen because we're so centralized here as the only provider, but it's so much bigger than us. Everybody was observing it who's involved in serving survivors.

Phil Buchanan: Wow. This is obviously so overwhelming at some level, so let's go to the sort of sector response you alluded to. Like, what should happen now? What can happen? I understand from having talked to you just once before that you've been trying to work in collaboration with other local nonprofits. How do you see things right now, and what are you looking for from donors, whether they be individual donors or foundations to do? Like, I guess if you could describe the path forward that you see, if any.

Susan Rosas: I think it's a bumpy path forward, but I think there is one. Here in Kalamazoo, very shortly after the funding freeze, we started as nonprofits gathering to better understand what was uniquely our experience versus what was shared across the sector because it was really hard to make sense of anything that was happening. None of us had ever experienced something like it before. There was mixed messages coming from Washington, coming from our representatives. It seemed like nobody really knew what was happening at the time. So we all came together to try to make sense of it as a larger collective and to gather data to understand who had lost what, what programs might be going offline. And through that initial kind of organic gathering of nonprofits, we ended up creating a more formalized coalition. Now, this coalition to date has more than 50 local nonprofits here in Kalamazoo that gather to talk about what programs we're seeing impacted, if we're seeing particular funding loss, or if we're seeing opportunities that we may be able to collaborate. This has been really important for us, especially here at YWCA, as we're trying to imagine when we triage programming from such significant funding loss, what are the programs that we must make sure sustain versus what are some operations that we might be able to lean on some of our partner organizations to support? And so there's been collaboration in that regard. I think that no matter how much collaboration we have, we will not fill the gaps. And so I… this isn't a matter of efficiency. This is a matter of reducing what is made available to this community and doing our very best to try to keep people alive in this moment. But that's been the general nonprofit response. And then as an additional conversation or a secondary conversation to how are we going to respond in direct service, we've also been in conversation about how can we better work with philanthropy to understand ways that we could work together differently or what could better support our community? How do we communicate things to funders and foundations and individual donors in such a way that makes it clear what's happening? Uh, how do we encourage collaboration in a different way? And so that's where this collective is heading, is how can we work together for all of these people that have really similar interests in supporting the community?

Phil Buchanan: Let's talk about the philanthropic response. I have been struggling a little bit with my own take on it. As context for you, I know you know a little bit about CEP, but we're 60% fee-for-service, forty percent grant funding. It's basically all foundations, the fee-for-service and the grant funding. So actually, you know, I'm a believer, I wouldn't have spent, you know, the bulk of my career in this job if I didn't believe that foundations can do a lot of good and that they're really important institutions. And I've been really impressed by how some foundations and some individual donors have stepped up in response to this time. And, in aggregate, I think the response has been quite inadequate to the level of stress that nonprofits are under. And I've been trying to understand why. I look back at the Giving USA data, and I see that in 2020, foundation giving went up 17% nominally, 15% inflation-adjusted over twenty nineteen in response to the pandemic. In 2025, foundation giving in aggregate went up 5% nominally, 3% inflation-adjusted over 2024. We surveyed foundation leaders this year in the summer, early summer. We asked them whether their payout rate for this year was below typical, typical, or above typical. The overwhelming majority said typical. And I talk to a lot of foundation leaders, obviously, and I hear, "Well, you know, we gotta take the long view. Philanthropy can't fill these gaps. It's a drop in the bucket compared to federal funding." And it all kind of reminds me a little bit of some of the research that I've read about the

difference between how donors respond to an individual story versus a kind of overwhelming statistic about death or loss or tragedy. And I wonder whether that's part of it. I really don't know. And I get it. I get it that foundations have to think about the medium and long term too, but it feels like we need more and that folks like you need more support. And I guess I'm curious, like, what you would like to see. Are there foundations that didn't just step up near term but have stuck with you? What's your take on this?

