



A PODCAST WITH RUSTY STAHL | S6 EP3

How Funders Can Support Nonprofit Workers in the Age of Burnout - Part 3

WITH

Desiree Flores
General Service Foundation



INTRO (00:04)

Welcome to the Fund the People Podcast! I'm your host, Rusty Stahl. I'm President and CEO of Fund the People, where our mission is to maximize investment in America's nonprofit workforce. We give funders and nonprofits cutting edge ideas, research and tools to help drive equity, effectiveness, and endurance in the social sector. So let's start the show!

RUSTY [00:34:00]

Hey Everybody! Welcome to the Fund the People Podcast! **Today's episode offers a view into why and how one foundation has integrated "healing justice" into its grantmaking. This is the 3rd in a special Three-Part Series that we're calling "How Funders Can Support Nonprofit Workers in the Age of Burnout"**. This is based on our panel discussion at the Center for Effective Philanthropy conference last fall.

Today I'm pleased to speak with Desiree Flores of the General Service Foundation. Let me give you some quick info about our guest. Desiree is Executive Director of General Service Foundation, a multi-generational family foundation that supports racial and gender justice work. She has 20 years of experience funding social justice movements. She was previously at the Arcus Foundation, a global LGBTQ philanthropy. And earlier in her career, she worked at the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and was a longtime program officer at the Ms. Foundation for Women. Desiree earned a bachelor's degree from UCLA and a master's in public administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. With that, here is my conversation with Desiree Flores.

(music)

RUSTY [00:01:57] Desiree Flores, thank you for coming on the Fund the People Podcast. Excited to have you here.

DESIREE: Yeah. Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here as well.

RUSTY: Desiree Flores, appointed Executive Director of General Service Foundation in June of 2023. Congratulations on this leadership role.

DESIREE: Thank you.

RUSTY: So, excited to have you on to talk about General Service Foundation, your experience of what is happening in the field now and healing justice, which I'm really excited, it's something we haven't talked about on this show yet. So this would be really good. To get started, can you briefly share a little bit about what motivated you and your social change career and how did you get into philanthropy?

DESIREE: Gosh, I think I'm probably like most people, at least anyone I've ever heard talk about their trajectory into the field of philanthropy, which is accidental or I guess not intentional. I grew up actually in the Central Valley of California in a family with a long history in farm working, and grandparents that were part of the United Farm Workers movement and marched with Cesar Chavez and had come over from Mexico a generation before me. So growing up I didn't really think about all of that as issues or a life of social justice or desiring social justice. It was just how I grew up in my family.

And as I got older I put the pieces together and thought I'd been given, you know, great opportunities and I think a mixture of luck and opportunities and some ambition, and was able to go away to UCLA to undergrad and got involved in a lot of student activism. It was the mid 90s in the UC system and so there was no lack of things to get involved in, and anyway long story not so short, ended up on the east coast and made my way up to New York City and wanted to start a career of, I don't even know what I was calling it then as an early 20-something feminist rabble-rousing, like how can I make a career and get paid out of sticking it to the patriarchy in all intersectional ways. And this was back, I remember going to Kinko's and just looking up on the Internet different websites that would have jobs at such places and found an assistant job open at the Ms Foundation for Women. I had no idea what a foundation was or what philanthropy was, but I knew that Gloria Steinem founded this organization and that they work to make life better and more fair for women.

So I applied and ended up getting an assistant job there. This was the early, I guess 2000 I believe, 2001 perhaps, and stayed there for 10 years. I was incredibly lucky, had an exceptional experience with wonderful bosses and mentors and managers and accidentally fumbled into the world of philanthropy and so was able to really build a career there over time and become a program officer and get, I think, the best learning of being able to support groups mostly led by women of color working at the local, at the grassroots level, doing community organizing and

advocacy work. And that was just the best learning I could have ever received and just really loved it and so have been in the sector ever since, 20 plus years.

RUSTY [00:05:48] That's great. Thank you for sharing that and our listeners who know what Kinkos was. So tell us about when you got to General Service, you started at Ms, you were there 10 years. Now, you're at the general service Foundation. When did you get there and what have you been doing? And tell folks about General Service Foundation, give me the overview?

