

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #19
“Uniting the way with Allison Warren-Barbour”
Sno-Isle Libraries, April 19, 2019



Ken Harvey: 00:00:00 Hi, I'm Ken Harvey.

Jim Hills: 00:00:01 And I'm Jim Hills.

Ken Harvey: 00:00:02 And in this episode of Sno-Isle Libraries, we're going to take some time with the President and Chief Executive Officer with the United Way of Snohomish County.

Jim Hills: 00:00:10 I'm really excited about this. When I happened to see our guests at a United Way breakfast, and I thought, oh my gosh, this is a new star in Snohomish County. I'm really excited to have this conversation.

Ken Harvey: 00:00:21 Well, we're going to take a short break and then we will come back and have that interview with Allison Warren-Barbour. It is worth sticking around for.

Ken Harvey: 00:00:42 Welcome to episode 19 of the Check It Out Podcast from Sno-Isle Libraries. This is the podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds and made possible by the support of the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation.

Speaker 3: 00:00:54 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:02 Well, we are delighted to have Allison Warren-Barbour with us who is the President and Chief Executive Officer of United Way of Snohomish County. She is in our beautiful podcast studio in downtown Tulalip, Washington.

Jim Hills: 00:01:16 Last time you said Puyallup, by the way, I just don't remember-

Ken Harvey: 00:01:19 That was in another podcast, right? Yes. Today I'm thinking Tulalip.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:01:24 Yes.

(Continued)

Ken Harvey: 00:01:24 Tulalip, Washington.

Jim Hills: 00:01:26 That's good.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:26 For those of you who don't know, Tulalip is right across I-5 from Marysville, Washington, in the Greater Seattle area as we have started calling this region. So, Allison has been the leader or the United Way of Snohomish County since 2017, and she came to the area from the United Way of the Greater Triangle in the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina. In North Carolina, she served as senior vice president of resource development and engagement and lead a team in developing what's considered innovative approaches to engage local problems solvers around that area's most complex social issues facing the families that they had with young children.

Ken Harvey: 00:02:09 She's bringing those kinds of innovative solutions here and engaging our communities in ways that we can help families. We're gonna be talking with her about that. Allison, thank you for joining us for this podcast.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:02:20 Thank you so much for having me. It's such a pleasure to be in this beautiful podcast room.

Jim Hills: 00:02:24 It's the studio. That's right.

Ken Harvey: 00:02:26 Well, I have to just say right off the bat that you came here from North Carolina, I'm not hearing any drawl in your speaking pattern.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:02:37 No, you won't because I am not originally from the south, though I did spend 10 years there in Atlanta and then Raleigh-Durham area. I'm originally from Ohio. Interestingly, I am from a small town in Ohio that's in between Columbus and Dayton. It is where they send international actors to speak very bland American English because apparently we have just that generic sound. So, it is where they go for voice training.

Jim Hills: 00:03:13 I had no idea there was an Ohio speech institute.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:03:14 Yeah, apparently that's a thing in Columbus. I'm originally from Ohio, which is why you may once in a while here a Midwestern word slip in here and there, but for the most part, a pretty generic accent.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:27 So, if you come there with a brogue or a drawl or some kind of accent, it falls away.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:03:35 They Midwestern it out of you apparently. I'm not sure.

Jim Hills: 00:03:38 I've been to the Raleigh-Durham area at one time. It was really fun. Could you describe the Triangle 'cause I wasn't sure that I fully understood that on my one trip there.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:03:47 Yeah. A couple of things about that area ...

Ken Harvey: 00:03:51 It's not like the Bermuda Triangle.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:03:52 I know that's what a lot of people say like, "Oh, you worked in a United Way in the Bermuda Triangle?" And I'm like, "No, you would have never found me." No, the Triangle, it stems for a couple of reasons. One, you have UNC Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina. You have Duke University and you have NC State. So, you have three universities there. Also, because it is the home of Research Triangle Park where the tech industry boomed with IBM and others in the late '70s and '80s, and they draw from those universities for employment. That's why it's called the triangle, is a Research Triangle Park.

Ken Harvey: 00:04:32 Got it. You said Ohio, so you said between Dayton and ...

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:04:40 North of Dayton and west of Columbus.

Ken Harvey: 00:04:42 Okay. So, the actual city or metropolitan area that you came from is called?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:04:48 The large metropolis of Piqua, P-I-Q-U-A, Ohio, two exits off of 75 north or south, depending on which way you're headed, Florida or Michigan. Yeah, very small town. We had 20,000 people, a real manufacturing and farming communities. I actually grew up around a historic farm.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:10 So, Americana.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:05:11 Very much so. Yes, if you watched the middle ever, that is pretty much where I grew up.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:18 Well, we're glad to have you here in our area. You're now in your third year as President and CEO of our United Way. For our listeners who don't know, Sno-Isle Libraries serves a two county area in Holmes County and Island County and within our service area, you're serving the mainland county that we serve. That's separate from United Way that's on Island County as I understand.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:05:51 Interestingly, this is very timely again because we've actually picked up Camano Island into our surface area.

Jim Hills: 00:05:58 Great.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:05:59 So, the United Way of Island County has been undergoing a lot of different changes and so they're looking at just consolidating just Whidbey.

Ken Harvey: 00:06:09 On Whidbey Island.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:06:09 So, we now have Camano in our service area, which is brilliant because they're actually were already part of one of our new collaboratives. But yes, primarily Snohomish County.

