

Agency for Change Podcast : Barb Bartle, President of Lincoln Community Foundation

Announcer

Welcome to Agency for Change, the podcast that brings you the stories of people creating positive change in the world. We explore what inspires these changemakers, the work they're doing and how they share their message. Each of us can play a part in change, and these are the people who show us how.

Lyn Wineman:

Hi, everyone. This is Lyn Wineman, founder and chief strategist of KidGlov, with another episode of Agency for Change Podcast. Today, I am excited to talk with a woman who is the definition of the word inspiration. Barb Bartle is changing the world in her role as president of the Lincoln Community Foundation, where she is leading successful efforts such as Prosper Lincoln, Lincoln Littles, Early Childhood Education Giving Day, Lincoln's COVID-19 Response Fund and Give to Lincoln Day, which was recently completed with a record-breaking year for donations. I know Barb to be an extremely talented and passionate leader. Barb, thank you so much for talking with us today.

Barb Bartle:

Oh, Lyn. It's my pleasure.

Lyn Wineman:

It's so good to have you here. Barb, would you start by just sharing more about the work you do with the Lincoln Community Foundation?

Barb Bartle:

Well thank you, Lyn, for this opportunity. The Lincoln Community Foundation was founded in 1955. So, I have to say that it is such an honor to be able to lead this work at the Lincoln Community Foundation for our community. Our mission is really threefold. We focus on development—which you mentioned several of those areas in your introduction. We were thrilled with our 2020 Give to Lincoln Day, where we raised a record \$7 million for 448 nonprofits in the community.

Barb Bartle:

You mentioned Lincoln Littles. We raise funds for our little ones for early childhood tuition assistance. Of course, we have donor-advised funds, where donors can recommend the grants that they want to make. And we focus on legacy, which is really supporting Lincoln forever. We're thrilled that in 2019 we had a record \$25 million in contributions to all of these many, many opportunities at the Community Foundation. So, that's how we do development work in the community for the community.

Barb Bartle:

Then, with those funds we make grants to the community. The second part of our mission is the grant making. We have open door grants—which if you go to our website you can read more about those opportunities. We have over \$250,000 a year in scholarships for post-secondary education. We have donor-advised funds, where donors make grants with the gifts that they put into their funds. And, of course, we have designated funds. People can set up funds for specific nonprofits.

Barb Bartle:

And then, we have our NextGen. Those are our young professionals, and they raise funds throughout the year and then make grants to nonprofits. Last year, they granted \$13,000 to three nonprofits in the community. 2019 was a historic year! We were able to grant \$17.8 million to over 1,000 nonprofits, and 87 percent of those funds stayed in Lincoln. So, the grant making is our second part. Finally, there is leadership. And some of those people are familiar.

Barb Bartle:

I hope we're getting familiar with our Lincoln Vital Signs. That is a report that has come out multiple times since 2014 that really shows Lincoln all about us—the demographics and all of the data. And that is commissioned not only by the foundation, but with 13 foundations in the community funders. We serve as the backbone for that. Prosper Lincoln grew out of that. When the community could see the facts about Lincoln, they especially wanted to do something about the poverty.

Barb Bartle:

And so, we engaged thousands in the community and developed Prosper Lincoln. We now have five focus areas: early childhood, affordable housing, strong neighborhoods, civic investments and workforce development. Those are some of the leadership roles we played. Oftentimes when you think of foundations, you think of an institution that a foundation supports. What I'm so proud of is that the Community Foundation is here to support the community. The community members participate in that. I like to say, "We are the community's foundation."

Lyn Wineman:

That is fantastic! You know what I love? I love hearing the stories of the success of Lincoln Community Foundation because I know that when you are doing well, the rest of the community is going to benefit from that. And I think that's so good from all the different kinds of people and organizations and areas of the community. That's just fantastic! I love hearing about the foundation, but as much as I love hearing about the foundation, I'm also fascinated with your story, Barb. How did your path lead you to this position at this point in your life?

