



Trust Talks Episode #7: Solving Our Workforce Challenge

Caleb Herod: Hello, I'm Caleb Herod, a program manager on The Chicago Community Trust's Growing Household Wealth team. I'm originally from Abbeville, Mississippi and have been with the Trust for a few years. The Trust's Growing Household Wealth strategy considers growing income, accumulation and transfer of assets, and reducing the debt burden, core components of what makes up a family's wealth.

I manage the Growing Household Wealth team's income strategy. This strategy works to close the racial wealth gap through growing and strengthening models that support Chicagoans through post-secondary pathways into careers with household-sustaining wages. Today's episode is a two-part conversation. First, I sit down for a wide-ranging discussion with Bela Moté of the Carole Robertson Center for Learning and Manny Rodriguez of Revolution Workshop.

Bela Moté: Thanks so much, Caleb. Hello, everybody. My name is Bela Moté. I'm the president and CEO of the Carole Robertson Center for Learning. We are an early childhood and youth development organization serving children prenatally all the way to age 17. And we do everything in the early childhood service arena, from home visits, to center-based, to preschool classrooms in school. And then for our youth development programs, we have afterschool programs as well as summer camp. Good to be with all of you today.

Manny Rodriguez: Thank you, Caleb. Thank you, Bela. My name is Manny Rodriguez. I'm the co-founder and executive director of Revolution Workshop. We're a pre-apprenticeship construction training program located in Garfield Park and soon to be in our second location in Pullman. Our whole mission is to take Black, Brown, and women and get them into family-sustaining construction careers.

CH: Awesome. Thank y'all so much for joining us here today. And I want to have a conversation about how the Chicago workforce ecosystem is working for these people in Chicago at each level. And the first thing I want to start off with, Manny, is Revolution Workshop. Revolution Workshop is a grant recipient of Bridges to Brighter Futures, which is a collaboration between Kinship Foundation and The Chicago Community Trust that aims to bridge the gap between Black, Latinx, and low-income post-secondary students, and good jobs that offer long-term economic security.

You've also received funding from We Rise Together: For an Equitable and Just Recovery to provide construction skills training with wraparound service to ensure job placement and retention. What are some of the barriers in connecting communities of color in Chicago to quality job opportunities?

MR: Thank you, Caleb. That's a really great question for us to start with. We have some really big challenges, and I think the first challenge that we have is, for two generations, we told kids that the only way that you can make it is that you got to go to college. And we forgot our history. What created the middle class in this country were blue-collar jobs. They were manufacturing and construction jobs. And we've spent a good part of the last 30 to 40 years dismantling that supply chain, which has left our ecosystem quite vulnerable. Right?

We have major skills gap shortages in both manufacturing and in construction right now. We have tremendous demand and need for these types of family-sustaining career paths in our neighborhoods, in our communities, and then we also have it, again, on the demand side. So I think we need to do a better job of linking those things together. I think we need to also be very honest and real that some of the reasons why we have these shortages is because we've historically left out underrepresented and underserved people.

How can we be more human-centered in our approach? How can we look at a person holistically? It's not enough to get them the technical training and then think that they're going to be successful on the job. You have to be able to look at the person and all of the things that are going on in their life. COVID exacerbated traumas that were already longstanding. And for us to think that we're just going to throw a lot of money to training and that's going to solve the problem, I think it's just not going to get us where we need to be.

And that's where I'm kind of hopeful because I have seen our ecosystem, the workforce system, as a whole, starting to look at this more holistically and taking a more holistic approach, funders being more flexible with opportunities. Even government getting a little bit more flexible with its opportunities, knowing that you need to have barrier reduction funding. You need to be able to help with mental health, with housing, with child care, with transportation.

CH: It's an interesting point about these lessons learned and this stuff being exacerbated by COVID. One of the things that you always kind of hear too from folks in the community too is that, "Okay. This is the thing that's happening right now." Is it going to sustain over time?