Ken Harvey: 00:06:22 Well, congratulations for surviving here after your third year.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:06:26 Yes. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Ken Harvey: 00:06:27 You've come on board and came on board in an organization that was really a fixture in Snohomish County and in some ways kind of taking over from someone, Dennis Smith who was like a founder, and really beloved in the area. What's it been like being at the helm for this first two years and now going into your third year?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:06:51 Yeah, I'd say that both the organization of United Way, the brand of United Way carries a lot of legacy in communities across the United States because they have traditionally been around 50 plus years. At least in our case, I think I entered in our 77th year and so obviously deeply rooted in the community here, and then deeply rooted with the people that worked there. Dennis had a career of about 18 years with the organization and had really worked in different parts of the organization too, so knew it quite well. I think as he was thinking about passing the torch, not unlike other United Ways in our system, really the whole system is trying to think through what the community needs the United Way to be in each of the communities.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:07:50 What's really helpful is that, though we share the brand United Way, we're actually separate 501(c)(3)s. And that really means that it can be very local and driven by what the local community actually wants. We're not driven by a headquarters organization like a lot of national nonprofits are.

Jim Hills: 00:08:13 That's interesting. I didn't think I understood that. I always think of United Way as this national brand or this omnipresent brand. I didn't really realize that each organization has its own thing.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:08:25 Yeah. It's its own 501(c)(3). That's helpful because we basically pay a nominal fee to utilize the name. But everything else, all the money that's raised here stays in any United Way's local market. And it's driven by those decision makers in the local market too.

Jim Hills: 00:08:42 What was attractive for you coming from the Triangle, which I got to ... I was introduced as ... it's a thing, it's a big deal to come to Snohomish County?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:08:54 I've been the United Way system for a decade now. I started in at the Atlanta United Way. That was \$100 million United Way with 12 counties and then the Greater Triangle was four counties and about the \$12 million United Way. I had grown up on the resource development side of United Way. So, I was really looking to get more involved in the strategic impact side of the organization, not just the fundraising aspect. And as I was looking for opportunities, this happened to pop up one day on the intranet emails that we get. Interestingly, my sister, my older sister who now lives in Nashville and has for about eight years, in the early 2000 she lived in Snohomish, the city.

Jim Hills: 00:09:42 Oh, wow.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:09:42 We had been out to visit her a few times. My husband and I both worked at the Grand Canyon National Park and Glacier National Park for two summers, and we would drive out and see my older sister here and just fell in love with it because who doesn't?

Jim Hills: 00:09:56 Yeah, there you go.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:09:57 So, we said, if ever ...

Ken Harvey: 00:09:59 Especially if it's not raining or snowing.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:10:00 Yes, we always came in summer. That was brilliant, right? But yeah, we said if ever the right opportunity pops up we should entertain it, and that was 12 years ago that we said that. So, when this came up, some things needed to be ready and ripe and that leads me back to kind of where Dennis was leading the organization to say, what are we gonna be about next? He pointed the organization towards a model that had been

adopted by a few major United Ways in the system called collective impact. Then I think that they were really looking for someone to come and operationalize that idea because collective impact on its macro scale is actually quite academic. It's a 30,000 foot model. Then it was like, well, how do we do that here?

- Ken Harvey: 00:10:53 Yeah, sounds good in theory, but how do we actually do it?
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:10:55 How do we do it?
- Jim Hills: 00:10:56 I didn't really realize that Dennis was setting the table for that change. Talk a little bit about that adjustment. How the organization moved from what Dennis had been doing for so long, he could look ahead and see that and how that worked.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:11:11 Again, I think part of it was driven by external markets for the United Way System in that the historic model is one of a community chest, or a community mutual fund where United Ways raise money from workplace campaigns and then have traditionally funneled that out into the community. Over the last decade that I've been part of the system, there have been a lot of different environmental changes that have put pressure on that to say that that kind of processing role can be done now by for profit processors at a cheaper rate or whatever the case may be. So, the business model of United Way is needing a closer eye on it. Again, even in Atlanta and in the Greater Triangle, we were having these conversations as well as to like, what does the next chapter hold? It was, where is the place for United Way? Where does the community need its United Way to go and be?
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:12:15 I had been in Raleigh-Durham and a model that used collective impact. So, I think that was part of, again, there were a few United Ways that have moved along this collective impact continuum I would call it. So, more and more United Way started to have that conversation and Dennis picked up on that conversation and began to have it with local community members. The team that is still there too, that worked alongside Dennis, did a lot of community interviewing. They held I think cause some big events to kind of say, "What is it that you require of your United Way at this point? Where do you see us moving and heading towards?" So, they had adopted a collective impact framework.
- Jim Hills: 00:13:01 Sorry, there were some cultural community changes, technological changes, business model changes. And so, then

United Way is responding to those and looking for a way that it can continue to serve.

- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:13:15 Yes, absolutely. Because I think for me, I have a background in business, but I've been a nonprofit now for over a decade. To me, there's an interesting dynamic in nonprofit industry about both scarcity and perpetuation. And really, what we all want, I think as community members is to actually try to solve these problems and not have a need for organizations like United Way and other organizations, which I think on the surface when I say that I generally get different kinds of reactions to that. One of, that's threatening. We shouldn't have United Way anymore. We shouldn't ... To me it's about, you should have the right problem solvers around the table at the right time. But with the ultimate, whether you call it Pollyannaish or not, but with the ultimate goal about solving these big, complex problems, because will act differently if we use that language.
- Jim Hills: 00:14:17 I'm just going to keep jumping all over you again. But I'm just so excited about hearing about this. The way the organization is innovating. Yes. Uh, to respond to the environment and how there's this sense of working yourself out of a job except that the environment continues to evolve and then the organization continues to evolve to meet whatever needs are coming up. That's really interesting.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:14:46 Yeah. That's right.
- Ken Harvey: 00:14:46 Well, we've used the term collective impact maybe 10 or 11 times now, and I just want to make sure that the audience really understands how you define that. What is collective impact?
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:14:58 Yeah, and interestingly, we've had our own evolution around, even that jargon, right? Because it is jargon.
- Ken Harvey: 00:15:03 Yeah. What does it mean?
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:15:05 It's set aside for so much.
- Ken Harvey: 00:15:08 What does it mean today?
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:15:08 For our organization in our CORE collaborative model, it is about intentional measured collaboration. I think that there has been, if you were to ask our sector, and even outside of the nonprofit sector, particularly in Snohomish County, have we been collaborating? The answer would be, yeah, we've always collaborated. But the fact is, is that this model is based on some

tenets that require us to have shared vision and mission and even shared data and continuous communications and a backbone organization that's constantly hanging that North Star in front of folks of where we're headed. It's a model that isn't about organic group projects is what I would call it. 'Cause we've all been part of group projects and know how well those don't go. I think that is what ...