Barb Bartle:

That's one of the fun parts about being where we are in our careers—we can look back and see that journey. And it's so interesting. I started out as an elementary teacher in Elmwood, Nebraska. I taught second grade starting in 1973, commuted from Lincoln and taught school in Blair and Cozad, which is my hometown. I taught for seven and a half years, and had family in those years. And then, my children and I moved to Lincoln in 1984. First I want to say, because it had such an impact on my career while I was in Cozad, we started what we now still call the World Entertainment Series.

Barb Bartle:

It was entertainment similar to the Lied Center except in a small town. You have to work with an umbrella organization, and so they asked me if I would help organize that. I had wonderful advice from a man in Omaha who was organizing this, and he taught me how to put together a board in the community, taught me how to fundraise for this, and put together the bylaws and everything about organizing. What I'm really thrilled about is that was around 1980 and the organization is still going.

Barb Bartle:

I learned so much from that volunteer work that has helped me with my career. I moved to Lincoln and substitute taught. And then, when the Lied Center opened, I was the coordinator of the volunteers, not the ushers, but the Friends of Lied. At that time, we were giving tours of the building. I worked with volunteers who gave tours, which was really wonderful. I met so many people when I was there. And while I was there, the position at the public school foundation opened up.

Barb Bartle:

I was actually asked by a great mentor, Woody Varner. He was at the Lied Center when he told me about it. So I applied and I asked, "Well, will you be on my board now?" That was wonderful to have this new position with the public schools. I was the second director—the first full-time director—and I was there for 18 years. I absolutely loved that role! The only other place that I ever thought I might like to be other than the public school foundation was the Lincoln Community Foundation.

Barb Bartle:

And so, when that became a possibility, I was thrilled. It was a dream come true. Now I can't believe I've been here for 10 years. I learned a lot about fundraising at the Lied Center because the Friends of Lied was doing so much fundraising, and then the education and the fundraising came together at the school foundation. It's just fun to look back and see how we've landed where we are.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely! I love how you said that our careers really are a journey, and it's great to look back and see how each piece builds on the other. And I know even in my career there's been times when there are highs and lows. Sometimes you learn as much from the lows as you do from the highs. It was just getting you ready for the next thing and the next thing. So, I think that's fantastic. All right. Now, I want to talk a little bit more about Lincoln Community Foundation. You mentioned so many things in the areas of development, grant making and leadership, but can we take a deeper dive? Can you share some examples about how your work with Lincoln Community Foundation is making a positive impact on the world?

Barb Bartle:

First I want to say that the Lincoln Community Foundation, as you mentioned earlier, is a compilation of the generosity of so many donors in this community. And when you talk about the world, maybe I'll start there. Our donor-advised funds have a wonderful ability to be able to make their grants to any nonprofit as long as it is in the city, the state, the country and sometimes even the world, as long as we have a U.S. connection to it.

Barb Bartle:

So, really the Community Foundation does impact the world. And the areas that our donor-advised funds—or any of our funds—really focus on are education and youth; animals; health and human services; community involvement; religion; arts and culture; and the environment. And regarding the environment, it's been such an incredible few years with disaster relief needed around the country. An example is we were given an award at our national conference because of donations to Puerto Rico's hurricanes and a donor-advised fund contributed to that fund.

Barb Bartle:

The great thing about community foundations is they're all over the world. Houston comes to mind. We were able to help the community by giving donations to the community at the Houston Community Foundation. So, when you say world, it really is the world. And the environment is just one component

of the impact on the world. But that comes to mind because of all of the disaster, fires and hurricanes we've had. And so, the Community Foundation is a great tool for that. This spring has been amazing. I think for those who listen and read about philanthropy, you should look at our community. What a generous community!

Barb Bartle:

I mean, we opened in a week, maybe less than a week. We were able to raise a half million dollar match fund for our COVID-19 fund that we partnered with the mayor's office and the city to launch. Our Lincoln COVID-19 Fund and the community rallied. And so far we've raised about \$1.2 million. Those grants have impacted nonprofits in the community that are on the front line.