MR: You have to be willing in this moment to have brave conversations, sometimes uncomfortable conversations, about the history of things that have gone on and why we need to stop these practices because it's hurting everybody. We all know this. I'm speaking to you guys and preaching to the choir here about, diversity and equity and inclusion makes the whole better.

BM: Manny, thanks for your good thoughts and reflections on that. I think I want to build off a couple of points because Carole Robertson Center is on the other side of the world, so to speak, right? And we serve about 2,000 children, primarily on the West and Southwest sides of Chicago. And these are children we begin to serve, and it's really that ecosystem of the family which I think is really critical in this. And our workforce is two-tiered. It's the tiering of making sure that the workforce who is entering construction jobs or apprenticeship programs, as the ones Manny and his team offer, have the wraparound supports to make sure that families can have options, because what we haven't said is the word options yet.

And so, we have to really think about that piece. And so, from my vantage point, we have to think about how do we create infrastructures for working families and early childhood, high-quality early childhood programs for working families matters. We saw what happened when the choices were reduced during the pandemic, especially for women. Women left the workforce at just astounding numbers. So there's that reality of the workforce.

The other reality is who Carole Robertson Center and the early childhood and out-of-school time or youth development sectors employ. Speaking of history, we know how early childhood came to be, and we have to say that aloud. It was primarily Black and Brown women taking care of privileged, primarily white families' children so that they were able to economically benefit from the services that were either at a very reduced rate or free, to be quite direct.

And so, thinking about whose shoulders we stand on when we're thinking about early childhood, youth development in the workforce, there is not separation of that. There are intersections that happen every single day between apprenticeship to employment, to retention. And I think, Caleb, to your good question about can this sustain, I too am cautiously optimistic, but I don't know. I think that we were all thrusted in trying to find solutions during a pandemic and a racial reckoning that we knew empowered us to be able to, for the first time, say aloud things that we'd experienced for generations.

However, the human spirit and the mind, sometimes our memories lapse in terms of those pieces, and I think that word accountability matters. So how do the public and private partners really think about community organizing, community building, and community development in tandem with grant-making strategies, policies, systems?

CH: Can you talk a little bit about the role of affordable, accessible, high-quality child care as it relates to the workforce and economy and go a little bit deeper? Because I think you already hit on a little bit of that.

BM: We know that children are attached to adults in their lives. And so, if we think about where we were as a nation with early childhood and the pay and the workforce issues and all of that pre-COVID, there were deserts when it came to creating pipelines of early childhood and afterschool providers. There were deserts literally where there were certain communities and ZIP codes in Chicago where there was a lack of high-quality early childhood. And I think that that's one of the few silver linings of the pandemic, is that when a very fragile system is already struggling, what happens when you layer that and you compound that and you exacerbate it?

And so, an organization like Carole Robertson Center that is deeply committed to serving historically marginalized communities, under-resourced communities, where the average income of a household is at or below the poverty threshold, the federal poverty line. And so, when you take all of those pieces and you realize that a nation like our nation, when it's brought to its knees because families don't have options, what does it say about our ability to improve the economy? So we have to really create solutions that limit the barriers, but also pay and compensate our workforce in a way that is recognized.

MR: I just want to jump in here, Caleb.

CH: Please do.

MR: I love what you're saying because there's a couple of things that we see all the time. Housing, transportation, and child care. Those are the three things that are the biggest barriers of our communities to having successful pathways into work. I love what you're saying, Bela, that we have to look at this, again, holistically. Your services and my services are not conducted in a silo. Right? They're connected. They're interconnected. I cannot be successful without organizations like yours and vice versa.

Every one of us plays our role, but we need to be working together because these problems and these systems have been... Let's be frank. They've been in place since the beginning of our country. So to think that a 12-week pre-apprenticeship program is going to solve all the societal ills and traumas of the folks that we serve is not realistic. Right? And there has to be a continued effort. And especially, and I see is, when we get them placed, that's when the problems begin, is we place them. Now they have a benefits cliff. They lose their SNAP. They lose their Section 8. They lose their TANF. Now they can't get the subsidy for the child care, but they're still behind the eight ball compared to their peers. And we're cutting all those resources off.

