



A PODCAST WITH RUSTY STAHL | S7 EP25

Defend Nonprofits, Defend the Social Safety Net

Defend Nonprofits, Defend Democracy Series

WITH

Edward Hershey
Home of Guiding Hands



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RUSTY'S SOLO PORTION

Welcome to the Fund the People Podcast and another biweekly installment of our Defend Nonprofits, Defend Democracy Series. I'm Rusty Stahl, your host and President and CEO of Fund the People. I hope you're keeping your tank full, taking care of yourself, and taking care of one another.

In today's episode, you'll get our Defend Nonprofits, Defend Democracy updates and you will get a terrific guest. Be sure to visit our blog at fundthepeople.org to get our full DNDD Update material with a full roundup of links and resources. In our interview today, you'll get a close-up view of what's happening from a human services nonprofit CEO in a conservative part of the country. Edward Hershey is CEO of Home of Guiding Hands, one of the largest providers of disability services in San Diego and Imperial Counties, reaching more than 4,500 infants, children, adolescents, and adults with special needs each year. As we recognize the sacrifices of our volunteer military this Memorial Day week, I'm pleased to say our guest is also a veteran of the United States Navy, and I want to give my own shout out to all the veterans out there who've served the country and made so many sacrifices for our freedoms.

The conversation with Mr. Hershey paints a vivid picture of how important Medicaid is to the American middle class. Any of us could be born with a developmental disability or some other disability, any of us can eventually have a disability that we weren't born with, and any of our children, siblings, cousins or neighbors could as well. It shows how important Medicaid funding is to nonprofits, and how important nonprofits are to Medicaid, and how nonprofits deliver the government's social safety net directly to Americans on behalf of our government. So definitely be tuned to my conversation with Edward Hershey.

A few quick programming announcements:

- Next Wednesday, June 4, 2025, we have some terrific guests – Kara Park, Program Director at All Due Respect, one of the most amazing intermediary organizations in the field today and a partner organization that I really respect; alongside Gaby Hernandez, Executive Director of Orale, an immigrant rights nonprofit that is participating in an All Due Respect pilot program. I'll speak with Kara and Gaby next week about the incredible pilot efforts of All Due Respect to improve wages and working conditions for community organizers around the country.
- The following week, Wednesday, June 11, 2025, Episode 27, will be our season seven finale and the final installment of DN/DD series for the season, and it will feature our very special guest, John Palfrey, President of the MacArthur Foundation. Mr. Palfrey has been one of the early and leading voices mobilizing foundations into action this year in response to the attacks on nonprofits and philanthropy and I'm very pleased that he would join us for our final episode of the season.

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We will be back, after taking a summer break from podcasting, we will be back on Wednesday, September 3rd with the first episode of Season 8 of your Fund the People podcast. Two and a half months during summer used to be calm and nothing would happen, but this year, it's going to be a lifetime. So between seasons, we'll continue to keep you updated on the latest policy matters impacting nonprofits and philanthropy over on our LinkedIn page – so be sure to follow us there.

TODAY'S MESSAGE. Nonprofits are essential to and integrated into the social safety net. A threat to the Net is a Threat to nonprofits and our workforce, and a threat to the nonprofit workforce is a threat to America's social safety net. It's hard to keep perspective on it, but we are in the midst of a rolling series of attacks on democracy, on our government, on our civil society, and on the American people.

The attacks on nonprofits and philanthropy began during the election campaign, but were primarily rhetorical and narrative in nature. There was one senate bill put forward by a back-bencher named JD Vance, it was an attempt at a double-whammy that would have stolen endowment funds and stripped away federal student aid from any college or university that didn't crack down on student protest encampments on quads that were promoting a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Those attacks during the campaign continued after the election but before the new administration began, with our old friend HR 9495, which we called the Nonprofit-Killer Bill.

Then a new, more intense round of multi-formed attacks took off after inauguration as we all know. These included: executive orders and memos and increasingly heated rhetoric and threats, efforts to defund and destroy universities if they did not agree to government censorship and control. There were DOGE threats to take-over, attempts to take over, and actual take-

overs of government-adjacent nonprofits and fully independent nonprofit organizations, like the Vera Center for Justice.

Now a new legislative phase of the attack is underway. In their Big Bloated Bill of tax-hikes, we see a TRIPLE-THREAT to the American Way of Life: BIG TAXES, BIG CUTS to services and BIG DEBT. BIG TAXES on the working class and middle class, BIG TAXES on nonprofits and philanthropy. BIG CUTS to basic government services that all Americans use - particularly Medicaid, which they said they would not cut. They're saying they're only addressing waste and fraud, not making cuts, that means they are dismissing Americans in need of basic services as waste and fraud. BIG DEBT added to the national deficit

And all of this to erode and shrink the public good, and provide tax cuts for the coastal elites, corporate titans and the corrupt swamp monsters who do their bidding.