- Ken Harvey: 00:15:58 You realize that's a dirty little secret.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:16:00 Right. It is. It's a dirty little secret. Even with our best intentions, and our will to want something different, we have to live with the reality of our economies and how problems in our economy gets solved. I think that's the unique place that United Way has then stepped into is trying to utilize the funding, the fund that volunteers get to decide how to distribute in a way that can really produce a different type of change around a very measured model that isn't based on singular programs alone, right? 'Cause we have wonderful programs in existence. But again, I consistently hear from both partners and donors about the continuing growth of need as well. Part of that, I think we have to step back and say, where's the onus for that belong?
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:17:06 I think for so long, we've tried to put the onus of poverty on people themselves. Then I hear a lot about intergenerational poverty because our model focuses on families and saying we have to just kind of concentrate on the next generation. They'll break the cycle of poverty. That's a lot of responsibility for kids.
- Jim Hills: 00:17:26 It's a lot of pressure. Yeah.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:17:28 I think it fundamentally glosses over actually the system that has some inherent barriers in it. Not out of malintent, but just out of how we have gone about trying to react to social problems versus solving social problems. That's what this model is really about. It's a systems approach, which is sometimes really complex and hard to describe, but it says we've built a system and systems are usually very good at producing the outputs of what we construct them to be. And so for us, we're saying, "If we want different results, then we can't continue to act the way that we've been acting as a system, we actually have to fundamentally change the system itself through a very intentional collaborative model." We actually call it collaboration because macro, again, collective impact is kind a macro academic term. When you operationalize it, it really gets down to more about what does intentional community centered collaboration need to look like.

- Jim Hills: 00:18:35 [crosstalk 00:18:35] okay.
- Ken Harvey: 00:18:37 So, on your website, you've got another ... some might say another piece of jargon that says CORE collaborative. I would love for you just to explain what do you mean by CORE? What does that stand for? Is that an acronym or is that the center of the earth? What is it? And then, how are you then applying that to really address these issues, these societal problems that we see in our region?
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:19:08 Well, you've picked up on the double entendre. It is to be about the core of something, the center of something. What it essentially stands for, it's an acronym, so it stands for Creating Open Roads to Equity. We primarily poverty exists because of the lack of access, or the barriers that exist for anyone. When we stepped into this model, one of the ways that you take it from a 30,000 foot view to the micro community view is we had to step in around a particular population. That's really hard for an organization who has historically been about trying to solve all things for all populations. So, this was a big change for a United Way model to say we're gonna focus as our entry point on children birth, including prenatal to age eight because math and reading scores in third grade determine a lot of the future of our children.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:20:17 We're going to start there. But we also adopted another model out there that's called a two generational approach from Aspen Institute. That's a misnomer. It just really means a multi-generational approach that addresses everything that is happening for those children and the adults in their lives. So, when we say, "You just have to surround the next generation with great education and access to health." Again, what it doesn't recognize is where those go home at night on the weekends in the summer. So, this is really about taking a family, so we first stepped into focusing on a population. And then, we said, "Okay, now we really need to recognize that when you're a family struggling with poverty, it is very, very difficult to navigate a very complex system to just get your basic needs met."
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:21:13 When you're trying to get access to food, but the hours where you can go pick up food are limited, and you have to leave your job to go do that, then you're making a choice. Again, this is a systems issue that we have constructed with the intention of meeting those needs, but with the impact of making people choose between. That is choosing between getting food for your family or another additional hour of work to increase your family's income. If I'm not at work, then I'm also not necessarily

looked at for promotions for roles that will help to increase my economic assets too. What we've done in the CORE model is to say we have to be part and partner and undifferentiated working system that is about placing families at the center or the core of a different functioning system.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:22:14 If you then take the amazing programs that already exist out there and place them in a different functioning system that's for instance, a child shows up to school hungry and needs a, a backpack program that has food that they'll send weekend meals home with that child, it's doing that and, from a school of improv. It's about yes, and. It's yes, here's meeting your basic need, and we need to stop and ask ourselves why do you need this? And then that is really what the core collaboratives are about. It's about then saying, okay, people enter the system through a touch point, a basic need normally, but then we have to say, so what is going on with this family and the adults in the family and address it simultaneously.

Ken Harvey: 00:23:05 That example you just used sounds suspiciously like an animated video that I saw on your website, which I found just incredibly helpful to watch. I would like to just invite all the listeners to please go to the United Way of Snohomish County's website and look for those videos. They are illuminating.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:23:28 Good. My marketing team will thank you.

Jim Hills: 00:23:30 They're emotional. They're very emotional to see that kind of need out there. I'm curious, we have been talking, we've been using some jargon, we've been talking about theories, we've been talking, but I know that when you talk about the collaboratives, I believe you're talking about some actual specific things. So, how does this translate to on the ground service delivery in what's happening in Snohomish County?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:23:54 Yeah. Again, traditionally, United Ways funded between 50 to 80 kinds of programs. What we did in the last funding, so the last two years we've spent just responding again to the needs of the community and that's required us to create a completely different funding mechanism, a new internal organization, and really thinking about different ways to raise financial capital around this and engage people in this model. What that looked like for us is you traditionally came as a single nonprofit with your program through our funding cycle. We actually required that you come with at minimum five partners. They could be nonprofit, they could be private, or they could be public

partners. They did not have to be just nonprofit partners, but we said five based on Aspen Institute's model.

- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:24:49 That includes things like increasing economic assets or lay learning, post-secondary education, employment pathways, health, and interestingly, the fifth domain we call domain, right? Fifth Focus area of that model is around actually social networks, friends, and neighborhoods. The things that I have that will ensure that if something happens in my life, I will not find myself in a situation where I don't have a place to lay my head. That's my social network, and a lot of our families lack that.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:25:19 So, we went about having the community decide who those partners would be through a really, what we would like to think is a lower barrier process as a funder to just say, "Tell us who you're gonna meet with around this population and what the conversation will be." And gave a few, what I would call startup grants just to have that conversation. Then, where it wound us was through a process that brought us a lot of phenomenal ideas of collaborative partnerships. We landed with five multiyear investments with five collaboratives. On average now they have 15 core partners on average in these collaboratives now, and tertiary partners up to 40 a piece.
- Jim Hills: 00:26:06 Wow.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:26:07 It's pretty phenomenal in just two years.
- Jim Hills: 00:26:09 That is phenomenal.
- Ken Harvey: 00:26:10 Yeah. I happen to know that Sno-Isle Libraries is evolved and I think two of those collaborative projects. One in the Darrington community area and the other one I think in Stanwood ...
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:26:24 Yup, Camano area.
- Ken Harvey: 00:26:26 Stanwood, Camano area. Going back to one of those videos that I saw on your website and Jim saying, what was the term you used there?
- Jim Hills: 00:26:36 Very emotional.
- Ken Harvey: 00:26:37 Very emotional. Just bringing this down to where the average person can understand, I think that in one of those videos it starts out with a child who's going to school and she's hungry.

And the teacher offers her an apple and the child essentially says something that just immediately just ...

- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:27:02 Not my turn to eat. That's a true story.
- Ken Harvey: 00:27:04 It wasn't my turn to eat last night.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:27:05 That's right.
- Ken Harvey: 00:27:07 Which just immediately stops you in your tracks when you think, oh my gosh, that is horrible to consider that that's happening where we live. But then the video goes on a little bit farther as the teacher then is contemplating, shocked maybe by this response, but then it kind of gets into that there's a whole host of needs revealed in that response that go beyond just an apple for that particular snack. And that these different organizations that come together as a collaborative, they help step in and assist, not just the child, but the entire family the whole, helping them reexamine all of those needs and identify how they might be able to come alongside and assist them.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:28:08 Yes. I like your verbiage there around come alongside. What's really important in this model is that family voice has been present along the way, and we continue to get better at that. Actually saying that folks ... the best problem solvers of problems are folks who have struggled with those problems. Not actually Allison at United Way. It is our families themselves who have had to navigate the system in ways that I could not even be into fathom. It's a human centered design approach, and so having family voice in this model has been critical to building it. We haven't done that perfectly. Again, we continue to step into that work to say we have to make that voice the most powerful voice. But I will tell you that in the grant process, the family voice absolutely carried a lot of weight towards a collaborative getting funding that traditional volunteers would not have funded.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:29:17 Because they simply said of one collaborative, "Y=This looks good, it sounds right, I'm just gonna let you know, I would not participate in that." We were like, "Oh, what?" And then another, it felt counter-intuitive to some of our volunteers and the family just said, "This is exactly what we need." That has been really integral part of this model, is the family voice. I'd say that's a big shift in United Way as well. What we know is that we hold intention, both the fact that we want to solve problems and as a United Way, it requires financial capital to do that. So, donors remain a really important voice as well at that table, and philanthropy plays a role at the collaborative table. But the

model itself is really evolving from a donor-centric model where donors kind of determined the issues that they want to solve and how to solve them.

- Jim Hills: 00:30:15 Right, and how to solve them.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:30:16 To an impact family voice-centered model.
- Ken Harvey: 00:30:19 Well, it seems to me that in some ways maybe even the model of, or the way of the traditional thinking of being a donor needs to change as well. Because what we're really talking about is the providing individuals in our communities opportunity to invest in other families for the mutual success of everyone.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:30:45 Yes.
- Jim Hills: 00:30:45 Providing an opportunity for people who want to help a pathway for them to actually help and demonstrate that.
- Ken Harvey: 00:30:52 Yeah, so I'm becoming an investor, not a donor.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:30:56 I know. I love that. Which is the exact language we use. So, we call a lot of our investors, CORE investors. That is the terminology we use because we do believe that this acts like an entrepreneurial investment. This is a pilot program. In a startup, so the Research Triangle Park, that's where I came from. I did a lot around startups and entrepreneurs and build an incubator fund there and lots of fun things. Here, to me, in a startup, it takes 10 years to prove out a startup model. That's the kind of model we're in. This is a long term play, which is also very different because the world of nonprofit has really been annualized because of philanthropy and donation and annual donations and tax returns and other things. The tax deductions, excuse me.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:31:48 So, really shifting from annualized outputs to long term outcomes that are a decade in the making is a big shift that requires all of us to think differently. Most definitely, the philanthropy at the table, so the investors at the table have to really think differently because the scale of this model is really different than the scale of the traditional nonprofit program only model that is really based on number of units per year, and scaling that per year. This is really about generational return.
- Ken Harvey: 00:32:26 Gosh, it really seems to change to the paradigm about essentially institutionalizing poverty and the cycles of poverty because you're not looking at carrying people and just feeding

people or them down for the night. You're really looking to help move them out of those situations and adopt new systems of living for themselves.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:32:47 Yes, absolutely. We all know for any of that type of change, you're really talking about cultural and behavioral change 'cause you could increase economic assets and still not be able to escape the culture of poverty. So, this is really about cultural and behavioral change that takes a long time and a different working system that recognizes that and how complex it is.