DESIREE: Yes. So I actually, I started formally working at the **General Service Foundation** in early 2022, although I feel like I have known the foundation and ripping close to its work for probably as long as I've been in the sector. General Service funded my reproductive justice program when I was at the Ms Foundation, very early on, and it was a foundation that I learned so much from growing up in the sector. **It was one of the first places I knew that were sort of doing what's now called, you know, intersectional movement building or trust-based. Back then we didn't have the fancy words for it, but it was really just sort of funding the folks that experienced it** and so just always admired the foundation and really appreciated the support it gave my program at the time.

So, when after Ms, I had worked at a few different foundations, consulted with different foundations, and so when I was looking for what I wanted to do next coming from the Arcus Foundation, which does LGBTQ movement building funding, I knew that I wanted to stay in, I really loved the work that I did and I had done for many years, social justice, you know, funding, organizing long-term movement building work and it was just, I think the luck of timing, there was a roll opening at General Service. I crossed my fingers and you know really thought this is, this is exactly what I want to do. I want to do exactly the familiar work that I had done for so many years but at a new place, but a trusted place, and being able to just deepen the work.

So I started in 2022. **I moved into the permanent Executive Director role in 2023 and have just been so humbled and grateful and excited to serve in this role where because General Services is such a small team and it is a family foundation, gosh 75-76 years old now, and because it is a smaller operation than other places I've worked at in my career, I get to do what I guess I've always wanted to do and just didn't really put it together, which is lead a foundation but also get to still do all the program work.** I don't know, is that crazy? Is it brilliant or crazy to want to be able to do all that together, but I have just always loved serving in a program role and being able to learn, and be in relationship, in a close relationship with grantees and with folks, you know, on the front lines day-to-day. **So what General Service has funded over the 70+ years it's been around, really has been the way I see it, a really clear through line of even though it's funded different issue areas it really has always had this focus on those that experience the issue or closest to the issue and of really, you know, funding work that maybe other larger foundations can't or won't.**

Over the years it has worked through or worked on different issue areas such as reproductive rights, land and water issues, democracy and voting issues, various conservation work, workers rights and my predecessor, the brilliant **Dimple Abichandani before I came on, was the ED**

for 7 years and really merged together each of the issue areas that the foundation had been working on into one program that still exists today called the Building Voice and Power -BVP- Building Voice and Power program. And what it is is, you know, also what I had always dreamed of doing, which is working on a truly intersectional movement building foundation program portfolio in all the most challenging and beautiful ways. All of our grant-making is intersectional movement building in nature, which means it's not focused on any single issue, or any single community, or geography, or any single movement, and it really allows us to fund what we've been funding for many years, but also do it in a way where we aren't really bound by silos. We can fund groups working on economic rights and reproductive justice issues that are also working on, you know, voting rights in and out of election years. Groups working across the country that maybe have a strong base in a particular part of the country but are working closely with national organizations and with regional organizations and local organizations. So it really is sort of a dream come true.

I feel like for all of the maybe monologues that I've said, or articles that I've written or wanted to write, or have already read that other folks wrote about how foundations should really fund in the ways that people and movements work in real life, **I get to do that day to day at General Service and just try to kind of keep up with where we think we can be most impactful with our dollars, in you know, supporting groups to truly, I mean cliches aside, really build the voice and power of folks that have historically not had it to make actual real, real change.**

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RUSTY [00:13:19] So, since 2018 the foundation has had this healing justice funding program and curious to dive into that. What do you all mean by healing justice, how did this line of work come to be and what does it look like?

DESIREE: Yes, I think one of, again that mixture of both challenging and beautiful, if I think about what I've experienced from General Services' healing justice work and what I know about it and have read in our files about it, the challenging and beautiful thing is that there is not one definition which I think to be true. **I think there is truly not one definition of healing justice whether you're talking about that in an individual's life or in a philanthropic foundation program. General Service started with this idea and approach and wanting to take some experimental action around it in 2018, but it really was kind of born out of everything that broke open after the 2016 presidential election for many groups in the U.S. Of course,**

particularly those working on social justice issues or led by and on behalf of groups led by, you know, communities of color and different historically marginalized communities. And it really was sort of a way to respond to the very real trauma, it was sort of the current lived trauma, but a lot of the historical trauma that had been triggered by everything that was happening at breakneck speed post 2016, really as 2017 evolved. And then that just sort of morphed into the added layers of exhaustion and of different ways that trauma presented itself in 2020 as covid came about. And then takes us kind of where we are today, which I think is a mixture of all of that, plus added layers. I just sort of see it as this really challenging hard kind of layered cake, I don't know, maybe we could call it something nice like a cake...

