**Social Issue Spotlight: Women and Girls Empowerment**

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**SPEAKERS**

Kimberly Swartz

**Kimberly Swartz 11:55:33**

All right, fantastic. Thank you everyone on behalf of the taproot team, I want to thank and welcome you to today's event. taproot social issues spotlight on women and girls empowerment organizations, this should be a really fun one. So we're excited to have you each here for this lunch and learn. Or it might be a breakfast and learn if you're joining from the West Coast, which I recognize a few of the names on the line. And I know that you're located out in California, and I think I see someone from Washington as well. So you're very welcome here. Today is an equal mix of education and celebration. We're here to collectively celebrate Valentine's Day, which is a fun holiday that's gained popularity in the recent years. And it provides us with this great opportunity to shower love and appreciation on the amazing women in our life. We know that communities thrive when all people, regardless of their gender identity have access to social, economic, personal and political freedoms. Nonprofit organizations are key players in the onboarding, ongoing battle for gender equality. And nonprofits are on the frontlines. They're fighting for this. And so we're here to learn from incredible leaders in taproots nonprofit community whose mission serve women and girls and seek to empower, elevate and inspire.

So this is going to be an open conversation on the challenges impacting women and girls, and how nonprofits are addressing this issue and communities across the country. We'll also discuss, of course, ways that these organizations and organizations like them could use your support. So that includes pro bono consulting through taproot, but it also includes ways you can get in touch with these organizations directly. ways you can use your advocacy use your voice, in politics, on social media and beyond. So thank you to everyone who submitted questions when you registered for this event. We've made note of all of those. And so we've already woven them into our plans for what to pose to the panel today. But questions throughout are welcomed. So use the q&a box, use the chat box. And then if we have time, in a second half of the event will also invite folks to raise their hands virtually and come off mute and ask questions to our panelists live. So a few logistical notes before officially diving in. We are recording this panel, we don't want to miss out on any of their great insights. We will share the panel with everyone who registered and it'll also be published on the taproot site for easy viewing. We are going to ask folks to keep themselves muted until we open things up and invite people to come off of mute. We do have a rather large group in the room today. So we're just asking people to stay muted for an easy listening and participation experience for the rest of our attendees. And if you need any tech assistance throughout, please shoot a private chat to my taproot colleague on the line.

Meghan Gillette is on the line from taproot and she will be your point person for any tech issues that you have. Alright, so with all the logistics out of the way, I'm going to get things rolling with some introductions. My name is Kimberly Swartz, my pronouns are she her hers. I'm located in Charlotte, North Carolina. And I'm taproots, director of community engagement. I'm going to be the moderator during today's panel. I know we had a few folks who registered for this event share during the registration that they were new to taproot they were new to our nonprofit. So just a quick introduction moment for our organization. But of course, if you'd like any additional details or context, drop it in the chat or message me or Megan privately, and we would be happy to connect with you more one on one after this. So Taproot Foundation is a US based nonprofit. And we get nonprofits the support they need for free. So we do that by facilitating connections with talented professionals from the worlds of marketing, HR, operations, finance, strategy it and more. And I know I see a few of our amazing volunteers on the line, I recognize the names that are joining and, and I can't thank you enough for helping us be able to serve all of these amazing nonprofits in the way that we do. And then Megan, if I could just ask you for folks interested in joining taproots community, Megan will drop a link in the chat. And again, we'd be happy to chat with you more about how the logistics of getting involved looks like through our programs. But with that, I want the bulk of this conversation. We're here to learn from some amazing nonprofits. And so I'm going to turn the turn the attention and then very soon microphone over to them. I'm delighted to introduce our speakers.

Starting with Karen Davis Thompson, who is a co founder of the nonprofit sisters empowering women. She's an advocate and adoptive mom, a former foster parent and a storyteller. And she and her sisters actually co founded this nonprofit together after they started to learn more about the foster care system and wondering what happens to girls who are growing up. Things like milestones like prom, and homecoming. And so they started the nonprofits with their program gowns for girls, providing gowns, and shoes and accessories, and sometimes assistance with hair and nails and anything needed to make a girl feel special on these big monumental moments in their life. And so as they learn more about the population they served and realize the youth a safer space to strengthen their voice and build confidence. They in their nonprofit group, and have now multiple programs, really teaching girls and supporting them in their journey to adulthood. So really excited to learn more from Karen, and hear all about her organization and ways we can support that work. We're also joined by Juliette Fishman, who is the co founder of Women for Women, which is a nonprofit organization located in Brooklyn, New York. And it's dedicated to empowering women in need, so that they're able to lift themselves out of poverty and reach economic independence. So the founders are started as friends and then went into this nonprofit work together, and they joined forces to help a woman in need by drawing on their networks and putting their skills to work. They provide professional advice, including advocacy and real estate and legal and financial and education on so much more,

As well as tutoring and wellbeing counseling to equip women with a set of tools to help them reach their goals and become independent. Women for Women also advocates for policy changes and improvements at the local and the city and the state level, to benefit women who are facing discrimination. So thank you so much, Juliette, for being a part of this today. Really, really excited to hear more from you. And then we also, we're going to be joined by a wonderful woman, Kate slaughter, who's the leader of exponential power of women, she unfortunately, had to drop out last minute because of a family health care emergency. So she won't be a part of today's panel.