Barb Bartle:

Not only are they on the front line with their work, but their fundraising has been down. Think of all the events we normally have in the spring to help support our nonprofits. Even during that stress, the nonprofits have just stepped up, and this COVID-19 fund has been so impactful. And then, we turned right around in May and raised a record \$7 million for 448 nonprofits in this community. I mean, it still gives me goosebumps to tell you that story.

Lyn Wineman:

If people could see me right now, they'd see my goosebumps too. I mean, it's just great to see the generosity of the community supporting the people and the nonprofits who serve.

Barb Bartle:

So that's just current support. The other thing that's happening—and we talked about this early on but we weren't really sure whether to approach it or not—but what we've been learning from our financial advisors is that so many people are working on their estate plans. They have been just inundated with people working on those. And so, we have people now working with us on how to set up a legacy fund for the things they care about.

Barb Bartle:

Our long-term planning was also impacted this spring, which is just wonderful. As you said at the top, the great thing about the Community Foundation and the endowments that we have is that when times are down is when the Community Foundation can be there to support the community because of endowments. And, of course, our endowment is how we come up with the match for our people who left unrestricted funds. We can then help the community today because we have funds from those

endowments to match gifts in the community for things like Give to Lincoln Day or Lincoln Littles. So, not only is current giving from this spring remarkable, so is the long-term legacy giving.

Lyn Wineman:

That is fantastic. I'm actually going to give a shoutout because we, Barb, have people who listen to this podcast from all over the country and even different corners of the world. But those of you who haven't been to Lincoln, Lincoln is a pretty amazing place, a very generous and thoughtful place where people take care of each other. So, it's a great place for those of you who've never been here. Barb, what are some of the biggest challenges you face? We've talked about a lot of things that are going well, but in your work and also as somebody who leads change, what are the challenges that you see?

Barb Bartle:

Well, we talked a little bit about that in our last question. As we think about where we are today, I think about how critical it was in 1955 when the founders created the Community Foundation and the gifts that I just talked about, those long-term gifts were established. Those are what are impacting us right now and providing us the help right now.

Barb Bartle:

And so, I think the challenge is “How do we stand on the shoulders of those who wanted Lincoln to be successful and taken care of in the years that they wouldn't be here?” This is our generation. How do we now step up and set up funds for the future of Lincoln for those organizations we really care about? I think the challenge—and the community has met it so well—is for today, yes, but let's think about tomorrow too. How do we make sure our children and grandchildren are well taken care of as well?

Lyn Wineman:

That's beautiful. Barb, since I've had the opportunity to work with you, I also know that you do not back down in the face of adversity. And I wonder if you could give people advice. What is your philosophy on moving forward in the face of adversity?

Barb Bartle:

Well, my great-grandmother came from Sweden at 19. Her fiancé came a year ahead and said he would leave her a letter in New York City in general mail. I mean, I just can't imagine that courage. And so, here she came a year later but couldn't find the letter for at least a year. She was a nanny in New York City. Finally, they connected and she took the train to Gothenburg, Nebraska. They lived in a sod house in the Sand Hills, 20 miles north of Gothenburg, and my great-grandfather was a finishing carpenter.

Barb Bartle:

He died and left her with five children in the Sand Hills in a log cabin. That's her story. Well, what's fun is that those children—my grandmother and her sisters—would come to visit and they would tell us these stories. I just love to hear them talk about their stories. That really impacted my life. I love to think about that grit that she had. And so, when I think, *I can't do one more thing or This is too big of a challenge*, I just think about my great-grandmother and think, *Okay. You can dig a little deeper.*

Barb Bartle:

I've shared that with my kids too. I mean, they all know about "Just dig a little deeper." And I think when you go back and you look at the adversities that you've had in your life, it's really where you become stronger. That's really true in our personal lives and it's true in our community life when we ask, "How are we going to come out of this pandemic and these difficult social justice issues?" I think it is what's going to help us develop. I know it will because we can look back. It's going to develop our character—who we are. I think when I look back at the successes this year and how people are reaching out, they're digging deeper to help in this community. We're really building our character. So, grit. I guess I would say it's grit.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that. Barb, I love two things about what you just said. First of all, I can't imagine living life without my cell phone and Wi-Fi and TV shows that I binge and my car and everything I've got. And I love the courage it must've taken for a young woman from Sweden to come to New York, find a letter in the general mail and then come out to Nebraska in the middle of nowhere and make a life. I think that's really cool. But also, we are going through a pandemic right now. And 2020, it's been a difficult year. Right?