RUSTY [00:15:40] Layer cake of trauma...

DESIREE: A layered cake of trauma. Yeah, but **although I've long, I think, wanted to just for convenience sake have a specific definition for healing justice or have a very specific, you know, program tied up in a bow with very clear outcomes** and you know, the clear rationale and the priorities and considerations, **the lived experiences of the groups that we support and that we grant will be the first to say we cannot do our jobs each day, or we cannot meet our organizing, or our advocacy or our policy campaign goals, without centering this healing that's needed and it is not defined in any one way and we are also struggling with how we go about doing this, when we know there's no way around it, just through it and there's no linear way through it.**

What I think also really came out was, in addition to 2016 and 2020, covid and the murder of George Floyd, and the continued after effects of the goings-on in the Trump presidency, I think that it was not only new trauma, but there were, what we heard from a lot of grantees, a lot of triggered trauma that maybe many grantees or folks that worked in organizations hadn't really dealt with, or maybe you were really focused on dealing with within the communities that they were working with, but that all of a sudden it just, it was not possible to really delineate that trauma from that that they hold not as, you know, as individuals with their life experience, not as maybe a paid staff at this grantee organization that works with these communities.

So, we really saw that blurring of lines that folks were not their position at this organization that was open from 9 to 5, they were really humans that were responding to what they were seeing. But also what was coming up for them, oftentimes as people who got into this work not because of a path that they chose but of cards they were dealt in life, I think as you, especially if you get into work with folks that deal with trans communities or HIV/AIDS or homelessness, folks get into this work as a way to to save themselves and their communities and and end up being, you know, the foremost experts on on these issues. And so, **how General Service approaches this work and how I've tried to keep this work to date is to not force ourselves into something that is too wrapped up and neat, because the work isn't. It really is a way to respond to the various layers of trauma that our grantees are dealing with.**

RUSTY: Right. There's too many neat bows in philanthropy that I certainly don't, everything doesn't need to be that, so I don't have any problem with you saying this is big and broad and messy and important.

DESIREE [00:19:00] You know, one thing I will say that I forgot to say earlier was that as I was looking at what preceded my time at general service, there were a number of interviews done with grantee organizations around what was needed, how they viewed, you know, healing justice, what it meant to them. And what I saw time and time again come out was different ways of basically saying the same thing, that for them the ways that they integrated healing justice work or activities or even just intention into their everyday work was this importance or I guess maybe intention of keeping themselves or helping themselves get whole while they were doing the work. So I guess **putting a spotlight on the importance of their wholeness as humans**, as people, that they could not break in the process of doing this work, that was often heartbreaking. And I think, you know, being in social justice philanthropy for 20+ years, I don't really remember a time before this where I really heard that expressed. I think it was always there, it's not like folks just started feeling these things or knowing that these were their lived experiences or those of their predecessors or their ancestors. I think **there's just this moment where folks are able to say I can't do this work if I'm not okay, or if you're not okay, and that has to be part of our everyday work. It's not something separate from our strategy or our work plan.**

RUSTY: [00:20:51] That's very powerful and so important that the foundation is being responsive to that, to listening intentionally and figuring out, even if it's not clean and easy to delineate what is needed all the time and it's not always neat and tidy, but that you all have been responding to this since 2018. Because so many funders have not made this a priority or part of the way they do business and supporting their grantees yet, and I think a lot are starting to wake up to some of this need and are looking around and going: what do we do? So that's one of the reasons I wanted to have you on, was so that other nonprofits and funders could hear about how you all have been responding. And I don't, I certainly don't think it has to be perfect or anything but it's a response, it's listening and responding, and that is such a critical part of social justice philanthropy and of investing in the human beings who make organizations and movements happen.

DESIREE: **It goes so much against the culture of philanthropy.** I mean, even the culture of your most values-driven social justice focused philanthropy. I mean, it is, so much of **the system and the structure is wanting to support some specific change to happen and then supporting groups in order to make that change happen. And so, there is just naturally a focus on clarity, on outcomes, on supporting the work needing to happen. And you know, movement building work already kind of starts to sort of upset that system or model, but I think that healing justice goes even farther**, and that General Service has long been a foundation that is comfortable in sort of living in this space, but it's stretching us.