But we will include information about her nonprofit and ways to get involved with her work in the follow up for today's event. So just really quickly, want to make sure that we take the time to highlight her organization's mission and vision, exponential power of women as a catalyst for local impact. And they're focused on inspiring and engaging women to unite to fulfill unmet local community needs. So their efforts grow from the overall philanthropic pie, increasing volunteerism cause related engagement and donations. And they're really after this idea of growing the good exponentially to create a safe, equal and free world of opportunity for all regardless of their gender identity. So unfortunately, we won't hear from Kate live, but there will be plenty of opportunities for each of you to connect with Kate connect with exponential power of women following this event, and we definitely encourage you to do so. So with that said, thank you to each of these leaders for joining us today. And thank you in advance for sharing your expertise and helping us learn more about this critical social issue. So I would love to get things rolling. And perhaps Karen, you won't mind if I asked you to jump in first. We'd love to learn why you do what you do. What called you into this work? What is the issue that you and your organization are addressing.

12:04:48

So as you mentioned, thank you so much for this opportunity and for the introduction. But as you mentioned, it started I'm a former foster parent. And asI got to know more about the foster care system, I wondered about I guess I was naive, I was very young, when my husband and I were foster parents and ultimately became adoptive parents through the system. But I guess I had never put it together that not all children who are in the system, find their forever home. And so I began to ask the workers like what happens for you know, like, people think prom and homecoming. It's just a dance, but it's really much more than that. And so I asked what happens with that and the answer I got was that you know, they just wear a dress worker might have which really wasn't it just it broke our hearts when we heard that. And so that's where we started. And as we got to know, the young ladies and even more young ladies in those underrepresented areas, we realized that they really were lacking the voice, the communication skills. A lot of them are girls of color.

And what I experienced, even at an early age, I do words for a living, I love to tell stories, I love words. And so my ability to communicate, even at a young age, you know, I was fairly good at it. And so as you are able to assert yourself to advocate for yourself, a lot of times you get this, she's disrespectful. She's aggressive, she's angry, etc. And it's really more about me being able to say what I need, even as a high school student, I taught school for a couple of years, and you want them to be independent, yet, when they begin to ask questions, the more inquisitive they become, the more those labels are things that I heard from other teachers in the school system. And so in short, we do what we do, because I want these girls to understand that they have a right to advocate for themselves, that their voice does matter, that their story and experiences are worth telling. And that it doesn't matter what other people think that that voice shouldn't be silenced. And if you learn that early, it gives you the confidence you need, so that when you get into college, when you get into corporate spaces, and people try to discount what you have to say, or when you are defending yourself, advocating for yourself. And you're told that you're being argumentative, or you're told that you're being angry or aggressive. You know how to handle that. Because those are skills that you learned early, and you are better equipped, you know that this is coming, unfortunately. And so you're better able to deal with it. When that time comes and you're better able to be confident in your voice and not feel that you have to stifle what you have to say.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:07:25

I love that. And I feel like I could see some women's heads nodding as you're sharing this, your story of a women's or a girl's sense of independence, being used against them as a weapon. And whether it's an educational setting or workplace setting. And I'm sure that there's a lot of us on the line who can who that unfortunately can resonate with and we're looking forward to digging more into that. Throughout today's conversation. Juliet would love to turn the mic over to you to to hear your perspective on the same question, What drew you into this work? And why do you do the work that you do at your organization?

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Yes, and I would love to answer but I just want to turn back to a Karen was saying it words are very powerful when you are able to voice who you are to explain to others that you're going to work with or study with what you stand for. That's that's a huge plus. And there are many countries in which that is not even an opportunity. So kudos to you and the work you do at Sisters empowering women. I think it's very, very critical. And young men need to learn that too. But that's for another panel. So why do I do what I do. I love working at women. For women. I co founded this organization because my team and I realized there was an opportunity to help survivors of domestic violence, and to have a meaningful impact on the lives of our sisters. I started my professional journey as a corporate lawyer. There I honed persuasiveness and analytical skills. After 10 plus years in various roles asa lawyer, or more recently, as a research center director at Columbia University, I realized how much helping others outside my immediate family was fulfilling. I hope to nurture and grow our organization for many decades to come. I have to thank my husband whose employment currently allows us to pay for our bills, because my job is not so is not so lucrative. But it's very fulfilling in so many other ways. So he's supporting our efforts and initiatives to help others and, and that's why I love what I do.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:09:48

I love that. And I love that you just gave your partner a shout out there too. I think it goes back to something we put on the description page for this event event. All people benefit when folks, regardless of their gender identity are empowered and elevated and allowed full participation in society. And so I love that your partner is supportive as you dive into this at work, but also with the realization that this isn't just a cause that women and girls should be concerned about this because that impacts all of us and takes away from the power of our communities. So on that note, I'd love to dial in on What's one specific issue is so pressing right now that you feel that everyone on the line should know about what is one thing that you are tackling uniquely at your organization that you're really trying to galvanize support against. And Juliet, I hope you don't mind if this time I, I pose that question to you first.

