



INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

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Nonprofit challenges

AS INDUSTRY EVOLVES, LEADERS SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS



JIM COURTNEY

Leaders of 15 area nonprofits met May 19 to talk about the challenges they face. They gathered in the Guaranty Building headquarters of Hodgson Russ as part of an ongoing series of discussions involving leaders from a range of Western New York industries.

BY TRACEY DRURY
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Employment issues surrounding the state's new minimum wage law and overtime compensation are expected to be a major headache for Western New York nonprofits. Worse, they come at a time when agency revenue has been squeezed as a result of health care reform and changes in reimbursement by federal regulators.

But leaders of the organizations

aren't sitting back and waiting for the impact.

Instead, they're collaborating with each other like never before, creating affiliations and even venturing forward with the dreaded "M" word: merger.

Executives of 15 nonprofits shared their thoughts on the topics during a roundtable discussion hosted by Hodgson Russ LLP. It's part of an ongoing series of roundtables led by Buffalo Business First.

Representatives of a half-dozen foundations listened carefully

to the discussion, looking for ways they can help find a solution. They included David Egner, executive director of the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation.

He encouraged collaboration but said it's not always easy.

"My experience in the collaboration space is that it's a word misunderstood by both funders and the sector itself," Egner said. "Collaboration costs money and it's difficult."

Working together also takes time, according to Francisco Vazquez,

CEO of Child and Family Services of Buffalo.

"It is difficult work," he said. "Those of us who go into this space believing that we can snap a finger and things are done, no, it doesn't happen that way."

Others pursue entrepreneurial ventures to help bridge the funding gap. That includes Empower Inc., which opened a bottle and can redemption center.

"This is, I think, the first of many entrepreneurial ventures for us," said CEO Jeff Paterson.

► ECONOMIC DYNAMO

The nonprofit sector remains a major economic force.

\$1.9B

Total assets in FY 2014 of Western New York's 37 largest foundations

\$115.6M

Grants awarded by the largest foundations

\$2.45B

Combined revenue of Million Dollar Nonprofits, the region's 300 largest

57,931

Total local employment at the 300 largest nonprofits

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► What is the No. 1 challenge you'll face when you go back to the office?

CAROLYNE DEFRANCO

President/CEO, Gateway-Longview Inc.

The biggest challenge that Gateway faces now is shortage of workforce. We have 500 staff and about half of that is paraprofessional staff to work in our residential facilities. There has always been a shortage of staff, quality staff who could work with the population that we're serving. We are in a dire situation because the economy is doing better. It's not as attractive of a position as it used to be. It's getting very challenging.



SHELLEY DRAKE

President, M&T Charitable Foundation

There are so many wonderful new projects going on, resurgence in community and there is an ever-growing need for funding. So

that's a challenge we always face.

DENNIS WALCZYK

CEO, Catholic Charities of Buffalo

One of the challenges that we face is to ensure that our infrastructure needs keep pace with not only provisional services but developmental services, and that means IT, financial administration, all the back office work that is so important to what we do.

JOSEPH COZZO

President/CEO, Buffalo Hearing & Speech Center

My No. 1 concern with 476 employees is recruiting and retaining high-quality staff. I think that's a huge burden on our community right now and likely to get much worse. So we're trying to prepare for that. And yesterday's news (new overtime rules for certain salaried employees), a quick analysis at our end, it's going to cost us quite a few dollars unbudgeted this year. Depending on how some of the interpretations go around teachers, this could cost us a half-million dollars.



► CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROUNDTABLE

The Nonprofits Roundtable continues a series of discussions with Western New York business leaders.

Throughout the year, decision makers from diverse industries meet for a discussion moderated by Business First journalists.

Excerpts are published two weeks after the roundtable.

Upcoming topics include tourism & hospitality, family-run businesses, education and sports business.

Roundtable discussions are sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP and held at the law firm's Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

SHERI SCAVONE

Executive director, WNY Women's Foundation

Really, our biggest challenge is no money, no mission. So fundraising. What I'm doing when I get back to the office is cleaning up after our big event with 400 people last night. I think with many organizations, money is the bottom line, regardless of how you get it and how you use it. But in terms of our nonprofit, that's one of the big challenges.