Lyn Wineman:

I've heard people say, "I can't wait to get through 2020." But I have started to wonder, *Maybe 2020 is just the year that we needed.* And that's a weird thing to say, but maybe the changes that we're making this year—getting more in touch with humanity and the environment, getting back to the basics a bit—maybe that's going to be good for us all as we come out of this eventually. I think that's a great story. Barb, will you tell me about something that you are really excited about working on right now?

Barb Bartle:

Well, a lot of my area that I work with the staff is around the leadership component and the work of our community. I'm just so excited about phase two of Prosper Lincoln. We started with this community

engagement and the community helped us focus on three areas. And so, just examples, in affordable housing things take a long time because we need to make sure we hear all of the voices. But in South Downtown, I'm just so thrilled. I encourage everyone to drive by 11th NE.

Barb Bartle:

It's such a great story about affordable housing in this community. The neighborhood and donors from various sectors in the community came together and bought the lot at 11th NE. A house had been sitting there for years and was a difficult property for many reasons. It was purchased, then the city came and tore the property down because it was found not to be safe to rebuild. And then, the Community Foundation provided a mission investment loan for NeighborWorks to build this house for South Downtown, a community development organization.

Barb Bartle:

And so, go drive by. It's a beautiful home. We had to work with the city and NeighborWorks in South Downtown to help figure it out. Imagine when those homes were built. They were just little spaces. They wouldn't meet codes today. So, a lot of behind-the-scenes work had to go on to make this happen. And now, there's a beautiful home there. NeighborWorks will help with their education program to find a family and make it affordable. There'll have to be more subsidy. And so, the Community Foundation has raised funds so that we have affordable housing funds to fill gaps like this.

Barb Bartle:

The Downtown Rotary's fundraiser in February is helping fill that gap. At the end of the day, a family's going to live in this wonderful home. So, that excites me. I hope it excites the community because we have lots of work to do ahead, so more families can have homes. For early childhood, I'm so excited about the new office. We have Lincoln Littles. Thank heavens we have that this year for the pandemic! And Brandt is the executive director there. They have worked with the providers to get the equipment and the supplies that our providers in the community have needed such as thermometers and masks.

Barb Bartle:

The community has stepped up so much to help our strong neighborhoods. I'm really thrilled. The other thing we know when we have long careers is that things take a long time. And in 2015, the community learning centers created a strategic plan with hundreds of people in the community and a dream. An aspirational goal was to have a community builder in each quadrant. Community Foundation this year is funding those community builders. And I think that's going to make such a difference because we know how important it is to hear all of the voices and involve all of the voices in our community.

Barb Bartle:

I know it is going to really help us to have stronger neighborhoods. And so, I think the local work is so exciting. And then, nationally it ties together to this local work. Nationally, community foundations across the country are designing. And I'm really pleased there are six community foundations that are helping design a plan, and the Lincoln Community Foundation is one of those six. We are trying to design plans for community foundations across the country to answer the question, "How do we address structural and systemic racism to achieve economic and social mobility?"

Lyn Wineman:

Wow, that's a big question.

Barb Bartle:

It's a big question. That's a big question. And I think community foundations are in the perfect space to lead this work in our communities. I said earlier we don't represent an institution, we are at the intersection of public, private and philanthropy. So, I'm really excited. Once this design is created, we are taking this to major funders in the country and asking them to support this work for community foundations across the country. I feel really good because I feel like Prosper Lincoln is already working with so many systems that I think we are in a good place to look at how we can answer that question. So, locally and nationally I'm excited about the future.