12:10:54

So say it again, what's one area of Canal?

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:10:57

One? What's one challenge that your organization thinks everyone on the line should know about? Because you're really trying to galvanize community support against it, what's one really pressing challenge that you're facing right now

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that the organization is facing or that the woman we're serving, are facing the women you're serving? Okay, so the list is very long, they need employment, they need education, they need childcare. So I would say that without those three founding, even food at some point, so those four pillars need to be addressed before we can even go into more systemic issues. But I think more there is awareness around domestic violence, I think people know that it's one out of three women will have faced domestic violence in the course of their lifetime. worldwide. In the US, I think it's more like one out of four. And then in New York City, it's 37%. So I think people may be aware that they're not then, you know, these are statistics that were published by various organizations, whether it's the United Nations or the Coalition Against Domestic Violence. So maybe raising more awareness couldn't hurt, but also also finding jobs, good employment for single mothers that are struggling to make ends meet, that don't have the benefit of two incomes coming into the household. Maybe that's a very important topic. We live in good talk for myself, I live in Brooklyn. So in New York City, that cost of living is outrageous. And if you're a single mother, and you have to pick up your son or daughter at 4pm, or sometimes even earlier, if you don't have after school, that your your opportunities are very limited, no matter how smart no matter how educated, they're very limited. And so I think there should be more. And maybe this is at the government level, and not just you know, fundraising and private donations. But there should be more support for decent housing, good employment for single mothers.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:13:14

Yeah, absolutely. And what I'm hearing is, if we look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right, we're still addressing needs on that bottom level, right? Safety, housing, food security. And once we have those in place, then we can start to really address the root cause of all of these symptoms. Yes, great. Karen, what about on your side of the equation? What's this? What's the one or two kind of pressing immediate challenges that your community members are faced with at the moment,

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and I have to agree with Juliette on a lot of it. So even in Florida, we've experienced a huge increase in the cost of living. And so we are getting a lot of single moms who are reaching out because they can't afford it their child senior year in high school, I just had a mom call the other day, she can't afford, you know, the prom dress, she can't afford senior. I mean, like she's got to figure out how they're going to eat, right, a place to stay. And so sometimes some of those things that people think are trivial, which to the child, they're not trivial at all have to go by the wayside, because they they're doing all they can to have a decent housing.

We really have a problem with that here in the state of Florida as well. And then as it relates to the, the young ladies that we serve, believe it or not, one big issue that we're facing here in Florida, is just the perception of girls of color, especially in school systems. And so there's a lot of adult suffocation, if you will, of girls of color, in terms of they're not seeing the way others are seeing when that you they're not seen as children, sometimes, you know, there's this disbelief that they're older, right? I mean, 16 is 16 No matter the color of your skin. 15 is 15. But the way they're often treated, we've even seen an increase and there have been studies on that as well. And the number of girls who are being arrested for stuff, it's like it would go into jail for that or six year olds who are tased right. I mean, it there just seems to be more debt that we're seeing in education, a lot more people who just don't they don't want to take the time to understand what some of these young ladies are going through just to make it to school. Whew, on a daily basis. Um, so there is a big increase in that year in Florida. And again, as Juliette was saying, we're also seeing it in terms of just the ability to survive day to day, finding a safe space, a safe place to live, food to eat. So those two things, I think, are ones that we're seeing and are really pressing here in our area.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:15:52

Yeah, absolutely. And you started touching on common misconceptions that are harming women and girls and other community members as well. And I wonder if we can dig into that a little bit further, because I'm sure there are plenty of misconceptions or viewpoints of either nonprofits working in the women and girls space, or just women and girls, you know, the community members in which you're serving. And so I'm wondering if either of you could speak to that a little bit more? What are some of those common misconceptions that you and your team are battling against in your mission, trip and work?