That just talks about, again, a rethinking and a reframing of how we have to look at how we have to support an individual. The first two years of the career pathway are very critical. We got to make sure. Then usually they stick because they figured it out. They got their feet under them. But they still have a lot of challenges. And again, a 12-week program ain't going to be enough. Everybody always wants to fund the fun stuff, the training. "Oh, yeah. Oh, they're building a shed. That's great. Could I have a she shed?" Yeah, of course. But...

BM: I want a she shed.

MR: There you go, Bela. There you go.

CR: I have loved ones.

MR: And we build those. Yeah. We could have that. That's the fun stuff. But the real work begins when we're doing our alumni services, our alumni outreach, and providing them with the real financial coaching. Before, we're talking about Monopoly money when they're in our program, but then it's like, "Okay. I want to get a car. I want to buy a house. I want to start that business." Then we're linking in. Now we're bringing in other partners from the community, other silos, if you will. But it doesn't need to be that way. If you think collaboratively and you think holistically, I think it... Just wanted to uplift that.

CH: Connecting to what you were saying, Manny, I think... And this is a part of the conversation I'd love for us to just dig into for a little bit, is the idea of benefits, the idea of who gets certain benefits, when, and how we prepare people for being off-boarded. What are we not doing on connecting wages and benefits? What is the opportunity for us to work collaboratively to think about how organizations can partner, not just when it's opportunistic, but when it is necessary for the worker so that worker never feels like they are left to navigate these things on their own? So that's a big question.

BM: No, that is a big question, but a worthwhile question for reflection and discussion. I think, again, we sit in the seats we sit in recognizing that the world before us is big and daunting. And I think that inequities in terms of compensation and benefits have really shaped the way that we really exacerbate systems. And I think about what am I doing as an employer, either to break away from that cycle, or am I perpetuating that cycle?

BM: Like Manny shared, we have had families, including some of our own employees, say, "Please don't give me that raise because if you give me that raise, I am going to lose my child care assistance dollars." So I can advocate and figure out one solution that is a one-off solution for that particular individual. But more importantly, I have to really think about that systemic solution. Right? And so much of what we

know are public benefits are attached to exactly what many Manny said. They are not thinking about... It takes 18 months for somebody to feel secure in a job.

CH: Mm-hmm.

BM: We know that. That's really clear from all the employer and employee data that's collected. What are we making... What are we doing for that first 18 months for that employee's cycle of employment, but after that. We also know that families that live in the communities that we are dedicated to uplifting, there are many other pieces of realities that sort of intersect that can either uplift them or pull them down. The belief that it's...pick yourself up from your bootstraps doesn't really work-

CH: No.

BM: ...when you're thinking of systemic change. And I would just say, which I failed to say at the beginning, 90% of the employees in the sector, in Carole Robertson Center in the early... are women of color. Black and brown women. Right? And so, for myself who employs, as an employer of almost 300, 90% being women, things like medical benefits, retirement, maternity leave, or I should say parent leave, forgive me, all of those things are within my control.

CH: Mm-hmm.

BM: What I choose to spend time and how I choose to invest in my employees should mirror what we see in Fortune 500 companies. It should. And we should have bold conversations with public and private partners to say, "Help us cross that bridge so that organizations like mine and Manny's don't have to shake in the boots the next time there's a pandemic asking about our own vulnerabilities and the possibility of staying open and surviving."

BM: Those are not conversations that ever fuel systemic inequities and systemic solutions. So I think we have much work to do, but we cannot ignore that community-based organizations, community-based innovations really fuel and propel change.

CH: Mm-hmm.

MR: It's a lot to talk about. And Bela, I think you hit on so many great points. For me, when you guys put out the Bridges to Brighter Futures, great. And you said that family-sustaining was \$24 an hour, I want to say. Was it 24?

CH: I think it was 24 at the time, and I think now it's like 25. Yeah.