And I think it is just something, it's just the reality of something like this, of philanthropies and foundations and program staff needing to likely kind of think through how you understand this,

how then you persuade or sell this in your foundation, and then you know, I think really think about what you're comfortable with knowing and not knowing, or seeing evidence of or not in the near term, in the long term or ever. With **our healing justice grant-making, it has always been very open and flexible, so it is it's very responsive kind of whatever folks need, and that has run the gamut, everything from extra dollars for services for staff, you know, to be made available whether it be massage or physical healing or therapeutic. Everything from that to extra dollars for staff development or for staff retreat time. What lately I've heard from a few folks is wanting extra resources for conflict management and mediation, getting kind of outside expertise and facilitation. So there's been, you know, a variety of different things that folks have said that they've needed and how they've used these resources, but we attached the dollars as a stipend onto the grant that we are usually renewing to the organization, and don't ask for any reporting on it.** We do ask folks, you know, are curious if they do want to share, but it is not structured in a way to monitor it, to evaluate it, and so that it's something that really does buck up against the general system of philanthropy.

RUSTY: Before we go further into what the program looks like. As you were talking I was thinking it'd be interesting here, and I know you weren't part of the very beginnings of this on the inside, but do you know anything about how the board responded or thought about this or what their role was along with Dimple and the staff, and what that case making might have looked like or what that listening process looked like, that others might learn from?

DESIREE [00:25:39]: You know, I'm privileged at General Service in that the culture of grant-making has long been one that has centered humanness and people and the wellness of the grantees that we support. I think that around that time post 2016 there were, you know, so many social justice groups, their worlds turned upside down, there were, I know working at that time at the Arcus Foundation having very similar conversations as I know were happening at General Service, you know, of groups all of a sudden needing to figure out digital security, having real fears of deportation, a lot of very visceral day-to-day protection needs were kind of all of a sudden, you know, needing to be met. And then along with that folks, you know, I mean not that these folks ever had 9 to 5 jobs with, you know, relaxing ever, but this, their lives really were 24/7 now in tending to the needs of their staff and the communities that they serve.

So I think that the conversation with the board was probably not that complicated which I think is, you know, a privilege and just really being able to share some of the conversations and some of the experiences and to get support around, you know, what sort of one easy step that we can take to you know, we don't know all the answers and don't have a perfect plan, but how can we respond in some way. So it was I think a fairly easy conversation and you know, I can go into where we're at now, which is I think probably where a lot of folks are at, just sort of scratching our heads and I think, again as I as I just talked about, you know the need to be flexible and not have a perfect plan, **I think there's just always that feeling of how do I create something that is the most impactful, that is the most strategic, with something that is so human and it is maybe not meant to be that way,** but I can I can get into that in a little bit.

RUSTY: Well, I didn't expect this conversation to have this theme of bows and boxes vs messy responsiveness, but I'm glad it did because it really does, it's really triggering for me, not trauma, but that experience of what working in philanthropic foundations can be like and that tendency toward the technocratic, towards perfectionism, towards linear thinking. And so it's pretty interesting that this, you know, keeps coming up in this conversation. For me it's making me think of sort of this deep connection between culture of philanthropy or philanthropic foundations and then how that impacts this issue of how nonprofit people feel, you know, supported or not supported, or developed or underdeveloped, or paid or not. You know, like all of those issues do connect back to the priorities and impulses and approaches of the funders who have such an outsized influence on how nonprofits operate.

DESIREE: Right. Well in the day-to-day, **I think you can have the best intentions and the best folks on your board and on your staff, but you know by and large the decision-makers in philanthropy -capital P- total sector and those you know working at the community level on the hardest issues are usually kind of two different groups of folks.** And so, I think for something that can be interpreted in so many different ways or as sort of unserious as is healing justice to a group of folks that you know, I think every human has traumatic experiences in their lives, but the particular kind of trauma that has been really broken open in the past few years. If you have not experienced that, or you don't see it day-to-day it's hard to understand it. And so, you know, if you sort of have the sector that is a very comfortable sector by and large and our day-to-day is not that of folks with this visceral trauma, **when you can't relate to something then it can very easily seem like not understandable or like the wrong answer. And just because something is not familiar doesn't mean it's wrong.**

And that has long been the case in our sector, but I think that with this, you know with the past few years, I think about what one of the best examples: during covid so many organizing and advocacy and public policy campaign groups had to focus almost explicitly on direct service and meeting the needs of their communities and of their staff. And many of these groups had been doing that forever, I mean it is part of, they just never told their funders about it. But you know, if you want to get communities to turn out and to be active and to vote and to go storm a school board, you know, they need child care, they need food, they need transportation. And so that was always part of really good organizing work, if you looked close enough. And so **when covid happened and all of that was taking priority, the good thing is that many foundations eased their practices or eased their rules and were sort of giving out flexible money in ways that they hadn't before... I will think about the silver lining on that,** and being able to really see that all of that work is being important and being, it's not work that is sliced and diced by groups working in marginalized communities day-to-day.