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Um, I think in our area, one is that sometimes people feel like, oh, there are all these jobs out there, you know, they just need to go and you know, get one of those jobs. I mean, everybody's hiring, right? You get a lot of that. In our area. There's also a sense, as I said before, of, there's a lot of stereotypes as it relates to a young lady's ability to advocate for what she needs, or to stick up for what she believes in. And there's the sense that, oh, she's just rude and disrespectful, which isn't necessarily the case. And so, you know, I'll give an example in my own life. So I have a special needs daughter, she is now 21. And at the time, she attended a charter school in our area that was supposed to be for children with special needs. And I got a referral for her. That shit that said, she destroyed school property, right? So you see, you get that and you think, Oh, my God, did you need to face a wall? Did she like, you know, break something. And so I am not like a lot of parents. And I encourage parents, when you get that type of thing, ask questions. So I said, Well, what exactly did she do? My child broke a pencil in half a referral, and accused her of destroying school property. So that word choice matters and how she's perceived right now, she's destroyed a pencil that I may have donated. You know, I mean, I donate it consoles to the classroom.

So you're calling that school property and, and that type of word choice on a referral. Now she was in elementary school, but there are colleges and the military, they look at a child record as they get into high school. And if you have a referral that says you destroyed school property, I mean, and then when you dig into it, she broke a pencil in half, or you accused her of doing something. And she was adamant that she didn't do it. And so before that she got written up. So I just think that there are a lot of stereotypes around a young woman, especially of color, but just in general, and their ability to speak their minds and to speak for themselves. And there's a way for them to be respectful when they do it. But it doesn't mean that they don't have a right to advocate for themselves. And so that's a big one that we see for a lot of our girls. And as I said, for some of the women that we serve, it's just, you know, people think jobs are just growing on trees, and it's just as simple as applying. And you can get the job and what's the big deal? And so that's a lot of what we're experiencing here.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:19:03

Sure. And not all jobs are created equal, right? Right, pay is gonna be a huge differentiating factor. But also, I think, one of the through lines. So far in this discussion has just been the power of words and power of people's voices, both for the girls themselves and speaking up and advocating for themselves and telling their story, sharing our perspective, but also for all of us to recognize the power that our words can have on women and girls and their future journeys as well. Juliet would really love to hear your perspective on this question around misconceptions.

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I think the main problem is finding a bridge, a help tunnel, if you will, between the people who are empowered to help and who can, and the beautiful souls beautiful woman who are leaving your shelter, traumatized because they have been abused for a number of months or years by their partner. And so on one hand, you have confidentiality mandates, they can't really talk much about what they've been through or what they've done. And yet it's their story. It is their life. It won't be tomorrow, but it is part of yesterday and often is very much part of today. So finding channels of communication between For those women who have come from Angola, or Bangladesh, or France, or Senegal, and they don't have a group of friends, a tight group of friends, they can, you know, talk to. So to them, it would be very foreign and very intimidating to just pour their heart out to strangers, you know, all the other people in New York. So I think it's what I love about women. For women, it's just a few women, it's not a lot, but it's a few women, we do bring the two worlds worlds together, so that we can find connections, and we can find meaningful opportunities for them to grow to become more independent. So, yeah,

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:21:19

yeah. Let's let's talk about what you would need for growth and development what you both need, but both of your organizations are looking for to get your mission in front of more people and have your mission serve more people? Is there a lot of folks on the line, who are actively looking for ways to get back and ways to get involved with a cause, just like your own? And so with keeping in mind that taproots volunteer community is made up of people who want to give back using their professional skill sets from the worlds of marketing or tech or strategy, etc? We'd love to hear from both of you. On what are your top capacity strengthening needs, right now? What are things that your organization is looking for? And and how could volunteers? How could people get involved with you? And, Karen, I'll go to you first.

12:22:12

I think the two or three that really comes to mind one, as I said before, I love words. So writing isn't necessarily an issue. But to me, marketing in itself is a different skill set. And so really finding a way to stand out is something we've always struggled with. We're a small organization, we all work in addition to what we're doing. So just finding a way to really market ourselves to be able to get in front of people who can help us make more of a difference. Who can give us a greater voice is a big one. We're always in that even equates with social media, people who can help create content, it's just finding the time, you know, social media can take over your life. And it's an important part of really kind of getting out there. But are we doing it in the right way? are we utilizing it correctly?

That's always one that is a concern for us. We're always looking for somebody who has really strong grant writing skills, we are definitely still very small. So one issue we always struggle with is when they start asking about budget, there's not a whole lot there to share. And then making sure that we are applying for it, maybe ones that are better suited for smaller organizations that are still working on growing even though we've been around for several years. Like I said, it's not like we've been able to devote 100% of our time we all work and then the money we're making that our jobs, we're donating to the nonprofit. So just really finding people who can help us weed out those grants where hey, these would work best for an organization of your size that's really trying to move up. So I think those would be the two biggest one that come to mind, really helping us hone in on our marketing, making sure that we are in the right spaces, and then helping us writing those grants and finding the grants that make the most sense for what we're trying to achieve.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:24:06

Yeah, absolutely. Juliet, what about from your end?