Susan Rosas: I think the difference is threat. When it was the pandemic, the threat was external. It was non-human. It was something that we were all experiencing and that it felt apocalyptic at the time, that there was, there was this great disease that we all had to battle and we were all together. In this most recent crisis, the source of the threat is very different, and the risk that people are willing to take is very different. I think some of the risk is carried by foundations who are willing to be vocal or who are willing to step up their giving, and some of the risk is carried by the nonprofits who are actually expressing what's happening to them, but we're scared. I think that's a really common trend about nonprofits is that there are a lot of nonprofits that are hemorrhaging money right now, but don't want to express that they're hemorrhaging money right now because they don't wanna put themselves in the spotlight, or there is a general sense right now that if you're losing money, that there must be something wrong with you or maybe you deserved it, or there's a different interest in blame that's happening now that really didn't exist during the pandemic. And so there's a cultural shift, I think, with how we are responding to this threat as a country compared to how we saw it in the pandemic, and I think we just see that in organizational behavior. We see it in funder behavior. And I think, as a service provider, I'm certainly seeing the disparate response that you're observing too, where there are some foundations who have really stepped up and reached out to, like, they extended the olive branch to us, and they were the ones that said, "It looks like things are really hard. How can we help?" We had a lot of donor-advised fund giving that hadn't previously existed, where there were individual donors who were ready to jump into the fight. I think especially because YWCA provides this direct service but also is involved in the systems change work, and so we're trying to influence the systems of oppression and the things that are upstream, in addition to addressing the symptoms of everything that's happening, I think that has engaged some donors that might not have been aware of the type of work that we're doing. And so I think our willingness to be vocal about what was happening to us was very risky for us to take, but then also brought people into the fold and gave them an opportunity to join into the fight in this moment. But then we've had a lot of foundations or nonprofits that have described us now as too political, and so they don't wanna engage in funding us anymore, or folks who have said that they will consider our funding applications if we remove words like equity or if we are explicit about our interest in supporting immigrant families or our pro-LGBTQ stance about all of our work. I think we have just different levels of willingness to take risk in this moment, and that that is the difference in why some foundations fund one way and others fund in a different way.

Phil Buchanan: So just to be really, like, clear, you have literally had foundations say, "We can't fund you if you use the word equity. We can't fund you if you advocate for LGBTQ rights, or we can't fund you if you support immigrant communities"?

Susan Rosas: Yes. So we've had funders ask us to resubmit an application removing some of these words.

Phil Buchanan: And what did you do?

Susan Rosas: So we have not accepted any funds that have required us to change our stance on this work. I think that has also contributed to some of our funding loss. The willingness or the interest in being steadfast in our support for marginalized communities has, I think, been useful in the way that it has sustained the trust necessary for people to seek help from us. It is critically important that when people are fleeing violence or if somebody has a high-risk pregnancy and they are afraid of hospital systems, all of these different reasons for why somebody might come to YWCA, we must sustain that trust. That is our currency. That is how we are able to be effective in the work that we do. And if we sacrifice that in order for money, there's no point for us getting money in the first place. But that has also resulted, then, in some funding loss for us because we have chosen not to accept grants. We have chosen not to pursue opportunities we would have normally pursued because they came tied to harmful funding conditions that we weren't willing to accept.

Phil Buchanan: Stick around. We'll be right back after the break.

BREAK

Phil Buchanan: It's so sobering, and the sort of changing boundaries of what is considered political when certain things are politicized is a source of frustration to me. But I wanna go back to something you said earlier in your response to my last question about this hesitation that nonprofits have to say what's really going on, because this came up in research that by the time this episode is released will be out, but you could not possibly have seen yet because we haven't released it, and it is exactly the dynamic that you describe. A very high proportion of nonprofit leaders saying they are less than completely honest with their funders, right? Because if you're my program officer and I'm a grantee, and I say, like, "We're really on the edge, we might not make it," you might say, "That's good money after bad," or whatever the expression is. "I don't want to take a risk on you." And then the other related problem that that leads to is a mismatch between what funders often, like really well-intentioned funders, think nonprofits need in terms, for example, of assistance beyond the grant and what nonprofits actually need, right? So an example would be, and this isn't in our data so much, this is just anecdotal, but there were a lot of funders that I think, and it was great that they do said like, "We're gonna offer help with security or legal support." And there were various programs that were stood up, and that's great. But the biggest threat to many of these organizations is actually just cash flow, right, and inability to sustain programs. And that has been less, as I described before, of a dramatic response from funders. So we have spent, at CEP, so much of our effort in various ways, trying to help funders learn from feedback from the nonprofits they support in a way that gets past some of the power dynamics that inhibit candid communication. And maybe I'm stating the obvious, but those power dynamics that inhibit candid communication are just intensified massively when the stakes are higher and when you're literally vulnerable to not

existing as an organization anymore. So I just worry that even well-intentioned people are sometimes just speaking right past each other because there's this inability to talk about the reality.