I know that there's a lot of energy around wanting to have philanthropies be able to sustain a lot of that ease and differences of approach that they had during covid. Anyway, I just think of that example of how many foundations you know said, well, we don't fund direct service we fund advocacy and it's just like, you know, if you want a fund policy change then like direct service is a very very core part of that work. So, being able to really see that, you know, I think even if it

made a difference that one foundation in seeing the reality of that, you know, that's a positive thing.

RUSTY [00:32:41]: Yeah, some of the reforms that foundations made at the beginning of the pandemic were, I felt, were just some basic things like: do better, look, don't put people through hell to get a grant, and some of them were pretty radical. I mean, we just got a grant where there was no proposal requested. It was a conversation, send us some basic documents that are already available, send us some goals from a previous proposal you've written and we approve and that was pretty dramatically different as an experience for me as a fundraiser.

I want to get back here to, I know you don't ask folks to report and I actually want to push you on that a little bit. So, because one of the things I've been frustrated by is the lack of stories and data and information about the value of investing in the nonprofit workforce, the value that's created for the individuals, for their organizations, for their movements and for the foundation's themselves. So the fact that you don't, I get that you're trying to be responsive and not add more work to groups by giving them these healing justice grants, or stipends on top of grants, but it sounds like you're not collecting sort of, in any formal way or any even maybe informal... My question was going to be, you know, can you share examples of the issues grantees have sought to address with the healing justice support and how do they use it. So that's still a question. And another question that's come up for me is like what would a non annoying way to capture the value be, that you know, the foundation could then share out to other funders and nonprofit?

DESIREE [00:34:41]: I think that's a really important point. I should add that we don't require formal reports actually for any of our grants, and most of our grants are general operating support, and we would try to keep in contact with grantees as much as we can that doesn't, you know, isn't overbearing, but we do have at the end of a grant term a conversation. And honestly, I mean, I get so much more of a conversation than I would ever get from a written report. The conversations go everywhere, but it really is the chance like, you know, what went well, what didn't, but really mostly what do you want to share, what's important for us to have on our radar not only is as a funder, but as someone also that circles in the philanthropic universe that I think can always, we always need as many stories and doses of reality as possible to be able to share.

So we do do that. One thing I have been thinking about is yes, on our end, what work do we do to compile that, who's the audience and why, who needs to know about this. Like, what are, you know, what do the story say? Do we need to have them say anything in particular, you know, how do we analyze it? So that's something for sure that is on my list and on my radar of how to do more of that since we have, we have those stories at our fingertips and sometimes I ask the question and they'll give me something, or sometimes they'll say it unsolicited, and so trying to organize that more I think is hugely important. And you know, I think for the healing justice work, we, maybe for a gen-op grant we do ask more pointedly, you know kind of tell us what happened etcetera. For the healing justice, we will likely, if they use the resources for something that they really don't want to share, that's totally fine. But I mean really, I think 99% of the time

folks are open to sharing. And I think you know, it'll be a case-by-case basis on what they feel comfortable sharing and how we interpret or analyze sort of the learning or the lesson in a non-judgmental way, I think. Because so much of this and as I said earlier, we're just finding so many groups needing support around conflict resolution, conflict mediation and work within teams, within their staff, within their coalitions...

RUSTY: And that's very sensitive. Obviously, yeah.

DESIREE: Yeah, but I think your point is incredibly important. If it's not noted and written up or you know stated by someone who, I don't know, gets listened to a lot in the sector, that's always a good way to get it. I'm a big believer in that I think things need to be validated and amplified in ways that get it beyond the echo chamber.