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So if I had two words, what do we need time and money. But for the everybody present here who took the time, thank you all for joining today's conversation. There are three types of expertise that we desperately need at Women for Women. The first one is find a financial expert, so someone who can assist us with accounting budget and tax preparation. Like I said, I'm a lawyer, and I'm doing all of that, and it's not cute. We need help. So someone who can assist the clients also with financial literacy, I'm working to talk to BNP and other banks in New York to find someone who can sit down with these women and tell them how to build their credit how to how to apply for certain fellowship opportunities, or even just how to how to save, you know how to have a good healthy financial etiquette. So that's the one first piece to financial expert. The second would be an advisory consultants. So someone with 25 or more years of experience in managing nonprofit organizations, someone who sit on a bunch of nonprofit boards and who could provide guidance as to how to better structure or organization if that person could identify grants, I would be happy to to apply for such grants. But I think we could use a more strategic approach. So, Karen, we're sharing the this.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:25:44

Some real three lines.

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That's right. That's right. This one is I mean, it's, you know, the sources of income are not are not infinite. It's grants, it's donations, whether it's individuals or corporate. So, so I think grants are are terrific, but they're very competitive and difficult to obtain. And anyway, they can be interesting to the third person would be a communication or social media expert. So that person would go ahead and challenge our current platform, I designed our website. And I'm sure it could use a little tweaking here and there, I'd love to hear more about someone who's passionate and equipped to doing that. Newsletters versus letters asking for community donations, like how do we tailor a better message, I want to use LinkedIn and leverage Instagram as well. But I don't have the bandwidth nor the expertise. So if someone had that expertise, and was interested in building a communication plan, that would be wonderful. And in that communication plan, specifically, we have two things that we're looking for. I think it's the same for most of you all on your organization's and maybe it's not that you're lucky. But in my organization, we have, we have various we have the same mission, but we have different visions. I'm more of someone who wants to grow the organization, and other members of my team, like the way it is and want to nurture what we currently have, which is already great. Both, you know, both the perspectives are fine. But I sometimes need to advocate on behalf of social media and train the rest of my team telling them that in 2023, you need social media,

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:27:40

and that internal buy in,

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right, and so that is complicated for some of them, whether it's age related or just a perspective of privacy preference, you know, all these factors. So it would be great to present how other similar grassroot organizations have achieved success with their social media campaign. And we have to be very careful to protect our woman's privacy, right, nothing can transplant No, no pictures, no names. So but there are ways to do

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:28:17

this. So storytelling without putting individual humans

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at risk. Exactly. Exactly. There, our top priority is preserving their well being and privacy. And also for fundraising, we need to storytel, right? Because otherwise, there's no transparency and people donors would be like, well, what are you doing? So? So presenting that sort of comparative analysis of how others have achieved their goals would be helpful? And then executing? Or what are the execution steps to implement this communication plan? So how do we publish content? How do we target our audience? How do we manage our time? You know, like, for example, march 8, and ninth are coming up. And I would like to do something for the woman International Day. It sounds like a perfect fit, and why not raise awareness while everybody else is doing it? But yeah, what would be a good piece of content?

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:29:14

So yeah. All right. So folks on the line, we heard, financial management needs social media needs are a big one messaging. And we heard a lot of things around fundraising. So I know some of our attendees on the line are from the nonprofit world. And they might be here representing their own nonprofit organization, or maybe a grant making body that they belong to, you have incredibly valuable skills that other organizations could also benefit from. So this is a call to action to everyone. Here, we are sending out a follow up email from this event that is going to have Karen and Juliet's contact information, but it's also going to have open volunteer opportunities that they currently have listed through tap requests or through other mechanisms.

And you're all encouraged to get involved here. I hope there's at least one action item that we can all take away from this. And then I want to go back to a question that was actually submitted in advance from an attendee that I see who's on the line, a Troy, who's one of our longtime taproot pro bono consultants, and he had posed a question around. Are there any further training or development needs? or resources that your organization's or, you know, speaking to your expertise generally, of working with other organizations serving women and girls, are there any staff development or community development needs that someone with an HR expertise could come in and assist with? And Karen and, Julie, I feel like you both spoke to this a little bit when you talked about mentoring services and like job training services that you both offer. But with that HR expertise, caveat in mind, I'm wondering if you could speak to Troy's question.

12:31:05

Sure, well, first of all, oh, go go for it here.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:31:08

Good. Oh,

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Troy, you're, you're a trooper, you're one of the very few. So congratulations to making it on this panel. Or on the on this on this session today. So you're asking for management training for the woman that we serve, right. So whether it's for their jobs, or to reach the right education, or to put their finances in order so that they can they can better assist their family? Is that what you're asking? I just want to make sure I understand the question.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:31:47

And Troy, I see you're off of mute, definitely jump in and and add some more context if you'd like. That looks like we're not able to hear you. So I will hear me now. Oh, yes, we hear you now. Go ahead. Try

12:32:06

it. My apologies. Yeah. So you know, with my background and the startup, they started, it's round, personal growth and personal development and professional leadership development. Personally, I dedicate 80% of, you know, our focus towards women and girls. And so, in general, as I'm crafting, you know, these things that could help folks develop and be fulfilled, I just want to understand broadly based on your experience, you know, in house for maybe staff, but also, you know, what's generally out there as some guidance as I'm kind of putting things together, a general need. Thank you.