JEFF PATERSON

CEO, Empower - Niagara Cerebral Palsy

As far as our biggest challenge, I think I could say it in three words: New York state. Dealing with policymakers who don't appear to appreciate the impact of the decisions that they make. Certainly in the IDD world, we're being asked to transform the system. We're having new regulatory demands heaped on us every day. We're being told to increase wages. And so you just get to where we're bone on bone. There has to be a breaking point and I think we're coming up to it where there have to be more realistic expectations from the state about what providers can actually do with the resources we've been given.

TRACY SAWICKI

Executive director, Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation

One thing that we'll think about today is certainly the effects of yesterday's decision (overtime pay for certain salaried employees) on these organizations. Oftentimes we as a funder can serve as a stopgap or an emergency fund when these curveballs are thrown at organizations. We also are thinking about ways in which our dollars can leverage the state dollars that are out there. So I guess our biggest challenge is finding enough money to do all of that.



STEPHEN ANDERSON

CEO, The Summit Center

There's such unpredictability. We don't know tomorrow what the new thing is that we'll have to address. So we spend most of our time dealing with changes in regulatory requirements. We're constantly under audit, constantly under some type of program review. We're dealing with funding changes which could be managed if we knew them in advance, but often they're known midway through the year after you've set your budget already and they're sometimes taken retroactively. And even if they just make a decision and implement it, then they dilly-dally for six, seven months trying to implement the new regulatory requirements. We spend all of our time - instead of looking at children's outcomes - just trying to survive. So just tell it what it is, lay it out and let's live with that.

FRANCISCO VASQUEZ

President/CEO, Child & Family Services of Erie County

The biggest challenge for me, and I'll go more macro on this, is that it's really to maintain a strategic discipline. It's so easy for organizations like ours to chase the dollars because we need to make sure that we can sustain what we do. The danger in that is that you then begin to diminish the value of the core of the business that you're in. So part of the challenge, of course, is to make sure that we lead with quality, that we're sustainable and in whatever we do we have a positive impact on people's lives.



MARY JO HUNT

Executive director, James H. Cummings Foundation Inc.

Raising money is hard; it's equally hard to give it away, and to give it away thoughtfully and in ways that

make a difference in the community. The Cummings Foundation only funds capital expenses. Our biggest challenge is we're a midsized foundation, so really the number of requests has increased dramatically. We're trying to be careful with the

dollars, to make sure that we're choosing to fund organizations that we think will have the greatest impact and the dollars will go the longest.



MICHAEL WEINER

CEO, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County

We're not a direct-service provider, as many of you know, so our perspective is a little different.

I'd like to think

about utilizing limited dollars more wisely, a very dynamic environment we live in, as well. There's lots of things changing around us every day of the week. For our system, relevance is probably a very significant challenge for us. With limited charitable dollars available, being able to demonstrate our value in the community and garner the kind of support that's necessary to bring more resources into the community because we know the needs are substantial is probably top of line for us.

THOMAS SY

President/CEO, Aspire of WNY Inc.

Without a doubt, the workforce issue really will be high on the list today. I've always said nonprofits are the only group in the world that hates to see the economy and unemployment rate go down. Now, of course, we like it because it improves the state coffers but really, in my 16 years, I think what's scary about this particular workforce is it's across the board and it's an area that we never had difficulties with. We run a large educational program, just to give you one example. And we have an eight-week summer school program that was always easy to find the 80 or 90 individuals who either were in school for special education or really just wanted the typical summer job. Even in that arena, for our summer special education program it's practically impossible for us to recruit staff. So I think it's the depth and breadth of the workforce issue that's really surprising to all of us.

RHONDA FREDERICK

President/CEO, People Inc.

Everything everybody said will be on my plate when I go back to the office today, but a number of us will be heading out to speak to the regional director of the Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities about housing. And the crisis in housing and aging caregivers and what's going to happen. Although

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there's this transformation agenda and there's a lot of thoughts that folks with disabilities can live much more independently than the system has let them, we have parents petrified. We have people failing all the time and there's still 1,100 people in the region looking for housing.

BILL McHUGH

CEO, Heritage Centers

We have a very difficult job of deciding what good ideas to ignore for the time being so we can focus on a critical set of five or six really important initiatives. We're staying focused on that. I understand the state is dysfunctional but I spent 40 years in the health care environment and I did a lot of work with the federal government and the state and different states, and I have to tell you, it's like saying it's oxygen in the air we breathe. They've always been dysfunctional and they're always going to be dysfunctional. So if that's the norm, we'll have to learn how to live with that. And there are tons of challenges that that brings, but I think that's the norm.