Jim Hills: 00:33:12 I've heard our managing librarian at the Stanwood library talk about the difference that participating in the collaborative there is making for him in the way he's interacting with folks who come into the library. So, public library, we're open to the public. We see the full spectrum of society come to a public library and some of those folks are in need. Prior to the collective, he had an opportunity across the street from the community center, which may or may not be open at the same time, may or may not have resources, and he would make a recommendation and send them out the door.

Jim Hills: 00:33:53 Give them ...

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:33:54 Referrals.

Jim Hills: 00:33:54 ... whatever you could give them in the library. Give them a moment, some respite, but send them out the door with a recommendation and thin he was never sure. Now, he knows who he's referring them to. And gives them a slip of paper with a name and a phone number or an address or something. He knows that he'll be able to follow up and that they will follow up. He's seeing the change coming that's filtering ... the same people are filtering back into the library, just like you might see in a school setting, he sees that in the library. The people are coming back, and they're changed, they're interacting differently. The family comes in now instead of the child who doesn't have after school daycare in the libraries. That's it for them. He's seeing a difference in his connection to the community because he's got this opportunity to see that [inaudible 00:34:52].

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:34:52 The beauty of this model is that it's bigger than United Way. That is the beauty of it because to me that's what systems change is about. We will try to, as much as we can, wrap our arms around these particular outcomes, but the actual systems outcomes are much broader than just the outcomes for the families that will be in this model. I've heard that actually, and

thank you for sharing that. It's really encouraging. I've heard that from the majority of collaboratives. Understand too that the co five collaboratives have only been funded for one year and that's happening. So, you have health intake forms that are completely being revamped because they realize, hey, if mom in her sick child, I have her fill out something that tells me about all the symptoms of the child. Not once do I ask her, how are you doing?

- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:35:46 They've completely shifted, which in the health industry, that is a big deal to shift those things to say, why wouldn't we ask what else is going on at home? Because we're seeing her symptoms, that's what you show up with at the doctor. So, why aren't we seeing that and then communicating it to her primary care physician as well? These systems changes that are about, and I hear that a lot about partners. We've always known each other, we've always worked with each other on the periphery, but we did not know the extent of what our partners did until this model. It's fundamentally changed even what I would call system dynamics between institutions, between nonprofits and the public school systems. When you have shared vision with shared goals and outcomes, all of a sudden it fundamentally changes our relationship to one another.
- Ken Harvey: 00:36:42 That's right. Because you can leverage your resources for the mutual outcomes.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:36:47 That's right.
- Ken Harvey: 00:36:49 This is a such a beautiful thing that I think, from my perspective, happening within our region, and I can tell you that Sno-Isle Libraries has just been delighted to be part of this. We have ...
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:37:01 We've been delighted to have Sno-Isle at the table. It's much more than a library. Particularly in the two that you mentioned, they're leaders and they are seen and very highly respected in those communities in a way that, again, I think it allows us to leverage in ways we, in a way, wouldn't have been able to before. That's the other aspect is we're now partners with organizations that we weren't traditionally partners with before, because this model opened up those opportunities.
- Jim Hills: 00:37:32 Right. Another way then what had been the case is just parceling out whatever donations were available annually and then trying to spread that as thin as possible.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:37:42 That's right. Yeah. I come from the Midwest again and my grandmother used to do a lot of knitting and she would knit what we call Afghans, and they were beautiful and wonderful. They were super stretchy so my sister and I would take one end the other end and stretch it the whole way. But ultimately, what happens when you do that? So, we covered a lot of area ...

Ken Harvey: 00:38:02 You could get away with that?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:38:04 While my grandmother was [crosstalk 00:38:07].

Ken Harvey: 00:38:07 While she's in the [crosstalk 00:38:07].

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:38:07 She was doing something else for sure. Well, and we would get it later 'cause she would come back in and what you had essentially done is you would create larger holes in the stitching. And so, it lost its purpose of warmth, but it covered a lot of area, so I likened this to a blanket approach.

Ken Harvey: 00:38:26 Great analogy.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:38:26 Blankets, they don't stretch as far and they're concentrated. That often means if there are four of you on the couch, one person may be left out, but it does a really great job at the thing that it was given to do. So, we've kind of gone from an Afghan approached again that was about small programmatic funding to these large investments in systems. It's not through programs. There's one fiscal agent per collaborative. They get to determine how they're gonna utilize the funding and we do not have line items. We have the objectives around the model. It's really changed the way that we've even worked with our community partners around our own funding model to say, "You have to have a lot more flexibility because we trust that you and the families have the wisdom and the assets," and we are barrier removers.

Jim Hills: 00:39:23 I am so drawn in by your passion for this. I really want to know, you talked earlier about your professional background, but there's gotta be more to it than that. How did you get to this place?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:39:35 Yeah, a series of things. What's interesting is I have somewhat of what I call a pretty random background and skill set in that I have a business degree in change management organizational behavior, but I also had the privilege really of going to get a master of divinity degree. That was a really phenomenal experience. I did not go for the vocational purpose. Like that's

normally why people go and I didn't. I had a lot of questions because I had been meeting and ...