This bill initially included: Healthcare cuts to the working class, middle class, and struggling Americans, Taxes on Nonprofits, Taxes on foundation endowments and I think university endowments as well and HR 9495, the Nonprofit-Killer bill found its way back from the grave as a little zombie trying to weave its way back into the law.

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Thanks to the advocacy of our field, groups like National Council of Nonprofits, Independent Sector, Council of Foundations, United Philanthropy Forum, HR 9495 was removed from the version that passed the House. The ACLU was in there too and I'm sure many other groups, trying to stop that. And you know, strangely enough the House Republicans took HR 9495 out of the bill. Probably because they knew it wouldn't pass, it has nothing to do with taxes or revenue for the government and that's what this bill must be, using the reconciliation process which allows them to pass it with only a simple majority.

But we must remain vigilant, it could come back in a Senate version of the bill, or in the negotiated compromise version between the house and senate or somewhere else. We must remain vigilant as was said in the joint statement of Independent Sector and National Council of Nonprofits, Council of Foundations and United Philanthropy Forum.

I'm thankful the NP Killer Bill is out for now. And I'm thankful that there is language in the bill to re-establish some portion of the tax deduction for families who give to nonprofits but who are not wealthy itemizers of their taxes. So there's one gleam of good in this bill as far as I can tell. But this is still a very very bad bill for our sector and our society. It would actually be a triple whammy on nonprofits: it would increase direct taxes on some nonprofits, tax large foundation endowments and university endowments at a rate of 10% a year, and rip away Medicaid, which reimburses many human services nonprofits for services they've already delivered to people who need them. It would concurrently strip sources of funding for nonprofits from three different directions: From direct taxes on nonprofits, indirect taxes on nonprofits by taxing foundations and government funding for basic service provision.

So TODAY'S CALL TO ACTION is to use your unique powers as nonprofit leaders, not as lobbyists or advocates, but as organizations that provide meaningful services to the constituents of your elected representatives. Show your Senators the Pain this bill would inflict on the communities and organizations they are supposed to represent and the organizations that serve those communities.

Show Your Senators the Pain, by Inviting them to site visits to meet the people you serve, to meet your organization, to see how Medicaid, combined with state dollars and other resources, make these services possible. If you can't get one or more of your senators on-site in the coming month or two, Show Your Senators the Pain by creating videos on your phone, it doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. But interview yourself, interview nonprofit executives, line staff, clients, and donors. This is not about poverty pimping or marketing, but telling the story of how nonprofits would be impacted by this bill.

Urge them to oppose the bill actively, viscerally and with vigor, to tell their story to their colleagues, of what this bill would mean for the American way of life. You could actually change their vote in the senate. They can also use this experience in their arguments about the bill, to surface the impact it would have in their state and in all the states and regions of this country. So that is today's call to action: **show your senators the pain of this bill.**

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In TODAY'S HEADLINES there's lots of good stuff up on our blog with links to headlines, to articles, press releases and opinion pieces from the last two weeks, plus a few great bonus items. Our top headline: A Gross Overreach, Colorado Nonprofit Association on funding cuts and executive orders. This radio story out of Colorado talks about the chaos, dismay and instability that's been caused by the Trump's administration and its attacks on the sector over the last six months.

There's lots of other great headlines, such as: as the tax bill heads the senate, here's how philanthropy is fighting back, in the Chronicle of Philanthropy. Judge rule take over of nonprofits is a "gross usurpation of power", in the Nonprofit Quarterly. And there's a lot more including the joint statement on taking HR 9495 out of the bill by some of our colleague organizations and there's a lot more about what's happening. So, definitely go over to fundthepeople.org or look in your show notes for this episode and you'll find a link to our DNDD update with all the headlines you need.

Our guest today is Edward Hershey. He's a hardworking, straight-talking, long-serving nonprofit leader in San Diego who is advocating to stop cuts to Medicaid, because those cuts will send services for the developmentally disabled back into the bad old days. Here's my conversation with Edward Hershey. Enjoy...

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RUSTY

I am pleased to introduce our guest today here on the Fund The People podcast. Edward Hershey is President and Chief Executive Officer of Home of Guiding Hands, a nonprofit that

has been providing disability support services to individuals in San Diego and Imperial counties for over 55 years. Edward has held this role since 2021 and has been with the organization in other roles since 2015.