Susan Rosas: Yeah, I think that's real. When we first formed this coalition, YWCA was often serving as a spokesperson among the various nonprofits because that was a risk that we decided with board support that we were going to take. And there were many nonprofits who really wanted to be a part of solution-finding but who didn't have the readiness, whether it was board support or whether they just assessed the risk to be too high to be front and center and have their face in the press saying all of these terrible things are happening across the sector. And so this coalition has provided to some degree some cover so that we can have these honest conversations together about what's happening. We can publish what it is that we're learning. We can strategize together without putting anybody In the spotlight in a way they don't want to be. So all of the data that we provide isn't identifiable. It's meant to be something that we all collectively build. And it's through those conversations that we're learning. So when in one of our last meetings, we asked the question, what do we wish would look different from our funders in this moment? And, you know, the things that I think are pretty predictable, that folks want to see general operating funds. They want to see funds that are much more flexible. They want to see an easier avenue to applications because we are just mass submitting applications as much as we can to try to stay afloat, and the easier the application, the better. They want just greater openness and flexibility to being able to pivot funds if something changes suddenly. And folks are really eager to see better coordination among funders themselves. I think there is this call for nonprofits to coordinate, but there is less of a call for foundations to cooperate, and we're really hoping to see mutual support in that way.

Phil Buchanan: Yeah, completely. If I had a dime or a quarter or whatever for how many times I've heard from funders, especially recently, you know, there are too many nonprofits. And, uh, they're not collaborating, and I have a couple of thoughts on that. One is, like, too many nonprofits, like, in general? Because I've been to plenty of communities where there's not nearly enough nonprofits. That's not the problem. I'm sure there's duplication in certain areas, right? But also, like, somebody's funding them, right? But also in this call for collaboration, are you also looking in the mirror, to your point and saying, you know, "How are we collaborating with other funders?" I wanna ask you, Susan, about litigation as a strategy because I understand that you have actually sued in response to some of these funding losses. Can you explain what has happened and what the status of that is?

Susan Rosas: Yeah. Yeah. So one of the trends that we've seen across the board in this sector for federal funds is that many of the grants issued by the federal agencies have funding conditions tied to them that we haven't historically seen. So some of those funding conditions have been full cooperation with ICE if you're serving immigrant families, or the prioritization of US citizens over non-citizens in service delivery, or we've seen funding conditions that require grantees to only respect sex assigned at birth. We've seen prohibitions on any sort of DEI activity, whether it's funded by the grant or otherwise across the organization. There's lots of these conditions tied to many federal grants that for an organization like YWCA are

untenable. We would rather not accept the money than have to abide by those conditions. And we were in conversation with other organizations that were experiencing something similar nationally, and we had the opportunity to join in a lawsuit against the administration that would help protect specifically anti-trafficking dollars from having these harmful funding conditions tied to those grants. We joined in May of this year, I believe, and then this summer the courts ruled in our favor. And so now the series of grants that we fought to protect no longer, it's $45 million worth of funds, they no longer have those harmful funding conditions tied to those grants.

Phil Buchanan: And is that being appealed by the administration?

Susan Rosas: It is not as of now. I think there are many of these lawsuits from organizations like ours across the country that are picking away at the various different funding agencies or various different grants, and this is an effort toward not just protecting a grant that we might receive, but rather protecting an entire swath of grants that national providers might receive. And so there's lots of this type of litigation currently at play across the United States right now.

Phil Buchanan: And have your funders been supportive of your participation in this effort?