DAVID EGNER

President/CEO, Wilson Foundation

Our biggest challenge is being

responsible for distributing over a billion dollars in Western New York and southeast Michigan by Dec. 31, 2035, in a way that's responsible, thoughtful and working with the agencies, foundations and others that are working in those communities. What keeps me up at night is how to weigh into that responsibly. You can do a tremendous amount of harm if you distribute incorrectly or you disrupt in a way that's not useful.

► **Tell us what you do to bring people into the organization and keep them there.**

DENNIS WALCZYK

Catholic Charities of Buffalo

One thing that works very well for us at Catholic Charities over the years is that we've been fortunate to develop a really good relationship with the University at Buffalo in social work through



internship programs. Not only are the interns valuable as interns, as far as helping to deliver service to the people they serve, but many of them wind up getting hired for jobs. So it's a good source of employees for Catholic Charities.

MICHAEL WEINER

United Way of Buffalo and Erie County

I'll speak to the point of retention and support of the workforce because unlike many of the folks around the table, we're a very small organization with 54 FTEs. But one of the things that I've learned to appreciate, even as I transitioned out of health and human services and government to the not-for-profit sector, is creating a culture of caring for the workforce, how critical that is. So everybody who works in our organization, it's important for us to respect the diversity of view, to be inclusive, to promote professional development and to nurture that relationship.

BILL McHUGH

Heritage Centers

One of the things we looked at is we have, like, 23 residences. Rhonda, I think you probably have 100 residences or so. And it is direct-

service providers and it's difficult to recruit individuals. So one of the things that our new HR executive did is break down the process of hiring. We found that there were 23 steps in terms of hiring someone, and so they re-engineered the process. Took it from the central HR office and pushed it out to the residences and collapsed it into something like six or seven steps. So we were able to take our vacancies from about 36 down to 18 or something like that. Another part of it is we had to free up resources from another area. We used some of the resources to give raises in a performance-based system. So for the first time in seven years, people got raises. So that helps, as well.

JOSEPH COZZO

Buffalo Hearing & Speech

We partnered with Health Sciences Academy to try and expose high schoolers to jobs that we recruit in. So speech path, OTPT, social work. A lot of these kids don't even know what these jobs are and how to access them. So while it is a long-term look, we've been doing it for a couple of years. We have a young woman at Nazareth becoming a speech path who said she wants to come and work at Buffalo Hearing and Speech. We have another young



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NEED NO-NONSENSE LEGAL SOLUTIONS**

From audits to ethics, board governance to fundraising – non-profit organizations adhere to a variety of guidelines that safeguard the programs and services they offer to the community.

Whether it's a cultural organization or health and human services provider, non-profits deliver a multitude of benefits to the people who rely on them for quality of life or life-enhancing quality of care. Hodgson Russ is a trusted legal partner to a variety of non-profit organizations – so they can do what they do best and concentrate on serving the community.

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woman in Syracuse in PT.

JEFF PATERSON

Empower – Niagara Cerebral Palsy

One useful thing for us has been we have a small foundation that was created from a bequest several years ago and the decision was made that rather than simply supporting operations, the focus of that foundation would be to pay for education and professional development for employees of the agency. That's something we can offer to new-hires.

► **Funders, do some of the workplace issues you've heard about today line up with programs you support?**

TRACY SAWICKI

Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation

I would say we're doing some of this already. As you heard, we had Bill talk about the infrastructure and our funding ship, for example, does a lot of work in technology. So if people want to make data-driven decisions about how they hire, where they hire, even scheduling for that matter, there are agencies in this room that have taken advantage of some of the "scholarshipping" to go to fellowships. Where an agency might not be able to come up with the resources, there's a partnership there so that the agency can afford professional development. In a crisis, which isn't necessarily what foundations like to fund, inevitably circumstances arise. Maybe there's an opportunity for us to come in and assist with something like that while, again, addressing some of the issues about finding employees and then retaining them going forward. But I think there are a lot of ways in which we can collaborate. I don't think it's just a foundation coming in and doing one thing, but it's in what ways do we leverage some of the ideas and take dollars that aren't available elsewhere to perpetuate answers to some of these issues?