Prior to joining Home of Guiding Hands, Edward worked for Father Joe's Villages as their vice president of operations and for their employment program, where he specialized in veterans needs. Edward served in the United States Navy during the Gulf War and was honorably discharged in 1993. He volunteers his time with the Boy Scouts of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the VFW.

Edward, thank you for your service to our country your entire adult life, as far as I can tell, through military service and through nonprofit work. And welcome, sir, to the Fund The People podcast.

EDWARD

Thanks, Rusty. Thanks for having me on today.

RUSTY

It's my pleasure and appreciate your time being here and what you do. Tell folks what is Home of Guiding Hands and briefly, who do you serve and what do you do?

EDWARD

So Home of Guiding Hands, as you mentioned, has been in operations for over five decades. We are one of the largest providers of services in Southern California to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Think of like Down's syndrome, autism. We started with a vision from a small working group of there had to be a better way.

Back then, if you had a child with a disability, your priest, your doctor, your friends would encourage you to put them in an institute, that they would be a burden, that their medical expenses would be higher than you could afford and basically you would be better off. A small group of family members got together and said, no, there had to be a better way. And created at the time what was cutting edge and modeled throughout the United States after that is a campus like setting that had everything there. We served about 200 people. Fast forward to now and we serve about 5000 people and have about 1200 employees and do an array of services.

RUSTY

Wow. You said 1200 employees.

EDWARD

Yeah and growing. We just had a new employee orientation last week and there were another 25 in the group.

RUSTY

Wow. So tell us, how does the organization work with government dollars to deliver these services?

EDWARD

Yeah, unfortunately, we're very dependent on that. About 90% of our funding comes from state with some federal match. We're about a \$35 million operation, 90% of that comes from government. Of that 90%, 40% actually comes from the federal government in the form of Medicaid.

RUSTY

And so you deliver a service to someone, you provide services, and then Medicaid kind of acts as their insurance and pays you back for that work done.

EDWARD

Yeah. So it could be, a lot of our program is housing. So we have different forms of housing, everything from foster program to group homes to independent living. So, a majority of their funds come in to provide for their housing, there are some that provide for their medical care. Within our group homes, we have a staff of nurses that kind of act as that frontline medical provider, triaging service, making sure medication is taken, that diagnosis are followed, doctor's recommendations, appointments held up.

RUSTY

Now, I'm just curious, like, does the government do anything like this? I mean itself, like the federal or state government. Do they have things parallel to these services or is this really something that nonprofits like yours are delivering and government supports you to do it?

EDWARD

Great question. Currently, no, the government does not do these services. Each state has a department for developmental services that helps oversee it. Each state's a little differently of how they manage that, but it is nonprofits that carry the bulk of that.

That wasn't how the industry began, though. It began out of the government's inability or inhumane treatment of individuals and institutes. So historically, as I mentioned, what sparked the innovation of Home of Guiding Hands was the poor care within the institutes. They didn't start off bad, but they were government funded ways of caring for large groups of individuals. Very similar to the campus setting, but it was more institutional, kind of like hospital setting. But over the years they saw tremendous amounts of budget cuts similar to what we're facing now and cut back the services. In the end, staffing was about one staff for every 30 individuals.

Geraldo did a piece on it, you can Google it, it's very disturbing, I'll warn you at first, but it shows pictures of people with a lack of care, almost acting as animals. They didn't have the use of their arms, so they would try to feed themselves, because there was no staff to help them, and they would just be like dogs on the floor trying to eat off these plates. Very disturbing. So that's what sparked Home of Guiding Hands and other organizations as there had to be a better way. The

government is not set up to care for these individuals, and that's where nonprofits come in to help.

RUSTY

And as I think about the timeline, 55 years, that would be, we're in 2025 that takes us back to 1980, am I?

EDWARD

Yeah, I think it was the 70s, yeah, and so you bring up a great point, though. It's not like we're talking about ancient history, right? We're not talking about an early period of the United States. We're talking about something that was within my lifetime, was within your lifetime. It was not that far back ago. And I think that's where my biggest concern with our current administration is just not learning from that history, and the possibility that we're doomed to repeat ourselves.

RUSTY

Yeah, I mean, I watched some of that Geraldo video that you mentioned, and I encourage everyone listening to do that as well, and we'll put a link in the show notes to the one I watched, which was like an anniversary, a look back, interviewing him, and at least one of the people who he had interviewed, one of the residents when he did that original piece, which was kind of before he became a sensationalist daytime show, it was more when he was more of an investigative journalist. It's very powerful.

I'm sure everyone listening would agree we don't want our children or siblings or parents or friends treated like animals, you know, in a hospital-like environment with no support. Well, we definitely don't want to go back to that.