12:32:54

So it would be listing your services so that women girls, and for 20%, others would be able to enter the workforce, I'm not quite sure I fully understand what you're trying to achieve.

12:33:10

I'm sorry. It's basically to help folks grow personally and professionally, and to be more fulfilled and to advance in the workplace and in the community. My flavor is around leadership. And so I'm just curious, as far as what everyone is seeing out there that I can kind of add to what I'm trying to develop to content and curriculum and different things like that.

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Do you usually recruit folks who are have a bachelor's degree or it sounds to me like if they're if they want to aspire to management, they will have to be already pretty up down that chain. So to speak, the woman for example, that I helped day to day, often don't have a high school diploma?

12:34:03

Yeah, so for the fellowship program, is it's very specific to up and coming. female leaders, but as far as the stuff that my startup is looking to develop is for basically women of all age and where they are in their career. So it's a broad focus.

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And it could be Dental, early childhood social work, it could be anything.

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Yeah, it's anything as far as areas of growth that would further their profession, their their effectiveness and possibly to self lead themselves and lead others basically. Hmm,

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:34:47

yeah, so just competencies, developing those competencies training, flexing those, so they're able to enter the workforce no matter what sector they advance into. So I'm curious as it relates to trice questions and the mission of his startup, what competencies do you see community members needing to grow and develop in are their mentorship opportunities for folks on the line with those women and girls or with rising leaders in your own organization? Karen, I see you reacting so I wonder if you have thoughts on this? Yes, a few. So

12:35:26

one of the new programs that we've started that Troy at some point we might be able to To take advantage of with you is, we call it the freshmen five, just because we started with five girls, but we are following them throughout their college journey. Now these happen to be in college, as we grow this program, if they want to go straight into the workforce, if they want to go into the military, the goal is to provide them with encouragement and mentoring if they need it, so that they don't feel you know, especially when you go off to school, it's that first opportunity where you've really got to you got to adult, right, you cannot call home if if things aren't going the way they need to go, if you need to be able to communicate what's happening. And so what we think they may need as we go along this journey with them is help as it as it relates to you know, they're looking to maybe they like I have one girl who wants to get a job this summer. And she has a very, very specific focus as to where she wants to work. And so she may need some help in terms of how does she go about really putting that into place, because it's not like she just wants any old job for the summer. Or, you know,

As I'm getting into my coursework, I'm having a little trouble or, or I want to get into some leadership roles, so that I have some stuff from my resume, but I don't really know what that looks like. And so an opportunity to mentor with some of them asthey get into that area, we're just getting to know them now. I mean, they're freshmen. And so this year, we're just taking the time to get a relationship, like they'll get, they'll get a snack box this month for Valentine's Day, I'm late sending all this I had some stuff to do with my daughter, but you know, so it's just really creating that relationship. So they understand that we are a resource if they need help, and don't really know what to do, or they may not have the support of family. And so if I'm understanding correctly, Troy, that may be a great way where we can connect, as we get to know them and see what their needs are, as they try to become leaders themselves. Because I think they're going to need to figure out what it what associations should I get involved in? What is it that I should do, um, so that I'm well rounded. And I'm not just a college student, but I'm a well rounded individual as I start looking for jobs,

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:37:36

right? If this is broadly my goal by going to college, these are some real tactical steps that you can take that you can get. Yeah, exactly. And I think, you know, with Troy's deep expertise, because he's been part of the taproot community for I think, 15 plus years now. And so other people like him on the line, even though this is a pilot initiative, I believe there are ways that you could take mentorship or take things that are built in this one consulting opportunity, and then expand that potential growth in the future and reach more students in that way, which I think is really special. Juliet, I see it, you've been like scribbling down notes and ideas, I think on your end. So I want to give you a chance to respond to this as well.

12:38:23

Yes, I, I'm thinking about how this is amazing. I mean, knowledge is power. And when you have a mentor and a mentee relationship, and it works well. It means the world, the world is your oyster, you can step by step plan, where you want to go. The challenge I see though, is I think it's very local. The people we work with are, you know, in Brooklyn, New York, they have no means to fly to California, nor nor do they have any desire, quite frankly, they just want to make it make it work where they are. So I think I would have to find this sort of mentor circle locally in New York. This is

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:39:08

so maybe the pro bono project, maybe the way you engage people from this community is by creating a strategy to recruit local mentors and local volunteers that have the specific skill sets your local girls and women are looking for an actual pro bono project.