**SHERI SCAVONE**

WNY Women's Foundation

So a little bit different from direct funding, we actually have a signature program called "MOMS: From Education To Employment." And that

identified the barriers to a single mother – who are in huge numbers in Erie and Niagara counties – to completing a college education. That program has been piloted at NCCC for three years. We have had 237 single moms go through the program. Over 400 kids have been impacted and the women are making on average 75 percent more when they get out than they were before they entered the program. We funded the model. NCCC will take over most of the funding of that model as our agreement with them.

► **You mentioned collaboration. Funders, talk to us about what you see changing in the size and scope of what you're hearing in terms of requests.**

SHELLEY DRAKE

M&T Charitable Foundation

We're seeing more and more capital requests, and that is because of the resurgence in our community, which is wonderful. But what happens is that when we fund capital requests, it takes away from the rest of what we do. So we want to be so careful that we don't slip back on programming. There are so many small not-for-profits and we're not necessarily giving them a lot, but what we're giving them is important. So the more we invest or we fund, the capital requests that are so terrific, we have to be so careful. So we spread them out. We typically do them over five years and we ask the not-for-profits not to come back to us when those are finished until there's a year or two break. Sometimes we do matching. We will top off a campaign and we'll do a certain amount if they can raise the rest to finish that capital campaign. We certainly like being a leader but we don't like being a loan.

MICHAEL WEINER

United Way of Buffalo and Erie County

As a funder and as it relates to collaborative opportunities, one of the things that I've learned to appreciate at United Way is we

usually get twice the requests in funding than we're actually able to allocate. We wish we had a blank check, but that's just not the reality. For example, last year we got \$9.5 million in requests. We allocated from a discretionary standpoint about \$5 million. We actually encourage and recognize the value of collective impact and collaborative opportunities. So when we score applications through the request-for-proposal process, we're actually asking organizations to demonstrate the way that they espouse their collaborative approach to service to get the best outcomes for consumers. And we give extra points when that is the case. The research demonstrates that organizations that provide a compendium of services and support or integrate those services and support with other partners are more likely to get better outcomes.

DAVID EGNER

Wilson Foundation

As the new guy at the table, I need to qualify everything I say with we're researching and looking at, but my experience in the collaboration space is that it's a word misunderstood by both funders and the sector itself. Collaboration costs money and it's hard. And there are times to collaborate and times not to collaborate, and determining which is which is difficult. So it's complicated, and as funders sometimes we have a tendency to push the issue of collaboration when it's not appropriate. It's finding those moments. Same with mergers. Mergers are great when when you can prove efficiencies and effectiveness, but again, they cost money. When you really look, it's easy to merge in the for-profit sector. It comes down to a bottom line. In this sector, it's emotional and it's psychological. Am I really going to give up this thing that I love and I care about and I'm passionate about and hand it over to someone else who may do it differently than me?

► **We've seen quite a few mergers underway in recent years. I wonder if maybe Francisco or Carolyne, you could talk about what you're trying to do with your respective organizations?**

FRANCISCO VASQUEZ

Child & Family Services of Erie County

We began a journey – Carolyne and I and another partner – almost two years now. It is difficult work. Those of us who go into this space believing that we can snap a finger and things are done, no, it doesn't happen that

way. We work together over this period of time to build that trust, first and foremost, to learn each other's language. When we start looking, at least in our example, we have three organizations. My organization is fully entrenched in the Buffalo space. Carolyne's is not only Buffalo but the suburbs, and our third partner, New Directions, is in the rural areas. So you look at a growing footprint that engages the strengths and capacities of the three organizations to meet a greater need in a bigger space. That said, in order to exercise the value of that strategy, you're going to need people. You're going to need the capacity to deliver on that. So the idea that mergers result in people losing their jobs is really not true in our case. In fact, we're probably going to need more people, to your point about more costs..

CAROLYNE DEFRANCO

Gateway-Longview Inc.

For me, one of the driving factors – and I've talked about this, as well – is the need to start to specialize. Take our residential facility, for example. We have kids who are there on PINS, diversion, JD kids who have been there for serious charges. We also have kids who have been there for abuse and neglect because of family situations; they're in the same facility. We also have the gamut of developmental – kids who are functioning at a 5-year-old level developmentally even though they're in this. And then some are pretty smart kids who are street savvy. They're all together in this same facility. I would love to have us start differentiating our target population.