So as the Trump administration has attacked government itself, government programs and funding streams while concurrently attacking nonprofits and threatening to attack philanthropic funders, this sort of triple whammy. How has this environment impacted Home of Guiding Hands or other nonprofits you see in the San Diego area or in the disability services field?

EDWARD

There's definitely been some impact recently. I think there's also what's going to happen in the unknown. So I'll talk first about what's happened recently and then we can go into where I see this going. But, we just recently had our gala, so I mentioned earlier that 90% of our funding comes from state and federal funding, 10% we make up through donations, events, fundraisers.

And so we recently just had our gala event. It's our largest fundraiser, funds go directly to what we call the mission funds, which are directly what the clients need. This might be something as simple as a wheelchair, because Medicaid doesn't fund but one every four years and there's breaks on the third year and so they're to go without a wheelchair for a year.

We saw a drastic decrease in the amount of funds raised because people are worried about their investments. You see a 20% hit on your investment in one week and now it's bounced

back, but that uncertainty of the market that's been created by the administration is making people very nervous about giving their money away. So that's what we're seeing right now.

Here in California we are waiting on the governor's May revise to come out for the budget. We are hearing that there's going to be substantial cuts to the program. And we for decades have been as an industry arguing that we need more funding. It seems like every year we're up there on the Hill saying we need more funding.

And six years ago, legislators actually listened to us and commissioned what they called the rate study. They brought in Burns & Associates to come in, look at our industry, and really determine is it truly underfunded or is there a lot of waste that you hear from the administration? And they looked at it and found that we were actually 40% underfunded for over a decade. So at the time, California had a surplus, so I was talking to legislators about how that surplus was built on the backs of people with disabilities.

From that, they actually implemented the rate study and over the last three years have put that rate into place. The last of it just went into place in January. But now that's under threat. So what was established years ago as the base rate, we finally got to and now that's being threatened to be taken away. It goes back to what I was saying earlier, that we're doomed to repeat ourselves.

We have seen what budget cuts do. It cuts at the core services. And we're not talking about waste that you hear from the administration or niceties, we're talking about medical expenses. We're talking about trips to their doctors, housing. These are really Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These are the basic level of needs that individuals have that we're threatening to take away.

RUSTY

Just to be super clear for my brain and the listeners. So when you were talking about this rate study and that you and others have been advocating that this industry had been underfunded, that was at the state level, that was California, where you were advocating, right? And that's who increased the rate there, the state's rate of reimbursement, I guess.

EDWARD

Yes, correct.

RUSTY

And so it's so dramatic and it resonates that we're underfunded by 40%. I think there's like a 30 to 40% underfunding of nonprofit jobs pay and the sector writ large, like this from the research I've seen, so it's very frustrating. I think that that will resonate across the country as well and across other parts of the nonprofit sector.

And so what do we go from and to the rates just for those people who are going to want to know. I'm not a statistician, but I have trouble understanding the way the government does these things. But can you just tell folks what the rate is?

EDWARD

Yeah. So there's an individual rate for each type of service. So that's a pretty broad question to ask. We have like five different housing models. We do transportation, we do therapy programs, we have respite programs, and each one has a different rate. So when I say 40% underfunded, that's globally kind of all services offered. But for each individual line item, there was substantial growth and some were more than 40%.

Transportation in particular. Think of it as kind of the school busses you see, right? Pick up individuals at their homes, take them to a program, end of the day, bring them back. That one in itself was 55% below what they stated was a minimum needed. And that particular program we have seen and operated at a loss for over a decade because we know the importance. We fundraised to do that, because it's so important to connect people with their community, get them to their doctor's appointments. So, we see that as kind of one of our driving missions and understand that we're doing it at a loss.

RUSTY

So I think that makes a really important point that people should know, which is, yes, government funds nonprofits to deliver services, but often nonprofits are actually funding government services, we are underwriting the underfunding of these services. And some groups have to take out loans and then pay interest while they're waiting for their government funding or because the government is underfunding them.

So if you want to talk about waste and ineffectiveness, how about fully funding these things so the nonprofits don't have to take out loans and pay interest on waiting for their government money? That would be a nice way to get rid of some waste and I'd say fraud. We're paying banks interest when we shouldn't be.

EDWARD

Right. You bring up an excellent point. We find ourselves waiting sometimes up to 12 months for some funding, or they didn't get the right rate into the system for us to bill correctly. And we're expected just to make that work. It's not like we're going to put a pause on someone's housing or tell them can't live here for now until we get paid.

I spend probably about 50% of my time trying to hustle for money, either through donations. Working with legislators, working with generous foundations to try to cover a lot of this gap that we have. And you bring up a good point, we take out loans, you know, there have been times where I've done payroll on credit cards and paid the interest until that money came in.