RUSTY: Right, we need to be very careful. We don't want to pimp people's trauma or we don't want to expose sensitive information about groups or any of that stuff. But I do think funders listen to each other, and then listen to these influential voices out there, like consultants and whatnot. And if there's not that sort of raw content that people are discussing, there's nothing to respond to, so it's been I think a challenge. One foundation I saw created a like a half an hour documentary where they followed four executive directors of grantee organizations over a year. So they paid a lot of money to have a film crew and the people be like driving their car, you know, doing their work with the camera person next to them, and they'd just be talking as they drove. So just really followed them as they went through a leadership development program that the foundation sponsored, and so in the end they produce this kind of 20-30 minute video that's on their website that really just gives you these portraits of people: what is an executive director's life like, and then what's their journey through this leadership development experience. That's obviously different from what we're, what we're talking about here, but I think that kind of it's not a formal evaluation, it's not asking for, you know, quantifiable data. It's just saying let's tell the story of the value for these human beings and their organizations. I think we need more of that kind of storytelling where it's appropriate.

As we kind of come to a close here, I want to make sure people have, people may have questions about, like, what does this look like concretely. So, can you just give us, real briefly, like what's the average size of a General Service Foundation grant and then, I know that the healing justice piece is relatively modest, that's another reason not to bother people too much about what they did with it, but can you give a sense of what the scale of the healing justice support has been, if you think it's adequate, where you'd like that to go.

DESIREE [00:37:07]: So the healing justice allocation in our docket, in our budget is a hundred thousand dollars a year. So it is pretty modest.

RUSTY: So that's total...

DESIREE: Total, and we have about 75 or so active grantees. So it's not, it's a modest amount for the needs. I know we certainly aren't able to support every single grantee. Most of this year

I've been really talking to folks and I may have like accidentally manifested coming back in contact with you Rusty to untie these issues, because I've been so curious of you know, what other people are hearing, what they're doing you know, if are there any brilliant, way more brilliant than I have ideas around how you would use a modest amount of money to get the greatest impact, or to be able to help the most. The good news-bad news is a lot of people are doing something or thinking of doing something, but I haven't really heard of anything that is like anymore kind of, you know, crazy or different than kind of, you know, this model of being able to give a little bit more to folks that need it.

Historically what General Services has done is let all grantees know that this is available and, you know, to be in touch with us if they wanted to be considered. Not surprisingly, I mean we support a lot of smaller organizing groups, a number of groups don't have development staff and so it may be that many folks don't know or don't have the time or the staff to actually kind of think about it and do the ask. So we'll get a couple groups every year that will make a specific ask, but really it has been, I think historically, program staff knowing which groups are really going through a particularly tough time or might want to use some extra resources for something and so it's been sort of tacking on 5,000-10,000 to, again, a grant that is up for renewal. So, you know something that you could just add on as opposed to having it be a whole different, you know, process and proposal.

This year I started experimenting with giving larger stipends to a few groups. So there was one particular group that's been doing a ton of work and I know 2024 is going to be a very, very big year and tough year for this group, and on a check-in call with them they would basically mention that, you know, before going into the year they were going to do this staff retreat, that I don't think they do very often, and they were going to do it in their office. And so we kind of had this funny exchange about being able to have retreats at nice places and how foundations will never forgo a nice place to have a retreat. And so we were able to tack on, you know, a larger amount to this particular group's grant. I mean, it was sort of in the spirit of if you would like to really be able to have, you know, this at a particular destination or you know somewhere where you can really have something outside of your office, you can, but also we don't designate exactly how you need to use the resources. It is just for the spirit of being well.

And using resources that you know, I think for so many groups, even if maybe there are larger social justice groups compared to others, there's so little money for anything that you know is not related to a specific project or you know that they would take away from salary or... So that's one example. I really am in the middle of the question mark, scratching the head process. I feel confident that you know, I can be creative and although our general yearly grant-making budget we're about between 4 and 5 million, although that is modest as well, in the grand scheme of things, **I am really trying to kind of think as creatively as possible in how to do the most we can, and how to think outside the box and experiment and always what can we do beyond, which I think is the most important thing to do, is just keep flexible general operating support, and let groups use dollars as they wish.** So I'm in the active phase of what's the next level for this, for us. We may not have billions of dollars, but we have flexibility and I have the room to be creative and to be really responsive.

RUSTY [00:44:57]: Yeah, I mean you just did the start of your tenure so I can understand that maybe caught you at an interesting moment, where you've kind of inherited this healing justice work that's been going on for, what is that now, five years or so, and the field keeps changing and trying to respond and that's great. Great to be in that place of trying to figure out the next, the next iteration, the next level. Now, I was going to ask that what are the challenges you're trying to figure out or tackle kind of next with this, but it sounds like that's going to need to be maybe, you'll be able to come back in a year or two from now and we can have another conversation and see where things went.