Susan Rosas: I haven't heard anybody express otherwise. I think we've also seen a dramatic shift here in Kalamazoo of people jumping on board with YWCA who might not have known about the organization or just might not have known how deep our commitment was to making sure that we protected some of these communities that were being targeted right now from this administration. So we've seen a groundswell, too, of people who hadn't historically supported this organization now jumping on board to be a part of it.

Phil Buchanan: That's great. I mean, I'm sort of processing, you know, something you said earlier about, and maybe you didn't use these words exactly, but sort of risk aversion of donors and funders. And I keep wondering when this sort of dam will break, and we will start to see people willing to stand up more because it really has been the last 20, 21, 22 months, whatever it's been, and maybe this is very naive, but stunning to me to see how risk-averse and honestly, in some cases, just kind of cowardly institutions to have been. You know, we can think across sectors, across various examples. What's so stark, I think, is to sort of juxtapose that lack of courage with the courage of the people who you're seeking to help, you know, who have no choice but to face incredibly difficult, you know, life-threatening circumstances, or your staff on the frontline doing that work. So I just say that, I don't know that there's a question in here, but my hope is that people can see people like you, your team, the communities that you serve, and recognize that they need to push themselves to step out more, to be inspired by the way you have just stuck in there. You know, because it can't have been easy for you or your staff.

Susan Rosas: I think back a lot about the literature that I've read about what was happening in the 1980s, where something similar in some ways was happening. We saw dramatic government funding cuts to social services at the same time that we

saw policies that were directly targeting particular demographics. In the 1980s, the target community were Black Americans. And at that time, we saw nonprofits and foundations alike step aside and allow for that to happen. So nonprofits pulled back on a lot of their low-cost direct service and started charging fee-for-service in order to make sure that they could stay afloat as an organization. And in so doing, then they weren't able to reach some of the communities they had historically served. We started directly pathologizing a lot more so that we could bill to insurance in a different way, so we were focused less on systems change and more on individual change. And then we saw foundations get hyper-focused on restricting their grants and on making nonprofits abide by very strict rules so that the foundations wouldn't get in trouble with the IRS or the new laws that were getting passed about how political their funds could be. And so there was a lot of risk aversion in the '80s, and nonprofits and foundations mostly chose to protect themselves. And so we saw the impact of that direct burden carried by communities at that time, specifically Black Americans. We saw what happened to homelessness rates and infant mortality rates and arrest rates. I mean, it was…the policies were very effective at what they were trying to do. And so now that we're presented with a similar circumstance where we're seeing dramatic funding cuts to the social service sector, and at the same time we're seeing policies that are targeting specific communities. Now, Black Americans certainly are being targeted, but now we're also seeing the targeting of immigrant families in a different way, of women in a different way, of the LGBTQ community in a different way. We have a choice right now as institutions. We can step aside and let the individuals in this community carry the burden themselves, or we can try to absorb as much of the risk as we can possibly absorb. And as institutions, we can absorb a whole lot more than any individual person can. As a nonprofit, we have some capacity to absorb some risk in our willingness to fight back against some of these funding conditions or our insistence that no matter what we do, we're going to make sure that we're protecting the people that come to our doors. And foundations can absorb some of the risk by funding organizations like ours, and by using their platform to speak out against some of these things, and pushing forward pro-democracy efforts and systems change efforts, and taking some risk in funding programs that might not necessarily fit into a very square decision-making bucket that they decide is gonna be safest for them in the moment. We can all carry risk right now to absorb some of the risk that would otherwise translate directly onto the shoulders of our most marginalized, and we should.

Phil Buchanan: I mean, I just think that's incredibly well articulated, and it just makes me feel that we need to stop having the risk conversation from a parochial, institutional self-preservation point of view, and start to have that risk conversation in the way that you're describing the broader risk to all of us, the collective of, you know, humans in society, and so I really appreciate that. I wonder, Susan, if I can ask you a bit of a more personal question about ... I really so appreciate you telling your story, and I so appreciate your leadership, and if you can talk a little bit about how you've been able to do this. How you've sort of navigated for yourself during what has had to be just an incredibly stressful, emotionally depleting time to have to lay off staff, to have to see folks who it's your mission to help unable to get the help that they need. How have you managed through this to be sort of in the position you're in, you know, all in, still going? Talk a little bit about what you've learned about yourself as a leader in this time.