RUSTY

Wow. That's crazy, that's crazy. And you've got 1200 people to cover payroll. So that's no small credit card bill.

EDWARD

No. But you talk about waste, right? You know, the interest is coming, I have to pay that interest and there should be no need for that.

RUSTY

That's absolutely right. You should not have to do that. You got the people you're serving who you can't just, you don't want to kick them out of those homes, you don't want to stop picking them up for their appointments. But you've also got this payroll, you've got all these people working for you who are also, you can't just stop paying. That's a lot of what we talk about on the show is this is the number of a workforce. So do you want to say like, you know, 1200 people is a lot of people, you know, are most of those people front line workers, providing direct services?

EDWARD

Yeah.

RUSTY

Or what's the kind of range of folks you have?

EDWARD

So we have the whole spectrum. Majority of our staff are what we call DSP, direct service providers, so they are the frontline staff. They're the ones that are caring for the clients. They're the ones during COVID, before there was a vaccine, was sitting with them and helping to take care of them. They're the ones that help cook or feed the individuals. We have drivers, commercial drivers for our vehicles. We have licensed therapists.

We're one of the few programs in Southern California that does the initial assessment to see if your loved one child has a delay or disability and then can offer some wraparound services or developmental services. So again, saving the government expense. With a delay in identification and early therapy, it could be where there's just some milestone delays and waiting until they're in the school system to provide those services at additional cost, additional time for that care. And the schools are stretched thin too, and might not have the time or the staff to provide that care.

So we offer a very needed service, but I don't know that it's very well known or how the different pieces are connected. You know, the government, federal government talks about waste in Medicaid and, you know, big cuts and there's so much that's connected. If you look at the funding stream to hospitals, large portion of their funding stream is Medicaid that comes back in.

So, how many employees depend on their jobs in the hospitals? There's a huge infrastructure, not just the doctors that are providing valuable services, but that operate it, the people that work in the cafeteria, the janitors, the maintenance people that take care of the facility, the receptionist. There's a lot of workforce that, as you make these broad cuts or accusations on

Medicaid, that's not being thought about. That's going to have a huge impact on the general public.

RUSTY

Yeah, I mean, if they really decide to strip nonprofit hospitals of their tax exempt status in order to "pay for tax cuts" for the wealthy, what would happen to those hospitals? Do they go away? What happens to all those exempt tax deductible assets that are sitting in those hospitals? Do they get donated to the government?

EDWARD

It's a very interesting theory, right? They'll either have to consolidate, so they close some hospitals. You reduce services, that's another way you save money. You reduce your workforce, delay services. So what you used to be able to go in and get a doctor's appointment within 30 days, now you're looking at six months, until you could get a doctor's appointment. You might have to drive further there might be a hospital that's close and now you're making a four hour trip to get to a hospital or service.

So I think we'll see delays in services would probably be the biggest impacts, some closure of hospitals and then lost jobs. We're going to see people get laid off to try to cover that gap. So might not have as many receptionists, maybe now you'll be using a computer to check in, you might not get those phone calls, they get automated and set up your appointment as opposed to being able to talk with somebody and schedule an appointment that works for you.

RUSTY

Yeah, we don't want hospitals without janitors or receptionists. That would not be a good way to keep people healthy or to run.

EDWARD

Or the states tax you more, right? I mean, that's the other alternative is you bring in additional revenue from different sources. So federal government talks about saving tax dollars for the wealthy, but then is that on the back of the middle class? So then you get a local tax that increases it and it ends up penalizing the middle class and lower class.

RUSTY

I think we could talk a little bit about Medicaid and who it serves in general and what it is, for people who are not as familiar, because it does seem like one of those far off things, like oh I think that was a nice policy from, you know, the New Deal or the Great Society and it's been around and we just expected. And you don't kind of really care about it unless you need it or use it. So can you briefly just say what Medicaid really is and does.

EDWARD

Yeah, Medicaid is a federal funding that goes to every state. And I think that's partly where some of the confusion comes from; each state calls it something different. So they bring in some federal funds, put some of their money together and call it something else. Here in California, it's called Medi-Cal instead of Medicaid. I think that's where some of the disconnects come,

where people, they're familiar with what their local services are but not that that's actually federal dollars that are attached to it.

So I can speak for California's program. So I have this chart that we put together that highlights across California per district for the legislators that breaks down individuals that are utilizing Medicaid or Medi-Cal here in California, which is funded through Medicaid federally. And it really highlights the number of constituents that utilize that service that I don't think we talk about. It goes everywhere from 30% in some areas up to as high as 68% in some areas.