- Ken Harvey: 00:40:06 Trying to figure things out.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:40:06 I was. I had my 23 year old existential crisis that we do. So, I was in a fantastic conversation around lots of existential questions, but also social impact kind of conversations during those three years. And then, when I graduated, my husband ended up getting into a Ph.D. program down in Emory. So, we moved to Atlanta and I was like, "What do I do with a business degree and a seminary degree?" I had been mostly in sales and management and consulting, and a nonprofit popped up. And so, it really built ... I was like, "Well, fundraising sales for nonprofit."
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:40:49 It was helpful to jump in. What was amazing is that the first nonprofit I joined was really well connected to some of the civil rights leaders in Atlanta. And so, you're talking to a girl who grew up in a very homogenous part of Ohio that is now meeting Andrew Young and walking a march by Ebenezer. It was just a phenomenal experience.
- Ken Harvey: 00:41:16 Ebenezer Baptist Church.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:41:17 That's right for MLK Jr. It was such a phenomenal experience that opened my eyes so broadly to systems and structures and barriers that are institutionalized across the United States. Nonprofit is really hard and messy, like the majority of jobs can be. But every time I felt like, "I don't think I can do this anymore, I'm gonna jump. I'm going to go and do just regular sales or whatever the case may be." My husband would always remind me, "You can't do that because you have to be righteously angry at all times. That is what motivates you." It's so true. I think for me knowing how privileged I am and my background and where I come from and the things that have been granted to me outside of any type of hard work or merit, that I can harness that in ways that can remove barriers for others.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:42:14 That really became a passion as I worked. I think I grew into that. That wasn't something that I was like, I'm a supervision oriented person and I'm just gonna do this. It was, I like what this organization is doing. Let me try it and work in nonprofit until something else happens. And then I got into United Way and thought, "Well, this will be great. When my husband gets a professorship, they'll know who the nonprofit is, so I'll be able to go somewhere." Little did I know or the university did that built a career in it. For me, being able to be part of hard

conversations that challenge the way that we think and the necessity of change is really my purpose. I would say playing a part in equity in any way that I can is really what motivates me to do this work.

Jim Hills: 00:43:11 There is a serious positive to on a day when you're working hard and things aren't going right to know that what you're doing, the ultimate goal, you make no apologies for.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:43:22 Yeah. Definitely that aspect of being a nonprofit is one of the benefits when it's been tough. I'd say, likewise, particularly given the role of United Way, and thinking about the mechanism of philanthropy and how it has played as a barrier in some cases has been challenging though too, is to think about what are we doing to continue to perpetuate some of the barriers without even intentionally knowing. That's been a real eye opening experience for me too in my journey. And then, being part of a very traditional, historic system that has its own inequities in it, to be able to understand both the power that United Way has to change things is really phenomenal and understanding that that power is also very convicting and weighty. So, I don't take it lightly. I do though get a lot of gratification out of being able to do what I do. It's a real privilege.

Ken Harvey: 00:44:42 Well, are there some organizations that you have gotten involved in since coming to the area?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:44:47 Yeah. As with most leaders, you inherit some of those things and it's wonderful to have partnerships and forge out, and I've been asked to join a few organizations. For me, the first year was just understanding that I'm trying to bring my board and our organization is bringing our board a model that has tied ourselves to very particular outcomes for very particular population and understanding that the resources are limited for lots of different reasons. I don't actually believe in scarcity. I do think scarcity is a myth, but I think that the way that we have resources tied up makes us behave in that way.

Ken Harvey: 00:45:33 Agreed. I agree.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:45:36 I've had to really decide on what I'm involved with, and does it move the families forward? I'm fortunate enough to serve as a commissioner on Everett Housing Authority, which has been a really wonderful opportunity, and I've served on three, four additional sub-committees for them. I'm part of the Economic Alliance.

Ken Harvey: 00:45:57 Of Snohomish County?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:45:58 Yup. Which I think is a fantastic conversation and organization that brings together a lot of different sectors to have important conversations. I'm also part of Everett Station District Alliance, which is really about the ... our office is in Everett, right down from the station.

Ken Harvey: 00:46:20 The military base station?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:46:21 No, from the train station.

Ken Harvey: 00:46:22 The train station.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:46:23 Mm-hmm (affirmative), on Macdougall. So, really about ...

Ken Harvey: 00:46:28 Otherwise known as a multimodal facility.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:46:29 That's right. Well done.

Jim Hills: 00:46:31 Seems like a former trains again, right?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:46:32 Yeah, exactly. And being partners with Ed Peterson at Hope Works and others. They're in that neighborhood to really talk about how do we create a space for all people down in that area and do it well and intentionally. So, I'm part of that as well. I was part of the Snohomish County health leadership coalition and that conversation around health outcomes for our community. I have not locked in opportunities and it's been a real privilege to be asked and to get to serve. Again, I think it's really important to ask myself if I'm the right person always to be the voice at that table because there are lots of amazing people in our organization too that they're a better voice at certain tables than I am.

Ken Harvey: 00:47:24 Well, speaking of that United Way of Snohomish County has also gotten involved with the Mariner Community Campus project.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:47:31 Yes.

Ken Harvey: 00:47:32 Tell us why.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:47:34 It's such a given in terms of us really supporting that work because it's built on a collaborative idea of nonprofit and public partnership primarily now. But certainly I can see private partnerships coming into play with that. The other thing that I

really love is most recently I've ... the pomegranate center coming to lead again what I would call the human center design of the model. So, starting with community and seeing what the community wants is so, so important. Again, that doesn't happen often. So, we're always a proponent of that and supportive of that and supportive of trying to think through both how do we change things locally, while also recognizing that there are opportunities around policy and other things as well.