MR: It's like 25 with 8% inflation rate. And I had to look, and I looked at my staff and I said, "Wow. Over half of them are not making \$25 an hour," because we have, to Bela's point, looked at our work somehow like we should be poor to do it. And that's just ridiculous. I think about what some of our organizations and the lift that we have to do and the kind of skillsets that you need to have to be able to do this work effectively.

MR: You have to be a community organizer. You have to be a business person. You have to be almost like a quasi-politician. You got to be a grant writer. You got to be a salesperson. That's a lot of different

things in one place to do this effectively, to do this really effectively, and do it on a hope and a prayer, when you've also been lied to multiple times by multiple of these systems.

The other thing I got with construction that I think is a big thing, and I did say Black and women being particularly underserved in the sector. But with brown, with Latinx, there's a lot of 1099 going on. So that person's very vulnerable in construction. You're 1099-ing somebody because they don't have medical. They're not getting retirement. Maybe they're getting a little bit of extra money, but they still got to pay the taxes back on that.

And to me, that's also a challenge, specifically in my sector, but I also think in other sectors. This could be something we got to look at because if you're working 40 hours a week and you don't have these bennies, well, then how are you able to really sustain a family with that? So it's tough. A third of white apprentices don't make it to journey level. So that just tells you how hard it is to really stick. So we have to stay with them. And now, it's the importance of me making sure, Caleb, folks like you know how important that two-year window, that 18-month to two-year window is. That's the part that we need funding for.

CH: One of the things that I think is interesting about how we at the Trust conceptualize growing household wealth that it's not just a conversation about income. It's also a conversation about, okay, how do you put people on the path to building assets, and how do you put people on the path to understanding a debt burden? One of the other things I wanted to talk to you both about is the challenges that job seekers and workers are navigating in their pursuit of income growth. You talked about those current job opportunities. Tell us about what has worked well from you all to support even your employees or some of your trainees and growth, and what are you hoping to improve?

BM: So, I want to go back to the workforce shortage that the early childhood and youth development sector have historically seen and, again, the pandemic just compounded that. So at Carole Robertson Center, we really needed to think about how do we keep retention of our current employees, but how do we... We've experienced a massive growth due to some federal investments in our organization, but we did a grow-your-own model, similar to an apprenticeship model, and we're just starting to call it an apprenticeship, where we cast a very wide net.

We are in North Lawndale, Little Village, Albany Park. Our three flagship buildings are in those, but we're in 27 communities. So, we reached out through our family support team and asked our families we know, whether they're employed, underemployed, or unemployed because of the paperwork that we process, to qualify for early childhood assistance and youth development. Cast a broad net. Ask folks if they were interested in learning more about these two sectors.

You wouldn't believe... And we removed the burden of what we typically describe as an interview process, and that's really, really important. We called it community conversations. Right? Just to get a feel. In the first few months of this outreach, we had 100-plus community members, some families, that were enrolled. Some just community residents that wanted to learn more. Of that 100, we employed a third of them.

CH: Wow.

BM: So when we think about solutions and innovation, there is no better person to advocate for the community than the people who live in that community, and to really appreciate that we have ignored those solutions because we believe that perhaps a gentleman, no offense to the gentlemen in this room, the gentleman in a suit knows better for a particular family or a particular woman who is looking for employment than those individuals themselves.

MR: Yeah. I mean, I couldn't have said that better myself, Bela. But I'm going to add some things about where I think we need to be in terms of helping at least my trainees. Data is very important. Data is also very important. You got to collect data. You got to know what is actually going on, what is actually preventing them. They may think it was one thing, and you really dive into a situation. It's really another issue that's systemic, but... Has a solution to it, but we just didn't think about it because we didn't collect the data.

So, it's important to have that engagement, that true engagement with the individual pre, during, and post any type of pre-apprenticeship program. I've been... I serve on the Apprenticeship Committee for the State of Illinois. I help define what apprenticeship is here in Illinois. I chair the Pre-Apprenticeship Working Group. And one of the things that we've talked about is, we have to make sure that there's a seamless transition into that career pathway, and making sure that that drives the innovation instead of being top-down. That never really works.