**FRANCISCO VASQUEZ**

Child & Family Services of Erie County

And Carolyne has just given you a glimpse of part of that conversation we've had on a number of issues over time. We are at that

Memorandum of Understanding level; all three of us have signed that. We are proceeding now with what I consider the very difficult work.

► **We haven't heard much**

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on the disability side about mergers and groups coming together. Have you seen that in other parts of the state or parts of the country?

BILL MCHUGH
Heritage Centers



We've seen some of that in other areas of the state. If you look around, there's about seven agencies in Central New York around Rochester and the Finger Lakes that have all collaborated over the years to build a separate company to manage their IT, their management information systems. So the question being raised is: Can we buy into that? Instead of being a \$47 million entity, our IT shop is much smaller than that. We only have about nine people. We can go into something that's \$300 million and have a greater scale and more powerful systems and more capabilities. Our people tend to be more isolated. If you're an IT shop, you know, you're more connected with the real world and are able to keep advancing. So I think there are plenty of opportunities short of merger. At my age, merger doesn't threaten me. I don't have any ego in it. But I think there's a tremendous amount of waste and inefficiency, and where you start is there are 700 CEOs in the IDD space. I can't think of a bigger waste of money for state taxpayers.

► **Rhonda, you've done a lot on the statewide level working with different types of organizations. Is there an openness to coming together or is it more focused on these niche areas such as IT?**

RHONDA FREDERICK
People Inc.

I think Western New York is unique in that area. We have the Developmental Disability Alliance of Western New York, which has been around for about 20 years. We have about 54 agencies in the Buffalo and Rochester areas that are members. Big openness – there are a lot of board members from that sitting in the room here with me. So speak up, be open to share, to collaborate, to look at where need is, who's better, who's not. On the other hand,

another group of 12 organizations got together about three years ago, Person Centered Services of Western New York, when managed care seemed to be looming for the IDD world. We formed together. We hired a director. It's an interesting group of agencies that have never worked together. I think we've done a really nice job at keeping current. I don't necessarily see that in other sections of New York state; there aren't the groups that talk together.

STEPHEN ANDERSON
The Summit Center

A couple years ago I reached out to a number of agencies. My agency is a little unique, I think. We serve primarily people with autism, but we're fairly broad and we have a very large school and most of our funding actually is set. We have a pretty small OPWDD program relative to some of the other people sitting at the table. I met with some very small agencies and some very large. Well, how can we collaborate? I don't think we talked about merging because they would just swallow us up, but we talked about mergers and we talked about collaboration. We talked about affiliations. I didn't get people very interested. In fact, I offended a few people. It was kind of awkward and I really didn't jump to the merger. I talked about can we collaborate on the back end. Can we share some resources? Look at our IT department. I think a few people thought it as trying to take over. I have to admit, some of these were very small agencies. I wonder if they will survive. What you talk about, Bill, they don't have adequate business metrics. They don't really have a high-level IT department. They are struggling with a part-time director but there's a mission there. There's a value to them and it is really hard for them to think about giving up.

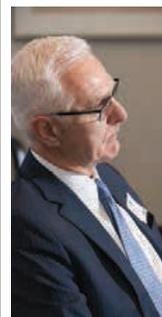
DAVID EGNER
Wilson Foundation

We lose focus on this, don't we? My favorite definition of collaboration is an unnatural act among non-consenting adults. I think that's accurate, but the bottom line for us shouldn't be cost savings; it should be service delivery. We start with the notion that we have to cut costs and do it more efficiently. The issue is effectiveness, not efficiency. And when we lose sight of that, we go down the rabbit hole and start pushing the wrong



buttons. I could hear when you two were talking about the MOU and the collaboration you're building, you are doing it around the issue of how to more effectively deliver services, not about savings costs.