So as I met with legislators, I shared this with them and really highlighted that if your desire is to get reelected and you're upsetting 68% of your constituents, what do you think your likelihood is of being reelected by those people? And it was eye opening. I don't think the legislators understood what percentage of their constituents utilized these funds.

RUSTY

And that cut across all the political parties and the political kind of makeup of these different districts, these legislative districts?

EDWARD

Yeah, that's what I've been really highlighting. This is not a party discussion, this is not a Republican and Democrat battle. This is across party lines and that's not being focused on. There are a lot of Republicans that if this cut goes through, I don't see them being reelected. I do not believe if once informed that this is what the United States people want.

While I don't have the information throughout the United States, it's pretty comparable when you go across the states, it'll be within the same range. That could be your grandparents, that could be somebody that is injured, that could be someone on disability, either intellectual or developmental or, you know, had a disability, got into an accident, for whatever reason and not able to work to the degree they were before. So it really covers a lot of different programs and a lot of different people with that.

And again, that money comes back into the local states and then employs other people, as we talked about before, it employs several people at the hospital that even if you're not on Medicaid or Medi-Cal, you still go to the hospital and those people come back and they buy gas at the gas station or groceries at the local store. So this has this real kind of web effect, where this money affects many things. And I think that's my biggest problem with the approach that the federal administration has taken is just these blind cuts.

This is not a program that you can just lob off big chunks of dollars or say that programs no longer need it and shut the doors. It will take us generations to rebuild the infrastructure that we need. Now, could there be budget cuts? I think so. Just like your finances at home and mine, you know, there's times where you have to make some cuts. But I think that's the piece we're missing, is having that conversation.

Where can the nonprofits cut where they need to as long as it is a cut across the board for other programs as well? We can't pick and choose which programs are more important than others. They're all important. They're here for a reason. And we as a society really need to reflect on how we care for our most vulnerable population, because I really think that's a reflection of who we are.

RUSTY

Yeah, I mean, doing cost cutting responsibly is one thing, but doing it irresponsibly and, you know, with a sledgehammer or a chainsaw is very dangerous, right? You can lop off your finger or your arm or somebody else while you're using one of these dangerous tools versus some precision thoughtful cuts after you've actually learned and understood what is actually needed and not.

So, one thing is the impact of the cuts themselves. The other is the impact of doing these things immediately without warning and without giving institutions or people or families any chance to prepare. That is having an even more problematic impact of doing these cuts the way they're doing them. Even the threats themselves, even before you get to actual cuts, the threats destabilize the system and are driving people crazy and messing things up, so.

EDWARD

Yeah, not a week goes by that I'm not getting a call from some parent wanting to know what's going to happen with their loved ones. We've seen our population, thanks to the care that people have been receiving in our industry throughout the States, their life expectancy grow. It wasn't that long ago that the life expectancy for someone with Down's Syndrome was in their forties, now they're living into their sixties and seventies, so they're outliving their parents, which was not a thing a decade or two ago.

So families are very concerned that I'm going to pass away and what's going to happen to my child and very nervous about that. You know, there are these chainsaw cuts, where are they going to go? Where is their housing going to be? They're going to try to follow to another program, homelessness? As you know, I came from that sector before here and they're not set up to care for this population. They're hurting at the stream now. I think we've really as a society, we're missing the mark and we have too many of our people, our veterans, our homelessness, our people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are suffering, and we're turning a blind eye to that, as a society.

RUSTY

Is that what your previous place of employment, Father Joe's village, is? Is that a homeless housing?

EDWARD

Yeah. It's one of the largest homeless providers here in San Diego. So Father Joe was an icon, he passed away and left us a few years ago, but he was an icon here in San Diego. And the vision of the Catholic Church to kind of change their homeless program and make it more of a

one stop center, he would talk about, and a holistic approach to their needs. So not just identifying the reason for their homelessness was that, you know, mental health issues, was it substance abuse, was it just a training program that was needed, and offering those services in a safe environment and then some affordable housing and rehousing after that.

RUSTY

Well, you know, I'm preaching to the choir here, but it just, the fact that veteran people go into service and into war and dangerous situations on behalf of the country, on behalf of the government, get PTSD, get wounded physically and mentally, and come back as veterans, and the fact that so many veterans then would fall into having these disabilities and being homeless or unhoused is just, it's such a travesty. The fact that you'd have on one hand the government saying go fight for your country and on the other hand the government saying we're not going to provide the services you now need because you went and served the country, is such a betrayal of our people.

So I was curious for your thoughts as somebody who is a veteran, you've served the country both through the armed services and through public service in non-profits. How have you been kind of processing what we're going through and where we're at as a country?