I'll give you a perfect example, transportation being a big barrier. You need to have a car because the site changes from time to time. You got to be able to drive. Public doesn't go everywhere. It's not always reliable. And so, you got to have a car. Well, we created a program called Our Wheels, where we're giving people auto loans at 5% fixed, but I had to put up money to make that happen. Well, why should I do that as a little nonprofit? Talk about systems. Well, maybe that's where... A bigger, larger ecosystem, that would benefit every workforce program in the City of Chicago. Right?

CH: Mm-hmm.

MR: And so, those are the kind of, I think, ideas that we have to be willing to be bold. And yeah, it may not work, but let's try. And I do think, and again, I'm cautiously optimistic, that in this environment, I have seen people being more willing to try things outside the box. They really think it is innovative. So I'm just hoping we can continue to drive that.

CH: Just the last question that I'll give, and this is probably a big one. After these past two years of COVID and national movements for racial equity, are Chicago's workers closer to being able to translate work into wealth?

BM: Not yet.

CH: Mm-hmm.

MR: Yeah. I would... We still got some work to do. This is not going to be easy. There is no silver bullet to solving this problem. It's going to take multiple... I mean, to be frank, it's going to probably take a generation for us to figure these things out, how to make them work together and have it be more seamless and doing all of those things. Now, a lot of things are happening, and that's great. So I do... I

think, specifically in my sector, I can tell you that things are better than they were five years ago. I can tell you that right now.

CH: Mm-hmm.

MR: I do think that there's a genuine interest in DEIA that I didn't see before. Right? There's a genuine interest in the sector of making sure that we're more diverse. But that's not enough. Right? And so, we've talked a lot about that today, and I just think that we have to, again, still be bold, still break these silos down, still work collaboratively, not in our own world, but collaboratively to solve these problems.

BM: Yeah. I said not yet, right? And I think the first stage of any solution is recognizing the problem. I sound like 12 steps of grief for addiction, but recognizing the problem, saying it aloud, and then really starting the conversation to how to fix it, how to improve it. And I think we're somewhere in that middle right now. Right? There are still some places and spaces where you can't say it.

CH: Mm-hmm.

BM: But I think in our industries and with leadership like Manny's and hopefully myself, we are giving the space to say it, and I think that that's the starting point.

CH: Well, I think that this has been a great conversation. It's been really uplifting to me to hear you all be willing to talk about the issues at a root cause level, and then also to think about how we can support a better ecosystem. So I'm excited to continue talking to you all and working with you all as we move forward. And yeah, thank you.

BM: Thanks, Caleb.

MR: Thank you.

BM: Thanks, Manny.

MR: Thank you, Bela.

CH: Joining me in conversation now are Matt Bruce and Patrick Combs. Matt became the first executive director of the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance in October 2012. Under his leadership, the Funder Alliance has raised more than \$20 million, growing from 5 to 25 funders, and initiated a set of strategic initiative focused on industry workforce partnerships, systems change, and workforce innovation. Matt has also stewarded the creation of a new fund to support the region's career pathway system and a new commitment to fight wage theft and discrimination in low-wage occupations.

Patrick Combs, who joined the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership as the chief program officer in 2020, currently serves as the acting co-chief executive officer. Patrick believes in driving equitable development across a portfolio of 29 programs that include all of our federal workforce programs, the COVID-19 Community Response Corps, community innovations programs, and business engagement.

I'm going to start with you, Patrick. The Chicago region is preparing to receive an influx of federal resources to recover from the pandemic and modernize our infrastructure. The Chicago Cook Workforce

Partnership received a grant from We Rise Together to hire additional staff, train new partners, and deploy a new mobile unit to expand workforce services to more places and people across Chicago and Cook County, enabling more effective use of federal funding. What do you see as the most promising opportunities for job seekers of color?