I was curious, you know, we were both on this panel discussion at the Center for Effective Philanthropy conference at the beginning of this month, we're recording this November 28th that was on November 1st. Feels like a long time, it's only been a month, where we talked -you and several other funders on the panel talked- about how you're trying to invest in nonprofit workers during this age of burnout as we framed it. So I was curious if you just, if you had any reflections from that conversation, from that session, from the questions, from what you heard from other panelists.

DESIREE: Well, I mean, I think like any person who organizes a panel or is asked to be on a panel, there's always that natural like, I don't think anyone's going to come. We were like all the way far at the end, it was the last day, but I had a feeling. And it so happened that you know, there were many folks that showed up which I think was great and truly a reflection of this issue. And I think, even if you are a program staff at a foundation, any type of foundation that doesn't have a formal program, maybe has not even ever had an internal conversation about wellness or burnout on behalf of grantees, you know something is happening. And even if you're having unrelated conversations with your grantees, you know that there is something, there's something happening. I think the intensity of the day-to-day experiences and lives of nonprofit leaders and staff... Yeah, you can just feel it, it's in the air and you see it.

So, I think that that was a big reflection of ,you know, I think the the hunger for knowing that my program may be about this issue or that policy or this system, but if these grantees cannot sustain their wellness, if my groups continue having transitions and burnout rate, you know what I'm seeing this is, **it doesn't matter what we want to have happen as a philanthropy, we need people to make it happen and we need to invest in people to be able to make the various changes that we want and that's part of our missions.** So I think it's a reflection of something that you just can't, you kind of can't ignore it. I think even for foundation staff too. I mean, again, our lives day-to-day may be more comfortable, but you can feel it. There is, I think the burnout happening in different organizations it's definitely, it's seeping and you can feel it.

So people know that they need to do something they just don't know what, and I feel like I've been in rooms now over the past year where before it was sort of something you didn't really talk about, or if you had shared with your grantees, you know that some of them were going through really hard things, it was sort of, we talked about it with this one person, or you know wasn't really... Now **the dam has broken, which I think is a good thing. It is now part of**

conversations, part of you know, learning panels and I sense an urgency and a desperation for answers from funders. Like, you know, I can give this much money just tell me like, you know, who do I give it to, like make it easy for me. I just ,I want to help and I just don't know, you know, how to make a grant to solve this, and it's not something that I can turn away from. Yeah, you can't ignore it.

RUSTY: And as we said going back to the theme of this conversation, we can't make it easy for the funders because it's not easy, and it's not something that can be neatly tied up. And this year coming, you know, 2024 it's not just going to be hard for that one group you mentioned, but you know, for social justice groups, for civic engagement groups that are involved in the election, this is going to be a another tense and intense year, less than a year from now, the presidential election will be over and we'll see what happens from there. So, you know, to be continued, I think. How can listeners learn more about you, connect with you and General Service Foundation?

DESIREE: Yes, you can go to our website where we do have more information on our programs on our grantees and the healing justice work at **generalservice.org**, and you can also email me directly: **desiree@generalservice.org**

RUSTY [00:50:35]: Terrific. Thank you for sharing the website and your email, that's great, and thank you for your time coming on the show and thanks for your leadership in the sector.

DESIREE: Thank you Rusty for your leadership, my goodness, for so many years, and this is incredibly, I mean to say that what you're doing at Fund The People is critical would be an understatement. So thank you for amplifying these important issues.

RUSTY: Couldn't do it without you and all the other good folks so, thank you though. All right, talk to you soon.

DESIREE. Alright, thanks Rusty.

(music)

RUSTY [00:51:10]: I hope you got value from learning about Healing Justice from Desiree Flores of the General Service Foundation. And I hope you enjoyed this 3-part special series, "How Funders Can Support Nonprofit Workers in the Age of Burnout".

Coming up next week here on the show: Shaheer Mustafa, Executive Director of CareWell, a foster-care organization in Massachusetts. You'll hear Shaheer's insights on balancing government and philanthropic funding in human services nonprofits, you'll hear how he built an HR department from scratch within an organization that already had hundreds of employees, and a lot more. I know you'll get a lot of value from his perspective, so keep your eyes peeled and your ears tuned to Fund the People. I'll talk to you next week!

OUTRO

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