EDWARD

Oh, that is a great question. I mentioned earlier I feel like our government has let us down, our government is supposed to be of the people, for the people. I talk with a lot of friends that I believe our forefathers are turning over in their grave. Like I'd love to have a talk, you know how you play that game, if you could go back in time, who would you like to talk to and what would you ask them? And I find myself wanting to talk to the forefathers. Like, is what we've become their vision? Is this what they thought we would do as they fought for our freedom and separation, is this what they envisioned? And I don't think it was.

I too, as we've talked about, I think the government has let us down as people. The military is a great example of that. We've gone to war, we haven't questioned that, we went to other countries to defend either their freedom or what the government felt was important and our soldiers didn't question that and then come back and they're left without services.

Just about every conflict, you can go back and see the number of disabled veterans that come back. And then you hear the stories of the delay in the VA hospitals and how they're having to wait for services. They're not getting services that should have easily been given to them quickly and they earn that. And then you hear stories about even military members on food stamps. How is that even possible that we have enlisted members that aren't even receiving enough money to care for their family when they're off?

And I talked about Maslow's hierarchy, I really believe in that. You need to take care of people's basic needs if you want them to thrive in their community or just be engaged, right? If they're constantly worrying about where am I going to sleep, where am I going to get my next

paycheck, how am I going to make payroll, is my credit card limit large enough to make payroll for? These are basic needs.

RUSTY

It's not a luxury yacht we're talking about here.

EDWARD

Yeah, yeah, yeah, or deciding I'm going to go over to the Bahamas for lunch today, so let me get in my personal jet, fly over there, spend 20,000 in gas just because I want to go get lunch over there.

RUSTY

Right... So as someone, I know you have a degree in human resources and you have degrees in organizational development, and I don't want to put any more pressure on you than it already is, but I was curious, as a leader and a manager of this workforce at the organization, you know, how are you and your team kind of helping people who are in your employment, keep morale up or keep stay informed of what's happening or keep things going? I'm sure it's a struggle and nobody's perfect, but I'm just curious if there are things you've been doing or talking about or thinking about in the last six months or so.

EDWARD

Yeah, I think there's a couple pieces to that. One of the things I've really been focusing on is communication with the team and education. I believe in the fact that we should have a voice as people and that people should get out there and vote, they should meet with their legislators, and the legislators should be represented of their community. I truly believe that.

I think at times there's disconnects and I don't believe that that communication is happening. So I've been very vocal with my team and my organization on trying to make sure they have the facts. However you want to vote, that's your personal opinion and personal right, that's one of the reasons I joined the military to make sure that people had rights, so that's important to me.

We had some federal government recently talk about autism and say it was a disease and could be curable and that they would never love or be able to date or create poetry. I don't know where this information comes from, but that's what my staff and others in our community heard. So I put out an op ed on that, I communicated with all our stakeholders and put it in the paper that that's not the case. Here are people with autism, it's not due to vaccine shots. Here's all the information on how that was disproved. Read it for yourself and come to your own conclusion, don't believe what you've heard on the news or from one or two individuals. Inform yourself. So we've been really focusing on that.

To build up the morale, you try to do what you can. We get together a lot. We just recently, I talked about we had our gala. We try to find things that are inexpensive but meaningful. So we rented out a movie theater and have a bunch of people come in the movies. A lot of our clients will be there, a lot of our staff. We're very fortunate in the fact that our long term employees, my

longest term employee has been with us for 48 years. They have this connection with the clients, and when we see the clients succeed or reach these milestones, you feel like a really proud parent. So we really focus on the wins and celebrate those, and that helps drive the motivation and the morale of the team.

RUSTY

Wow, that's amazing. You mentioned sort of advocating and being out there and writing op-eds and going to the state capital and I think you've gone to Washington as well. You know, a lot of people now are feeling concerned, worried about, or fearful. There's a lot of people frozen by fear of speaking out. And, you know, one thing we've been saying on this show is that, you know, we have to keep our First Amendment rights by using our First Amendment rights. If we stop using them, they become meaningless and we've already lost them.

But it's very real, right? I find myself going, should I write this publicly? Am I going to be tracked? Get on some list somewhere or some nonsense like that. And then I have to say, Yeah, I can't live like that. That's not. So I was curious as a nonprofit, as a social service agency, how do you see your role as an advocate, both you as the CEO and the organization for your cause generally even before this year? And how has that shifted now, if it has?

EDWARD

I think the shift has just intensified. You know, I feel like we are really in a fight now, so that kind of just motivates me to jump in and continue. I think I've been a big believer, I love what you said about our First Amendment rights, and that's what I really believe, that people need to speak up. I mentioned it earlier, the government was built to be of the people, for the people. We need to communicate what that is.