Patrick Combs: Caleb, thank you for asking. It's a really good question, and we're really thankful for the Trust of believing in our community engagement strategy. What I really see is the biggest opportunity for communities of color right now is, we are seeing the tightest labor market we've seen in a very, very long time. And employers are desperate for talent, and the traditional pools of talent that they've gone to are dry. So to be able for their businesses continue to grow and thrive, they need to reach in pools of talent they've never thought to go to before.

And so, that's where our community engagement strategy comes in, whether it's getting mobile workforce units out to communities that don't have services directly there, or really deeply engaging in a thoughtful and meaningful way with community-based organizations and faith-based groups. It's incumbent upon our organization, organizations like ours, to really dig deep and find that pools of talent in the community that have not had the opportunity to get pushed into these good jobs throughout Chicago and Cook County, and get them into these jobs while we still have the opportunity to.

CH: Awesome. The Partnership and Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance are both celebrating their 10th anniversaries this year. As a long-time Funder Alliance partner and champion for economic inclusion, how would you say the workforce ecosystem has changed over the last decade?

PC: Yeah. I mean, I would say, just like any other 10-year-old, we're learning new things. We're learning new words and new ways to talk about ourselves and our world. At the end of the day, workforce development hasn't changed very much. It is still about connecting employers that need talent and talent to those employers. But the way we talk about the work we do has changed dramatically in the last 10 years. 10 years ago, when people talked about equity, they were probably talking about the stock market. They were talking about home ownership. They were not talking about economic development.

But today, equity is center in a lot of the work that all of us do. And so, it just... And words like inclusivity were never mentioned 10 years ago. Words like access, talking about systems change. So just the way we talk about the work we do and the way we talk about the impact we want to make, I would say, is probably the biggest change we've seen in the last 10 years.

CH: You mentioned equity and inclusivity. How does that increased emphasis on equity and inclusivity translate to employer practices shifting?

PC: I just had a conversation the other day with different employer groups, and they had an issue about how long it took to do background checks. And it took so long for background checks that by the time they came back, people had already found a different opportunity. And so, I challenged them. Why are you doing a background check? If this position does not require the person to handle sensitive information or anything else, why is the default to do a background check for everybody?

And it's challenging businesses about the way they've always done things because it's the way they've always done it. And asking them, "Is it how you've always done it?" kept people out of the labor pool, who are great people and great sources of talent, just because it's the way we've always done it.

CH: Matt, I see you nodding along. Is there anything you would like to add to that?

Matt Bruce: Yeah. These are issues that Patrick and I talk about a lot that... This is a moment in time where I think we in the workforce development field feel we have this opportunity to seize with employers to get them to turn to populations that they just have not looked to before. And we think if we can convince them now that these are great sources of talent, we can put in place relationships and norms and cultures that hopefully last well beyond the moment that we're in.

CH: In the previous conversation, I spoke with the leaders of organizations working to help people of color access the skills and resources they need to find employment. With so many recent news reports about a labor shortage, one might think finding a job should be easy in this moment. What is the real headline folks should be looking at?

MB: Yeah. I think there's a number of things really going on that we need to unpack. It's certainly true, as Patrick was saying, the labor market is tight. The demand for workers is just outpacing the supply of workers. But if you look into that, some of it is that the demand for workers for the jobs employers are offering, the supply is not interested in those jobs. So, in some ways, we have a job quality crisis, as much as we have a labor market crisis.

Another thing going on that was a pattern that we saw before, as just we're feeling the effects of that pattern, is that we really have sort of a bifurcated economy in many ways where we have a low-wage, low-skill, sort of disempowered worker economy. That's where we had seen a lot of wage growth or a lot of job growth over the past 15-plus years, and then a high-skill, high-wage economy. The employers are really going to feel that labor shortage, especially in those higher skilled jobs.

But another thing that's going on underneath all of this is that there's just structural demographic challenge that we're seeing. The baby boomer generation is retiring. The pandemic accelerated them leaving the workforce. We see that. And the generation of workers coming into the workforce now, and those workers who are 18 now or 17, 16, et cetera, they just don't have the numbers to replace the workers who are going to be leaving that we're going to be losing over the next decade or so.