Lyn Wineman:

Barb, that's wonderful. I think about the ripple effects of everything that you are doing and that the foundation is doing. I even wonder if a hundred years from now someone will be on a podcast or doing an interview or telling the story of how they moved into that house on 11th NE, and how that changed the trajectory of their family and their life. There are so many ripples ... so many. I think we change the world even one person, one family, one neighborhood at a time, because all of those people will have that ripple around them and the people they talk to. So, that is wonderful. Barb, you obviously are a very strong leader. What advice do you have for someone out there who aspires to lead positive change?

Barb Bartle:

Well, I look back and think Don Clifton and I had a really wonderful experience working when I was at the school foundation on some community engagement work. And he once said, "We've got to stop thinking of things happening in three years or five years. We've got to start thinking in 25 year chunks." And I think that's really important. I can see now how important timing is everything, and patience—that steady drum—is so critical.

Barb Bartle:

The other thing that comes to mind is there's a Chinese essayist, and this quote really has driven my work the past few years since we've been working on Prosper Lincoln. He says, "Hope is like a path in the countryside. Originally, there is nothing. But as people walk this way again and again, a path appears." For me, hope is a path that we all create. And I think the reason this rung such a bell is because of this work around Prosper Lincoln.

Barb Bartle:

It's such a bottoms-up process—listening to all the voices. I also love Willa Cather's quotes about this was just a prairie. And now, a path has appeared, and this is Lincoln. To the pioneers, of course, it was the prairie. But as we gain hope and recognize it is our collective action, that creates the way forward. I think that's really important for a leader, that it's not just one person's vision, it's a collective action that we have to work together for and be patient.

Barb Bartle:

Another favorite of mine is Johnnetta Cole, who was president of Spelman College. She wrote in her book *Dream the Boldest Dreams*, "Leadership comes not only from growing up in a place called home but from growing out into unfamiliar places, that is what keeps pushing us to lead courageously with the boldest of dreams." I think that we cannot be comfortable. I've heard so much this spring, we have to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. And we have to reach out together with patience with the boldest streams. So, that would be my advice for someone.

Lyn Wineman:

I love all of those words of wisdom, Barb. And I don't know if you remember this, but the very first time I met you, you and I were going to do some work on Prosper Lincoln. I think you brought the book *A Path Appears* that has that Chinese quote in it. And that's been inspirational to me as well. Because on the days when you're like, "I don't know what's going to come next, but I know what we need to do," I just tell myself, "The path is going to appear. The right thing is going to happen. We're just going to keep moving forward." So, Barb, as a marketing professional, I always have to ask just one marketing question. Can you share how you and the foundation get the good word out about the work that you're doing?

Barb Bartle:

What you're doing here is telling stories. And that is so powerful. And this spring, when we had the COVID-19 fund established, we knew we needed to help the community know how those funds were

being used. And so, we had several writers in the community step up and write wonderful stories about the grants and the impact those grants were having. We heard so many positive comments about that. And another thing I think is, of course, we are so fortunate to have all of the media in town. What would we do without them for Give to Lincoln Day and Lincoln Littles?

Barb Bartle:

And I think the job that *L Magazine* and NeighborWorks are doing is so important to help tell the stories of the nonprofits in the community. All of those are so important. I have to say that 10 years ago when my staff came together at the community foundation, we heard over and over and over again that people had never heard of the Community Foundation. And so, we knew we really had to focus on marketing. And the past 10 years with staff and professionals, that has been the focus.

Barb Bartle:

And I have to say, Lyn, thank you. KidGlov has been a really big part of that as well. We know there are still people who have not heard of the Community Foundation. And I hear that from my colleagues. The oldest community foundation in the country is the Cleveland Community Foundation, started in 1915. The president told me, "That never ends. There are always people that haven't heard." But I just feel like we've had such great support from the professionals, from staff and then from all the media in the community. We wouldn't be able to do this without this wonderful support and with marketing.

Lyn Wineman:

Barb, thank you so much for that shoutout. It is our pleasure at KidGlov to work with you. There is nothing better than being able to do your work—and our work is in marketing—knowing that what you do is going to impact the community and the people in the community and the nonprofits. Thank you for giving us that opportunity. You shared some great quotes from a variety of authors that motivate you. Could I get one Barb Bartle quote? Some words of wisdom from Barb Bartle to inspire others.