We had a rally here recently where we brought together 300 individuals to communicate what they want. For so long, especially in the intellectual developmental disability, they've been silenced, but they are voters, there are some that are employees that pay taxes, they are members of their communities and have rights just like everyone else.

RUSTY

Citizens, they are Citizens, too.

EDWARD

Yeah, I talked about the employees we have. So, my focus has always been on educating. I think there's a lot of misinformation out there. I think the media has turned into just trying to get numbers instead of putting facts out there. They'll put their lens on depending on what news station you listen to and it's really focused or leaning towards their beliefs as opposed to just educating people, which I think is what it should be.

So that's what I do. I really feel it's important to educate my staff, to educate the individuals that we serve, and then they can make an informed decision, whatever their decision is, that's their

decision. If society stands up and says, as a society, we do not feel like we should support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, that would be what the society decides. I'll try to figure out a way of doing it without the support of the masses, because I disagree with that. But I think it's important that people share their voices and we come together and make decisions. It's not a small group of people that should make decisions that affect everybody.

RUSTY

So tell us about the rally, the 300 person rally, was that in the state capitol or?

EDWARD

No, this one was local, but it was for our federal representative. So Darrell Issa, we went to his office. When I went to a couple weeks ago, I was at the Capitol, met with several people, he was one I was not able to meet with. He was just not available to meet or his staff and then later said, I'm not a constituent of his area, even though my office is, probably about 80% of the clients I serve are, and several hundred of my staff are. So he did not want to meet with me as an individual because I wasn't a constituent, so I brought some of his constituents to the office to try to meet with him. He wasn't there, but we had great media presence, we left a lot of information for him and encouraged him to reach out to his local constituents who would love to talk to him about the Medicaid cuts.

RUSTY

Excellent, excellent. Well, if you have rally footage or a write up of what happened, we'd love to share that.

EDWARD

Yeah. Yeah, I'll send that to you.

RUSTY

I'll be amazing. That sounds incredibly powerful. Both, you know, for the people who are part of that, as well as part of the organization.

EDWARD

We got a tremendous turnout of self advocates. My daughter was actually one of the speakers. We had 12 self advocates that talked and did an amazing job talking about what the impact means to them. We had one gentleman that actually lived through the institutes and it brought tears to my eyes hearing him talk about the treatment there and not wanting to go back to that type of service.

RUSTY

Wow. I'm so glad you did that and thanks for sharing about that. And so, just as we come to the conclusion of our time together, what would be your message for the Trump administration? Sounds like you've already delivered it to a congressman who represents many of your staff and the people you serve and where your organization operates. But what would be your message or what is your message for the administration, as well as for the private funders and your fellow

CEOs in the social service and developmental disability services field? So, a lot of audiences there, but take it as you like.

EDWARD

Yeah, I think first for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, fighting is nothing new to this population. They fight to get out of institutes, they fight for funding over decades of underfunding, so they know how to fight. Keep fighting, make sure their voices are heard.

I think for people that are interested or even not interested, get interested, go and find the information. Don't blindly trust that people have your best interest or what you believe at heart. Get the details. I always tell my staff, find the truth, find the root, cause or issue. Get to the bottom of what is being talked about and then make sure your voice is heard.

We've said throughout this podcast today, we've talked about your voice is important without exercising it, it's like it doesn't exist. So, you can sit back and you can complain or you can speak up and do something about it. So I encourage you, understand that situation, get to know the impact that these broad cuts have and make your opinion known to your legislator.

To the government, I truly believe and I mentioned it earlier, we are a reflection of how we treat our most vulnerable population and if this is what you guys believe in, I don't believe you're representing the people at large within the United States. So my statement to them would be: talk to people, talk to the people that offer these services, talk to the nonprofits that are filling the gaps that the government is not taking care of, and don't blindly go in there trying to make cuts. Make informed decisions and a strategic approach to it.

RUSTY

Well, I know on behalf of our team here at Fund The People and all of our listeners, I want to wish you and your colleagues the best in the weeks and months to come, and I would reflect back to you what you said about keeping up the fight. So, thanks for everything you're doing for the service and also the advocacy, it's so important. So Edward Hershey, CEO of Home of Guiding Hands. Thank You so much.

EDWARD

Yeah. Thanks for having us on and amplifying our voice.

RUSTY

It's my pleasure, thank you. I hope you'll join us next Wednesday morning when we will be back with our regularly scheduled podcast programming, with another incredible guest from the field. Please do not miss it right here on your Fund The People podcast.