- Ken Harvey: 00:48:29 So, just for the audience who may not quite understand what we're talking about in terms of the Mariner Community Campus, this is a project that's underway where a number of organizations have collaboratively, working together with the community around what is known as the Mariner Area.
- Jim Hills: 00:48:52 Well, that's what we call it, but we're asking them what they call it, right?
- Ken Harvey: 00:48:55 Yes, that's true. But geographically it's located south of Everett and north of Lynnwood and east of Mukilteo and west of Mill Creek.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:49:05 Right.
- Jim Hills: 00:49:06 I always have to think when trying to describe it that way.
- Ken Harvey: 00:49:09 Yeah. So, but about 30,000 people or so who live in this area that currently is not well represented or not directly represented as its own community yet as a jurisdiction, but is part of Snohomish County in an unincorporated area. We only have a few minutes left and we're just gonna take a short break. When we come back, we're gonna ask Allison for some concluding thoughts around her earliest memories of a public libraries and any advice that she might give, especially a young woman in her late teens, or 20 something as she's considering her path forward.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:49:57 Yeah, absolutely.
- Ken Harvey: 00:49:58 Right back in just a minute.
- Speaker 5: 00:50:00 Hey parents and grandparents, is there a child in the family who's latched onto a smartphone or tablet computer? Help them put that screen time to good use by downloading fun and educational magazines from Sno-Isle Libraries like Highlights, High five and American Girl. Every magazine packed with age

appropriate content like crafts, quizzes, experiments, poems and wholesome stories. And each issue is free to download with a library card from Sno-Isle Libraries.

- Ken Harvey: 00:50:31 If you live in Snohomish or Island county, we'd like to invite you to stop by your closest library or visit the library online. You'll find thousands and thousands of titles of classic and popular books, music, movies, and surprising number of digital resources just waiting for you. Plus, you'll have opportunity to enjoy our friendly, helpful librarians. Check us out today.
- Ken Harvey: 00:51:03 Okay, we're back from the break. So, Allison, your earliest memory of public library.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:51:10 Yeah, I love public libraries. I have always been a member of my local libraries. I distinctly remember walking in when I was probably about seven years old and getting my first library card. We had books before then of course, but really having my own, my mom not checking things out for us. I got to have my own card. In my small town of Piqua, they had taken an old mansion called flush mansion and turned it into the public library. It was just this beautiful building with all these nooks and crannies and the kid's section of the library was in the best part of the house that just had so many places to curl up with a book and read and get lost. Mom was upstairs while my sisters and I were downstairs playing or reading books.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:52:05 I feel like it was really formative. I always participated in the summer challenges that they had. My mom used to make us read for a half an hour before we got to go outside and play in the summer. Actually you would have thought perhaps that would have had a negative effect, but it really instilled in me a love of books and particularly fiction. I read some nonfiction. I've just recently ...
- Jim Hills: 00:52:34 I would think you'd have to read a lot of nonfiction in your life.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:52:36 I do, yeah. Yes, but my joy is fiction. It has always taken me on adventures and it continues to do that for me. I feel like I was raised by parents who really valued new experiences and you often can't just go and have a new experience, particularly ...
- Jim Hills: 00:53:02 In Piqua.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:53:02 ... when I was little and we didn't have a lot of money in Piqua, but books always allowed me to travel. So, hat became an increasingly important part of my life in the libraries. I've always

used public libraries, so they've been a phenomenal part of, not only just about reading and literacy, but really community. I would go there with my friends. It was much more than a place to just go and check out books. We lived in libraries when I was growing up. That's my very fond memories and it has very strong advocate for public libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:53:37 We'd love to hear that. I think a lot of our listeners can share that type of story for themselves. Last minute of the pod, of this interview, if someone comes across your path, especially maybe a young woman, late teens or early 20s, trying to figure out where does she go from here? What would you say to her?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:54:07 Two things really that I came upon and was coached later on. I really wish I would've known when I was younger. One is to try, and there's so many tools out there to do this, but to try to land on your purpose early. Understanding that nothing really is permanent. So, your purpose as a 25 year old can evolve. But to land on purpose really helps than when you think about what you want to be involved with, both personally and professionally. To know what the world's greatest need is, what I'm good at, what I love to do and what I get paid for and where those intersect in the middle really allows someone to say, there are gonna be lots of opportunities that cross your desk or your path and it may feel like on paper that you should go after it.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:55:03 But through a little additional discernment you may find that it doesn't hit all of those things, right? Ultimately, it's not serving your ultimate purpose, so it won't be as fulfilling as you thought it would be. I went through a couple of those experiences and I've also done that exercise where I have turned down what felt like a given role that I of course I should take it and then only to, a week or two later, come into a completely different opportunity that changed my whole direction life. I wish someone would have just sat down with me to talk through those things. What do you love? What are you good at? What do you think the world needs? If you're currently have a job or not, what could you get paid for? What are your skills?

Jim Hills: 00:55:46 Does it take some courage to believe in yourself when you're asking and answering those questions?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:55:52 Yeah, absolutely. Again, I think you have to understand that as human beings, we are adaptable and we evolve and not also just saying, "Well, once I land on this, this is what it's gonna be. It's static." We're not static. We're dynamic. I think allowing yourself that freedom, lets you be more honest. If I say, "Right

now, this is where I am," that really helps. I was fortunate too, I was raised by Indiana Boy's High School basketball coach, and so I grew up as an athlete.

- Jim Hills: 00:56:26 I've seen that movie.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:56:28 Yeah. Jimmy, just call me Jimmy. But no, I'm not that great with a jump shot. But I was fortunate in that a lot of women, girls in my era did not participate in sports. And that I do think that that completely informed the confidence aspect of performing in a team, making decisions, failing and knowing that you can be resilient and bounce back from that has really been incredibly powerful and helpful to me too. That and then I spent a lot of my 20s chasing after what looked like successful people.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:57:09 So, I would go and track them down and spend lunch with them and friend trap them into helping me to try to discern and determine. Through that process, I would receive advice that just didn't really sit well with me and I didn't know why. Because of course I was asking the right people all the right questions until someone said to me, "Are the leaders that you're spending time with, people you really like really enjoy it and would want to emulate?" I was like, oh, that's really interesting. Probably not all. So, she told me in that moment, "Go find the women or the people that you really aspire to be and create time for them in your life."
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:57:54 For me, it's about creating those spaces, not just with anyone and everyone that is deemed successful by society or whatever the world says. But what does success, and that's really ... it's linked to that purpose, so if you find someone who's a leader that shares a similar purpose, then probably more often than not, the advice is going to be most helpful.
- Ken Harvey: 00:58:18 This has been a delightful conversation.
- Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:58:21 Thank you. I appreciate the conversation and really the opportunity to share more about United Way and the CORE collaboratives. We have such phenomenal partners in that work and so [crosstalk 00:58:32].
- Jim Hills: 00:58:32 I think that's gonna be very, very exciting for Snohomish County.
- Ken Harvey: 00:58:35 If someone would like to chat with you more about this work that United Way is embarked on or wants to know more about you or whatever, how would you like them to contact you?