Barb Bartle:

Well, so this is really fun. This just happened yesterday. I have two but I'll do one. I have for a long time ... I don't know how long ... It seems like I've always said to my children, "Just give it away." Just give it away—whether they have to apologize to somebody, something's really hard to do or they found something. So, that's always been my mantra. And then Otis Young always used a phrase that I really like too which feels the same: "Lose yourself in service to others." And I love that. But "Give it away" would be mine. And then, I was thinking about my mom, because when your mother lives to be 100, she never stops teaching you lessons.

Barb Bartle:

And what I realized is, even at 100, we have to have purpose in our life. She continued to crochet caps for cancer patients until probably her last month or two of life. And so, when I think about my mom, I think about, "Find your purpose." And so, yesterday I was trying to get the words right on find your purpose. So I just Googled "Find your purpose" and this is what I found. I just love this. I hadn't ever seen this quote before, but it combines those two things together. It is by Pablo Picasso. It says, "The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away." Isn't that awesome? I'm so excited about that. Yeah.

Lyn Wineman:

That is amazing. Where has that quote been hiding?

Barb Bartle:

Yeah.

Lyn Wineman:

It's amazing. Thank you for sharing all of those.

Barb Bartle:

I'd really love to tell you one more quick one because my grandson has me on a new one. We were on vacation—he's seven—and we had to walk for a distance for whatever reason. The kids didn't have their shoes on and there was some gravel. And so, there's a group of us and I'm walking, and I looked back and he's walking all by himself, just so gingerly barefoot. And I go back so he's not by himself. I'm standing beside him and he's saying, "Slow and steady wins the race. Slow and steady wins the race." And so, I find myself saying to myself, "Slow and steady wins the race."

Lyn Wineman:

From the mouths of babes. I love that.

Barb Bartle:

That's right.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that. Somebody had told him a story or read him a story and he was just internalizing that. It is a great thing. There is science that shows that people remember from stories and narratives, and when you touch their emotions, they remember that much more than just shouting out a list of bullet points. So, he remembered that story.

Barb Bartle:

Back to “Give it away.” A couple of years ago, Notre Dame came out with a generosity initiative. And what they learned from their research is those who give their resources away receive back in turn. It's a virtuous cycle of good.

Lyn Wineman:

What your mother told you is true and there's science behind it. Barb, this has been so much fun. For our listeners who would like to learn more about the work of Lincoln Community Foundation, how can they find out more?

Barb Bartle:

Well, they can go to our website. Technology is wonderful these days. Our website is lcf.org. And there, you can also find our Facebook handle and Twitter—all of those ways. And since I have this opportunity to tell you a final thing about the foundation, I just want to say that Lincoln's greatest asset is its people. And this is the best way to spread the word, person to person, about the work of our wonderful nonprofits.

Barb Bartle:

We have 65 years of history and relationships in this community, a tremendous staff, board of directors and past board of directors, trustees and thousands of donors. And they're all ambassadors in this community. We hope those who are listening will want to find out more and be ambassadors for us too. All of us want to make a difference to be a part of something that's larger than ourselves.

Barb Bartle:

And we want to create a lasting change that will endure long after our involvement has ended. So, the foundation can help donors make gifts to support. As I mentioned, today's needs, like Give to Lincoln Day, help design gifts that will impact Lincoln tomorrow. The Lincoln Community Foundation is honored to be the keeper of these legacies for Lincoln forever. We're so grateful to be a part of your podcast, Lyn.

Lyn Wineman:

Fantastic.

Barb Bartle:

Congratulations on getting this part.

Lyn Wineman:

Thank you so much. And I am an advocate of yours, for sure. Barb, it is always a pleasure to talk with you. And I know people will find your story and words of wisdom to be positive and inspiring. So, thank you so much.

Barb Bartle:

Thank you, Lyn.

Announcer

You've been listening to Agency for Change. If you're enjoying these inspiring stories, please subscribe. Is there a changemaker you'd like to recommend for this podcast? Just visit the KidGlov website at kidglov.com to share or to listen to more stories about the people behind positive change.