Susan Rosas: Oh, gosh. It has been extraordinarily painful, and I think as I'm witnessing my peers, not just here in Kalamazoo, but across the country… I think you had a report. This is why I reached out to you in the first place, is that y'all had collected data on burnout among CEOs within nonprofits and how it's just dramatically increasing in this last year. I mean, I feel it. Everybody around me feels it in the work that we're doing. I don't know if I have the solution to it. I ... This isn't something I've, I've had to experience before. I mean, I think I've, in many ways, always been a fighter. I don't think you get into social justice work without being willing to go out on a limb. But this is, this is something altogether new, and I've learned a lot about how I compartmentalize and how we can survive anything for a period of time, how some of the assumptions that we always had about who would step up when don't always pan out that way, and that the best that we can do is, is to make sure that we're keeping our own moral compass at the center of our decision-making and to not let fear direct what choices we make. And I think there's no such thing as courage without fear, and I have been afraid a whole lot this last year and a half. I think as leaders, we're often told that we're not supposed to be afraid or that we're not supposed to express some of those vulnerabilities. There's been moments where I have just…it has seemed like the sky was falling, and it was just unbelievable some of the things that we were seeing happen, you know, on the federal stage or even things that were being allowed to impact our communities through the state. It just felt surreal to me. Like, how, how could so many systems fail all at the same time? Where, where is the humanity here?

Phil Buchanan: Yes.

Susan Rosas: And also, we are the humanity, and if we give up and we decide we're tapping out and we're not gonna be a part of it, then who's gonna do it? And so I think that's been a major driving force is that we have to stay in this. We have to push these efforts forward because the consequence of us standing down is profound, and people lose lives over decisions like that. That's been the driving force right now. I don't know how healthy that is, but it's what's been keeping me going right now. And I think there's a lot of us that feel that way.

Phil Buchanan: Yeah. Yeah. And I wonder to what extent your relationships with other leaders in the community, they must feel different now than they did before. And I wonder if that has also been a help to you just managing through.

Susan Rosas: Yeah. This coalition has been just deeply supportive for me. So I'm fairly new to Kalamazoo. I've only been in this role for two and a half years. So I had one year of relative peace, and then, you know, everything was on fire. And so I really didn't have a broad network of peers yet in Kalamazoo, and we solidified one quite quickly as we were all struggling, and that's been enormously helpful for me as a leader.

Phil Buchanan: This podcast, you know, hopefully this doesn't sound too self-referential, but takes its name from a book I wrote in 2019 called *Giving Done Right*, in which I describe nonprofit leaders, particularly those working in community in the way that you are, as unsung American heroes who are doing just extraordinary work. The job is so hard. It takes everything it takes to run an equivalent-sized business,

but actually, it's a way harder job, which is the opposite of the narrative that you'll hear if you are in a business school or something. And literally people like you and your team are holding communities together, and I'm so grateful to you for the work that you're doing every day, the way you're advocating for those who are marginalized, targeted right now in ways that are just completely inhumane. And you have, you know, kept up your courage and the hard work, and you've also mobilized others to work with you, and I so appreciate you spending time today just to tell your story. But I just mostly wanna say thank you for what you're doing, Susan. Really, really appreciate you.

Susan Rosas: Oh, thank you so much. And truly, I think we all have a different piece in this puzzle. This happens to be YWCA's role right now of how we are fighting for social justice, but y'all are playing a role, too, at the Center for Effective Philanthropy, right? By just hosting this podcast or by collecting the information that you do and publishing it and making sure they're painting a picture. Everybody plays a role in this, and it's so critically important that we're fitting together in this one puzzle because it's just so critically important right now.

Phil Buchanan: Yeah. Thanks again, Susan Rosas, for everything that you're doing.

Susan Rosas: Thank you.

Phil Buchanan: There are a ton of 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. You can also send us a note at gdrpodcast@cep.org.

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Our original podcast artwork is by Jay Kustka. Special thanks to our colleagues Sarah Martin, Molly Heidemann, Christina Tran, Chloe Heskett, and Naomi Rafal for their marketing, research, writing, fundraising, and logistical support.

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