12:39:29

Exactly. Because it's also so individual when when woman's dream is to become a nurse, although in a few years, she could even be a doctor if she wanted to. She's so smart, and dedicated. And then another woman's dream is early childhood education. So they're incredibly different spheres. You know, there's not it's not the same schooling, it's not the same skill set. So we kind of have to because we we help one woman at a time and we really hone in on her needs and her family needs. We kind of have to look at what exactly it is that this person needs to fulfill her dreams. And so right now I really is too early, but woman for women is a year and a half old. It's too early to say systematically systematically, what would a mentorship program looks like, look like Sorry, but, but that this is so exciting. I like to sit down with them and discuss what their dreams are, what their goals are, and also figure out what's achievable because some stuff is just not happening. You know, so we have to be realistic with what we can and can't say.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:40:37

Yeah. I have another question. This actually from two separate folks who've registered for this around, how can I help support this issue, but in my local community? So if folks aren't located in Brooklyn, if they're not located in Tampa, Florida, how would you both suggest getting involved or acting in support of women and girls, where someone is located, personally, and, Karen, I'll start with you first.

12:41:06

I think that, you know, you can find out maybe I don't know how much they know about the makeup of the community, where they where they live. But I think you can always get involved. At least for girls, especially by maybe volunteering in the schools, it's a great place to be able to find out maybe what's going on in your immediate area where you might be able to assist, you can always become an extension of what we're doing. I mean, I can't speak for Juliette, but I'd be happy to talk to somebody about how easy it is to start with something like the gowns, that's what we started with. And then you get to know these young ladies, and to find out what other challenges they're facing in their lives. And so it started out really simple, with this way to build their confidence, you know, to see their faces when they put the dresses on. And they know that they don't have to wear some dress that they're countless third wore from five years ago, right? Or whatever somebody found somewhere or, you know, some dress from their cousin once removed, because their mom lost their job, like, they get to go in and pick a dress. So it just started with such a confidence boost. And then from there, we got to know them and realized what other challenges they were facing as a foster as a child in foster care, or a child of parents who are not together people, you know, a family where there's not enough money, not enough food. So something as simple as that can be a great way to start. And it could be an extension of what we're doing.

And so that may be one way, you know, latch on to something that is meaningful to you, and then ask somebody, how do I start that in my local area, because I guarantee you, no matter where you live, there are people who are struggling in some way, form or fashion. And just like there are girls in my area that need gowns, almost 100% positive, wherever this person lives, their girls in their area, who need them to, and people who are sitting on them because their daughter didn't want to get rid of the dress. So the closet, she's never gonna wear it again, you know, or I've been looking for a place because a lot of people don't want to give them to Salvation Army because they sell them for example. So they want to give a tough place where they're given away for free. So those would be my two suggestions. One, find something like, you know, like I said that what we're doing and say, Hey, I think I want to start that in my area. What suggestions would you have, or going into the schools, especially if you want to work with girls is always a great place to start. Because as you mentor them, or tutor them and get to know them, you'll find out what other areas they may need help in and ways that you can participate and help build solutions for them.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:43:43

Yeah, I love that. Listening to girls and young women is the place to start. And that's going to help you inform your own choices. So that any support you're offering any advocacy you're offering is responsive to the actual needs that are present in your local community. So I love that you're highlighting start there. Juliet, what about from your end? How, how could you encourage people to get involved with this cause locally.

12:44:12

So if you're not in an area where some of the organizations you want to work with are located, then the beauty of it is I think we've heard at least for for Karen and I, we both need social media expertise, you don't need to be physically close to any of these organizations, and not to women, for women, not to sisters, empowering women, because you could do that from anywhere. And I think that's very valuable. That's very helpful. This kind of expertise you can do from wherever you are. So that's the first one. And the second, which is very obvious. The second one is finding an organization in your area that does meaningful stuff, because I think when you start seeing the local, like the actual impact on the woman's lives, how it transforms them, how grateful they are, how much you learn from them, then it's it's in these little key moments that it becomes quite addictive and you really want to continue going back at it and really giving a hand because it's a it makes for a meaningful life when you're able to impact others and others are impacting you in this in different ways but very powerful too.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:45:30

Yeah. I think it's so special, you just mentioned that you as the volunteer or as the supporter as the advocate, you learn so much from the exchange, just as the person that you're helping does as well. It's it's a win win situation. And I think that's what taproot always says about pro bono and skills based volunteer relationships to the nonprofit obviously gets a great benefit from the skills that the volunteer is donating. But the volunteer gets so much education and inspiration and networking connections out of it, as well. So