► **Let's touch on additional opportunities for revenue and trying to tackle some of these issues. And, Steve, could you talk about your new division and the jacket?**



STEPHEN ANDERSON
The Summit Center

Well, the money is a little bit of a struggle right now, but the two innovations, in fact, you funded one of them and that was an old project to develop an integrated software that we built custom for schools to serve people with autism. It allows the teacher to sit at a kiosk or a computer and to do an assessment and then that has logic built into it. It points the individual to a curriculum for that individual child, a lesson plan. All the data is collected on a handheld device. All of this is immediately converted into a usable graph. The other thing we have is we were just disturbed by how often our staff were injured by the people they serve. A lot of scratches and bites and lost time from those injuries. Could we protect them? We were largely using protective equipment from the sports industry, martial arts, lacrosse pads and stuff. I think one time we figured we had about \$10,000 worth of inventory of sports equipment just to try to protect our staff from injuries. So we started to try to design something that we thought staff could wear that looked more normal, didn't look like you were coming to defend yourself when you were actually working with a client and fit in a little better. And we found a local company that built protective gear for another industry, largely the food industry. We partnered with them to design a jacket that has almost impenetrable fabric and it has stainless steel in the lower part of the arm. We have a distributor's agreement. We're starting to sell it; just started in mid-April. We added an employee because of the grant that you guys gave us and we sold 18 jackets.

TRACY SAWICKI

Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation

We see our grantees as partners. One of the things that the Tower Foundation has been trying to do is to move into opportunities where there's innovation. We thought there had to be opportunities where there were good ideas that could benefit, to go back to what we were all saying. It has to be a benefit to the people we're trying to help but also might be able to help with that sustainability issue.

STEPHEN ANDERSON
The Summit Center

Our thought was that you take the things you do well and you call it your intellectual property and you start to say: Can we make, for lack of a better word, a profit off of this? And can that be reinvested into your mission-driven activities? And we are not there yet, but we are just getting started and we'll see how it goes.

JEFF PATERSON
Empower – Niagara Cerebral Palsy

On our side, you're looking to find work opportunities for the individuals you support. And sometimes that can be a struggle. So one of the things we've just done is we opened a bottle and can redemption center. It is both a job-training opportunity for the individuals we serve and a revenue-generating opportunity. And it's been enormously successful, well beyond our initial expectations. So many customers come in and say, "Keep the deposit, I don't want it." And you know, we're in a situation where I think we can realistically expect Medicaid to cover maybe 85 percent of our costs going forward. So you have to find a way to bridge the gap. And this is, I think, the first of many entrepreneurial ventures for us.

THOMAS SY
Aspire of WNY Inc.

Ours isn't necessarily in the area of a new project or renovation. We've begun to not only provide primary care to community members but, more importantly, are part of an accountable-care organization statewide that's in the Medicare savings program. We just regularly look at opportunities to take some of our service coordinators in our field. That's a position that's very



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much up in the air and we've sent them through training to be community health workers. So now we've reached out to some existing health homes and are contracting with those health homes to place our former or part-time service coordinators.

► **Moving away from the sheltered workshop to these new opportunities, what do you find in terms of the response from employers to bringing your clients and their support staff in-house?**

THOMAS SY

Aspire of WNY Inc.

I would say where we notice it the most is the area of internships. There's easily a list of 150 businesses that are actively supporting our internship. Some of them are very short term; some of them are quite a bit longer. I think for our field to be able to introduce our individuals and our employment concepts to employers has worked out tremendously well.

STEPHEN ANDERSON

The Summit Center

In Niagara County, I think retail and food service tend to be the places we find success with job placement. But one of the misunderstandings of the whole sheltered workshop issue is that it doesn't mean that you can't continue to provide site-based programming; it just means the site has to be integrated. We have to stop the victimology – why is the state doing this to us – and say, "All right, well, let's accept the challenge and build something better than what exists today." We all have a track record of doing that in other areas. Why not in the sheltered workshops?

► **Dennis, you wanted to add something?**

DENNIS WALCZYK

Catholic Charities of Buffalo

Focusing on people we serve, these are people living in poverty – people underemployed, chronically unemployed, people returning from prison, refugees. I find that our community, as we experience a renaissance in job growth, is being more and more receptive on the manufacturing sector, business sector, elected-official sector. If we're serious in what we're saying, we want everybody to have a chance at these jobs. When we look at people we work with, and it's now starting to be recognized, in order for them

to have a chance, an equal chance of this, we need to provide the net of supports they need. So to that end we're collaborating with some community-based organizations: Voice Buffalo, Push Buffalo, Noah, which is a community organization in Niagara Falls, and the Back to Basics Ministry, which works with people re-entering our community from prison. As a collaborative, to work together on this, we see ourselves as not only the pipeline of having clients who could be eligible for a training program, apprenticeship program, pre-apprenticeship programs and also work but also as Catholic Charities we can provide – we have been doing this for many years – the training and also the support necessary to keep them in jobs.