And so, this speaks to what Patrick was saying. Employers need to find new sources of talent. They have gotten out of the habit of employing young adults and youth, and that needs to change. We, as a society, have shut out whole parts of our labor market, for example, through the criminal justice system, as Patrick was mentioning. We have a whole swath of workers who... No one has invested in to help them build up their skills. And so, we've effectively shut them out of certain parts of the labor market. So in this moment in time, we can work with employers to turn back or turn to these sources of talent that they've just not tapped into.

CH: One of the things that you just said that resonated with me is this idea of employers looking in different spaces for potential employees. But a question that I have for the both of you, we always ask the question of are employees ready to enter these parts of the workforce, but are employers ready to support them so that they can actually be successful in these roles?

MB: Yeah. I think employers that figure out how to get ready are going to find that that's going to be their competitive advantage. I think we... In a nice way, I hope we have these sort of market pressures on employers to figure this out. Speaking from the kind of work that we do, our bias is towards

employer collaboration and employer engagement with the public workforce system, with the community organizations that are part of the public workforce system. Employers need partners to help figure that out. Those partners are there. So employers that figure out how to engage, how to innovate, learn from each other, they're going to have a step up.

PC: Yeah. I agree with everything Matt said. And part of it too, what we always talk about is meeting people where they're at, where we have to meet, employers, where they're at as well, and try to go into it, not assuming that they are not using these inclusive hiring practices or looking at these pools of talent because they don't want to, but because they don't know how to. And so, helping them learn how to do things differently and teaching them to fish again. They used the same fishing rod for 30 years, and now we're telling them, "Well, now there's a new way we can do things."

And so, part of what we do is not just work with job seekers, but also educating employers on these best practices. And as Matt said, it's really about getting employers to talk with each other and to champion with each other why these kinds of hiring practices are good for their bottom line. So we really have to show the business case why these hiring practices are the right thing for their business.

CH: Yeah. I like the point that you made about giving them the tools. Really, it's about giving everyone at every level the tools to be able to facilitate these partnerships, and I know that both of you from your roles have done some work to facilitate employer practice change and also collaborations between workforce trainers, the workers, and the employers. I want to take a step back and look at the bigger picture for a second. Reflecting on the past 10 years of your organizations, what solutions are you most proud of?

PC: I think what I'm most proud of is, there's local workforce systems in every city and community around the country. They're funded through this federal act called the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. But the way we do things in Chicago is different than where it's done anywhere else in the country, and definitely different than any big city we've done in the country. And that is because we don't just put all of our resources and all of our funding into a few large locations and try to funnel people into them. We invest in communities.

So we have a delegate network of over 90 organizations that we fund that we primarily try to fund in communities that have lacked investment, that have seen systemic racism, that have seen disenfranchisement to, again, reach people in communities that have been left behind. And so, I'm really proud of how we've designed the way we do things here because we decided to come up with a solution that was best for Chicago and not necessarily what everybody around the country was doing.

MB: I'll just chime in that an organization that's been able to pull off a service delivery system that serves both city and county, and the city and the county supported together, that is a major achievement. You just don't see that in other parts of the public service sector.

PC: Thank you, Matt. We love our colleagues from the city and from the county. They're both wonderful. And we love the support from both sides.

CH: The love is all around.

MB: I'll chime in. For the Funder Alliance over the past 10 years, some things that rise to the top for me are the focus on worker rights and worker power. And we've seen this with some of our close partners, like the Partnership, Chicago Jobs Council as well, the sort of recognition that... The importance of workers knowing their rights and be able to stand up for their rights, that that is in fact part of workforce development.

MB: The second thing that rises to the top for me is just this notion of employer collaboration has now become almost like a norm, where it's not something where we have to sell the case of employer collaboration. We need employers to work together on this. We have so many examples now of these employer tables, whether in financial services or healthcare or public health or early childhood education or manufacturing. I think the case has really been effectively made that there is benefit to employers coming together and working together on their shared workforce issues. So that's great to see that the field has moved in that direction and we've tried to play our part in that.