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:58:51 I am easy to get on email because we all have it with us now.

Ken Harvey: 00:58:55 That's right.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:58:56 It's allison.barbour@uwsc.org.

Ken Harvey: 00:59:11 Okay. Well, we'll have that on our website.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:59:13 Brilliant.

Ken Harvey: 00:59:13 On the show notes for this podcast. I'm assuming they can also find you at uwsc.org, which is your website.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:59:21 Yes, that would be wonderful.

Ken Harvey: 00:59:23 Great.

Jim Hills: 00:59:24 Thank you so much for coming.

Ken Harvey: 00:59:25 Allison, thank you so much.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:59:26 Yeah, thank you for having me.

Ken Harvey: 00:59:26 This has been great.

Allison Warren-Barbour: 00:59:27 Thank you.

Ken Harvey: 00:59:34 Well, that was an incredible interview.

Jim Hills: 00:59:36 I don't know about you, but I just thought everything that came out of Allison's mouth was a pearl that I just had so much fun with that.

Ken Harvey: 00:59:44 Well, I think she's been a real find for United Way of Snohomish County and a real asset to the area. I can really see how the work that United Way now is now leading is liable to really change the equation about poverty in our area.

Jim Hills: 01:00:05 Absolutely. There was that comment that I think you made and she expanded on where it's not about philanthropy, so United Way depends on donations, but it's not about donors, it's about creating a sense of investing in the community where you're living and where you're growing. So, they're changing their language to talk about investors as opposed to donors. That just made so much sense to me. I don't know a ton about philanthropy, but what I have come to understand is that you're really not asking people to donate. You're doing something with

that money and creating an opportunity for people to do what they wanted to do anyway, which was to help.

- Jim Hills: 01:00:54 So, you're actually giving an opportunity to help. That's what an investment is. An investment is expecting a return and expected return is that the community gets better. That's what United Way and what Allison is bringing to the equation.
- Ken Harvey: 01:01:12 Well, she certainly seems to be a change management expert and she's doing a great job helping to lead this area into really helping to break the cycle of poverty. And boy, I think by making family successful in our area, everyone becomes successful.
- Jim Hills: 01:01:33 There were some funny parts too. I liked that part where she said that her husband was counseling her on, when she was trying to find her pathways, "No, you got to keep that righteous anger going."
- Ken Harvey: 01:01:43 Yeah, keep your righteous anger. Stay where you can keep that righteous anger applied.
- Jim Hills: 01:01:47 Yeah.
- Ken Harvey: 01:01:48 Well, and I think that in many ways, yeah, society, we're all better off if we can be righteously angry about things that we think are not right.
- Jim Hills: 01:01:58 And give our energy to.
- Ken Harvey: 01:02:01 Yeah, channel our energy, either to address that, fix it, and make everything better. I really appreciated some things that she said as well, I'm pulling up my notes out here. She talked about, when I was at and when I asked her the question about what would you say to a young person, especially a young woman who's just getting started coming out of teenage years or early 20 somethings, and she's talking about knowing what you love, figuring out what you love and figure out what your purpose is. And if you start pursuing that, suddenly you discover that that opens its own sets of doors, not just one door, but multiple sets of doors.
- Jim Hills: 01:02:44 What did she say about the mentors? The people that she was going to talk to and ask questions about? What was that?
- Ken Harvey: 01:02:50 Well, she said that she was interviewing these leaders as she had identified and asking these questions, and though they were giving her these great answers that she was taking notes

on, she said that some of them didn't quite feel right to her. When she asked someone about that, they said to her, "Well, are the leaders you're spending this time with the ones you really wanna emulate?"

- Jim Hills: 01:03:16 Good question.
- Ken Harvey: 01:03:16 Like "Oh no, I guess not quite." "Then go find the ones you really want to be like and do what they're telling you to do."
- Jim Hills: 01:03:29 There was one word that popped out, and it has to do with what United Way is all about. They have this acronym called CORE. It's creating open roads. I loved all of that, Creating open roads. This is a pathway to what? To equity. Not to help, not to this, not to a handout. To equity. I just love that one word as part of that mission.
- Ken Harvey: 01:04:00 Well, great interview and right after the interview, I mentioned to Allison that we will have to come back and essentially and revisit these CORE collaborative projects that are happening, uh, once they've gotten through their one year cycle and maybe chat with some of the participants to find out how did things turn out, how are things looking one year into the effort of working with families and to help address all of the needs that surround them as a system that may have previously kept them from moving forward.
- Jim Hills: 01:04:38 That would be great because there was one question that I really wanted to ask her that I didn't feel it was quite fair given that these collaborators are really about a year old, and there was a year or more of putting them in place, so they're just growing. I really wanna know what is next? What is the next step? Because I'm pretty sure that a woman like Allison has that in mind.
- Ken Harvey: 01:05:07 Thank you for listening to the Check It Out Podcast. For free resources and materials connected to today's guest and topic, head over to the library's website and search for the word "podcast." The library's website is sno-isle.org/podcast.