► **Respond to what you've heard today in terms of the opportunities that you hear from your colleagues.**

DAVID EGNER

Wilson Foundation

The famous American journalist E.L. Mencken said that for every complex problem, there's a simple solution. And it's probably wrong. I think that's what we're facing. And as I'm listening, I'm hearing you all try to process through extremely complex problems. And I think many times we, in the funder community, in trying to be effective and efficient, forget to stop and just thank you for the work you're doing and the struggle you're taking on through those problems. So let me be the first to do that. I think that in this time of change we're seeing a new generation, the millennial generation. And those coming behind them want to embrace change in a faster pattern. I think the challenge for us in the years to come is how to get them excited about the sector we're in and the work we're doing.

BILL McHUGH

Heritage Centers

I want to respond to what I'm almost universally hearing around the table in terms of we have a very dysfunctional state and it's always changing and the changes are retroactive. In my view it is, again, almost universally rejected. But I think we have one client, the state of New York. That the organization that pays us. And they also entrust us to serve several thousand of their clients, the people who are developmentally disabled, because they believe that we can do a much better job of taking care of their clients than they can.



RHONDA FREDERICK

People Inc.

We have a staff crisis and it's only going to get worse. Each of us are kind of dealing with it on our own. I heard some great ideas. We're competing for

the exact same person. We all want the same person coming in, whether it be in a direct support position or a clinical position or management. So how can we encourage more people to see this as a wonderful career and not just a job that they keep for three months until they make 10 cents more an hour somewhere else?

THOMAS SY

Aspire of WNY Inc.

My takeaway is a nice refresher of just how robust the not-for-profit community is in Western New York. How fortunate we are to have funders that truly do understand us and partner with us. That's not a catchphrase. I think you saw today how, in our own respective industries, there's been a history of innovation and that innovation continues.

MARY JO HUNT

James H. Cummings Foundation Inc.

I think one thing that we should be doing is we should be driving public policy, not responding to public policy. And so, in particular in the area of early care and education, we're starting to have some conversations in the funding community about what can we do there as a collective voice, knowing that we need data first and we need to understand. So there are lots of people who have done research. We should be telling Albany what we think is the best way to provide the services we need if they are going to fund them. And let's pay attention to those aging human capital resources in this community.

FRANCISCO VASQUEZ

Child & Family Services of Erie County

The reflections that you all share about your challenges put things into perspective, at least for me. As you were talking, the thing in my mind that kept appearing is a dodgeball game. We're all dodging the ball in many ways, and as we go forward we need to be a bit more strategic about how we dodge that ball and how we engage it. We're constantly moving and keeping an eye on where the next challenge is coming from.

STEPHEN ANDERSON

The Summit Center

When I look around the room, I think about the talent and the resources. I keep thinking, can we solve any of these bigger problems? See if there is a solution we take to the governor and say, "With this plan, we think it will cut costs, serve more people and have better outcomes." So if there is any interest in that among the foundation people at the table, it would be great to talk about it.

TRACY SAWICKI

Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation

It's nice to hear that people are working together and trying to come up and have different ideas as to how to do it. Sitting in the foundation seat, deciding where to put our efforts, it's just so complicated. And knowing that if you make a decision about where you prioritize, something else gets left behind. And so listening to all the needs and listening to all the complexities just makes that process more worrisome. Is there one area that as a group we could come together and really just tackle?

JEFF PATERSON

Empower – Niagara Cerebral Palsy

The arts and culture section in Buffalo has been very effective in positioning itself over the past few years as a sector of the economy. If we want to be more respected and if we want to be given the opportunity to influence public policy, we are going to have to learn to speak that language more effectively and talk more about the economic impact that we have as employers and as drivers of the local economy. One of our big challenges going forward is becoming more fluent in that language so that we can have more of a seat at the table and be more proactive instead of reactive.

JOSEPH COZZO

Buffalo Hearing & Speech Center

The one thing running through my mind – and my Latin is probably poor – is illegitimi non carborundum, which roughly translates into "Don't let the bastards grind you down." And while the bastards are trying to get us down with everything we've talked about today, we bring something very special to the table, to this community and to the people who come to our doors for help. I'm leaving here thinking that, yeah, it's my job to worry about the margin and the problems. But the other side of me has to really tap into, from my staff and the people we serve, the cheerleader part of what we do and why we are all in the not-for-profit business.