The last thing I'd point to is seeing use of shared systems. So these are things we constantly need to keep working on. But this notion that... Whether it's something like careerpathways.net or something like the Career Readiness Framework that Chicago Jobs Council has been working on, something like best practices in trauma-informed care that the Partnership has been a leader on. This sort of notion that we don't need to recreate the wheel in all the different parts of the workforce system if there's a great tool or a great curriculum or a great approach, that it can be applied by many partners and institutions in Chicagoland workforce development, and we can all benefit from it by sharing in that progress.

CH: I want to take a step now and look towards the future. You're both celebrating 10-year anniversaries of your organizations. What do the next 10 years look like, not just for your organizations, but for the Chicago worker?

MB: I'll say a few things that I'm excited about. One is, I'm just bullish on investing in workforce. Well, it's part of our mission that more philanthropy should invest in workforce development, partners like the community organizations that the Partnership funds, their delegate agencies. That's a good example of good investments in workforce. And it's part of our mission. How do we convince more philanthropists, more foundations that, if you're looking for impact, if you're looking for closing equity gaps, this is a good place to invest your philanthropic dollars? And I'm optimistic that that case is working, that we will see more foundations, more donor-advised funds, more philanthropists investing in workforce.

The other thing I'm hopeful about is a recognition that we need to have more and more innovative solutions for things we've started calling the social determinants of wealth. So access to affordable quality child care, access to affordable and reliable transportation, access to affordable and reliable mental health services. These are all things that we know in our day-to-day work in workforce development absolutely gets in the way of, say, a training program succeeding, absolutely gets in the way of someone succeeding once they've transitioned into a job. So I think that's on the horizon. We know we need to work on those big, structural challenges.

PC: Yeah. And I agree with Matt. I think my vision for the next 10 years is, how do we help families and individuals build wealth through employment? Workforce development a long time ago was seen as a social service, and now it's rightfully viewed as part of the economic development sphere. And for a long time, it was an anti-poverty program. But I think we need to start talking about it as a pro-wealth

program. The problem isn't that these communities are too poor. The problem is these communities don't have enough wealth in them.

And so, how do we help people grow their wealth, grow their family wealth, and get past family-sustaining wages to wealth-building wages, and really change the trajectory for themselves and their family? So that's what I'm really excited about and bullish about for the Chicago worker for the next 10 years. And I'm just bullish on the Chicago economy. I think we're a growing city. I think we're a city of the 21st century. And I think, as more and more employers see that, we're going to continue to see more and more employers moving here, relocating here and seeing it. The reason is because we have the talent. We have the talent and we have the ability to get talent to those jobs. And so, I'm bullish on the next 10 years.

CH: The thing that you both said that highlights something from our earlier conversation is this idea of how do we support the work that happens around the work and making sure that folks are not just getting into family-sustaining jobs, but how are we supporting them into wealth-building. And so, thank you both so much. Any final comments you'd like to give?

MB: That's a great point to end on, Caleb. I mean, we're seeing some experiments in universal basic income, for example. And I think what we're going to find is, as we lower barriers like that for families, they actually work more. They engage in the labor market more. It doesn't turn them away from work. It actually allows them get to a place where working is, what Patrick was talking about, sort of a wealth-building activity and not just a subsistence activity.

PC: We're looking at things about ways to be innovative and not look at financial literacy or financial empowerment education as a service to an individual, but as a service to offer to businesses for them to offer to their employees because, again, it's not just about getting somebody the job, but how do we support them through that job so they can build that wealth.

CH: Two great points and nothing else to add. I really appreciate you all taking the time to talk with us today.

PC: Thanks, Caleb.

MB: Thank you.

CH: I want to extend my thanks to all the wonderful guests we had on today's episode of Trust Talks. And I also like to acknowledge the Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance and the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, who are celebrating 10-year anniversaries this year. CWFA's anniversary kicks off in May and culminates in September with a symposium co-hosted with Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership.

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