12:46:11

yeah, please. And I would add that it's, I didn't expect this because it was kind of an organic thing. This woman fell on our lap, so to speak. And we couldn't turn a blind eye and not help. So it started not because we wanted to start this project, but because it was there, she some something needed to happen. And, and so I never really quite realized, I realized I would miss my paycheck. But I didn't realize how much how fulfilling this work was going to be the strength, the resilience, of some of the women we work for, is, is unreal, it's they're so inspiring. They're so brave. And that gives us fuel to continue to keep fighting if we need to, or collaborating, or lending in hand. And it takes multiple forms. You know, it could be a weekly dinner with her and her family around our family table. And it could also be knocking on a council members door and saying this is not right. And there's discrimination and it needs to stop.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:47:25

Yeah. Speaking of that resilience and power of women, and we have a few minutes left, and so I want to close with a question around today's holiday Valentine's Day, you know, in celebration of all of the amazing women and girls and your to life, but also folks on the line, and people want to put in the chat. What are you celebrating? How are you celebrating the women in your life? During Valentine's Day? How are you stepping up for the women in your life on Valentine's Day, I would definitely encourage folks get in the chat. But Juliette and Karen, want to pose that question to you, how are you stepping up and celebrating and showering love on the wonderful women and girls in your two lives? Karen, I'll start with you.

12:48:15

So for me for gallon tines day, so a couple of things. One, I have a group of friends who are some of the best volunteers a girl could ask for. And so we delayed our vision board party, which we normally do in January, we all had a lot of stuff going on. And so we're gonna get together this weekend and celebrate the friendship and love that we've been able to create. And put that vision board together and support each other as we, you know, try and make those things happen throughout 2023. They are my core volunteer group, a couple of them actually we're on today. They're there for the Back to School Bash. When we give up bags, they're there when we give out gifts for teenage girls to help with that. They will donate time, money when they can and so we'll definitely celebrate and thank them for that. And then as it relates to the people that we service. As I said, we have our freshman five so I'm very excited. I've purchased all of their snacks that they asked for.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:49:12

If they're lucky girls like

12:49:15

me, we didn't want them to know what they were like when they would their first gift was a journal that we made that was personalized for each of them to encourage them to write about this journey in their freshman year of college. Their next gift they got something from us for Christmas and so they don't know that their gallon time state box is coming with their favorite snacks and so we will celebrate them and encourage them as they are on this journey. Some of them may be the first one in their immediate families to go to college. And so we are going to celebrate them in that way. And it is prom season so I will be celebrating young ladies in that way. I just had a young girl come by yesterday for gown I have somebody who's coming Wednesday. So we will be celebrating how we can be a support in that way. So we come up on prom season here in Florida.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:50:04

That's beautiful. Juliet how about for you?

12:50:09

Karen can I get one of those bags? I'll give you my address. I love snow.

12:50:15

I know you love snacks and I'm sorry I've reached my snack limit so we're tapped out.

12:50:23

So while the tradition of Valentine's Day is a way to celebrate love between a man and a woman, gallon tines day celebrate love and for kinship between women. So as a daughter born in a family of five women, I thrive in female environments, and I do not need a dedicated day to celebrate woman awesomeness. However, I certainly spend at least one day a month with my besties, my core group of girlfriends, we're talking 20 years of unconditional friendship. Wow.

And so on March 7, my ladies and I will go to the BAM theater in Brooklyn to see the choreographers peanut Bush Aqua dance performance. And as the Guardian said, it's the most luminous, sexy entertaining piece Bosh made. So I'm very much looking forward to that. If you haven't already read it, I recommend the light we carry by Michelle Obama. In that book, she devotes a whole chapter to describing how important her close group of friends is, and was during her sometimes isolating years as a First Lady. So she talks about decades of meaningful friendship and how that helped her through challenging times. And she also cherished the good times with her crew of gals. So I always try to do something of this sort regularly, not just once a year, because I could not wait 364 days. Yes,

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:51:46

so true. And a good reminder or good note to close the sign. It's just the celebration of the community. And tal important with these community connections and feeling like you're a part of something bigger than yourself, is for us personally, but also women and girls, so they know that they're supported and loved and appreciated by all of us. So I think we're leaving today with a lot of to do's a lot of action items, a lot of ways we can step in and be advocates and supporters, but also things that we can just do in our personal life to turn this kind of silly holiday that kind of sprung from a TV show a few years back to something that can be really special and impactful for the women and girls in our lives, but also those across the country. So I want to say just thank you so much.

To our expert speakers today, Karen. Juliet, I learned so much from both of you. I'm really looking forward to hopefully creating some more connections between our community members and both of your organizations. And just thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And for everyone. Yeah, no, thank you. And for everyone who joined in, I appreciate you spending an hour of your time with us today. I hope you have a great rest of your Valentine's Day. And we'll talk soon and and hopefully we'll we'll see some connections springing up between you and these organizations soon as well.

12:53:14

Thank you, Kim. Carrie. That was wonderful.

12:53:18

It was Thank you. I really appreciate it.

**Kimberly Swartz** 12:53:20

Yeah, absolutely. All right, everybody. Have a great rest of your Monday and we'll be in touch soon. Bye now.

12:53:27

Bye.