

Agency for Change Podcast: Chris Sommerich, Executive Director of Humanities Nebraska

Announcer:

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Kelley Peterson:

Hello. This is Kelley Peterson, creative director at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change Podcast. Today's guest is Chris Sommerich, executive director of Humanities Nebraska. Chris has been with this nonprofit organization for over 16 years, helping Nebraskans explore what connects us and makes us human. Chris, I'm eager to talk with you today and learn more about the great impact you are making on the world.

Chris Sommerich:

Great to be with you here today, Kelley. Thanks a lot for having me.

Kelley Peterson:

You bet. Chris, would you take a minute and tell us more about Humanities Nebraska, the history and its mission as it stands today?

Chris Sommerich:

Absolutely. It's hard to believe that Humanities Nebraska has been around for 48 years now. We've been at it for a long time as a statewide nonprofit organization. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts were both created by Congress in 1965 during President Johnson's term and part of a lot of different things going on to promote the cultural sector as part of the Great Society initiatives and all that. And they realized pretty early on that they really couldn't reach the entire country and small towns and inner cities and everything in between from Washington, D.C., from some big federal agencies. And so, the state humanities councils were created in the, kind of started in the early seventies to really get out and do programming to touch the lives of all Americans, wherever you lived. And for the humanities, it's all about a strong democracy requires informed, engaged citizens.

Chris Sommerich:

And so, we started in 1973, just awarding grants. And Nebraska is a really interesting state with large rural areas and a couple of bigger cities. And so, in order to really truly serve the whole state, we just started evolving over the years in our programming, and it covers a lot of different areas now. And you've mentioned our mission statement there at the top there, where you said our mission is to help Nebraskans explore what connects us and makes us human. The challenge of that mission and opportunity, I guess, is that it's very broad. There's so many different ways to do that, but at the heart of it is the idea that we, as the great philosophers say, an unexamined life is not worth living. So we try to help people reflect on where we are now, where we came from, where are we trying to go. And we do that through history and literature and philosophy and ethics and religion and, all those things that people like to argue about.

Chris Sommerich:

And so it's been a really fascinating place to work and with just amazing, interesting people all over Nebraska, who I would say kind of a unified trait of theirs is being curious about the world around them and wanting to improve communities. And so it's a really great place to work and to be part of, and you really get to see the best of humanity when you're exploring the humanities.

Kelley Peterson:

I love that answer, especially any time that you can celebrate the past and the future at the same time is a great thing. So Chris, we've mentioned humanities a few times now, can you elaborate and break that word down? What is it and why is it so important to communities?

Chris Sommerich:

Sure. Sometimes I'm jealous of the arts people, because everybody knows what the arts are, right? The humanities, people often think of it as something they had in college or high school, there's this list, a laundry list of different disciplines. And I rattled some of them off earlier, things like history and literature and philosophy and all that. And that's true. And if you ask the National Endowment Humanities, they'll provide you that whole list of things that are called the humanities, but it just really boils down to exploring what it means to be human. And that means as an individual, exploring your own life, your own self, how you relate to others around you, but also as a community and as a state and as a nation and as a global citizen.

Chris Sommerich:

And so it's really, and again, another aspect of humanities is being very broad as it goes from the very local to the very global. And we try to do that in a lot of different ways. And we try to get not as hung up about what those humanities disciplines are, as much as it's all about bringing people together, people coming together to again, explore what connects us and makes us human.

Kelley Peterson:

It sounds very thoughtful and deep. And the reason I'm saying that is because, and not that my designer friends are not, but when you said, "I'm jealous of the arts," it just made me laugh a little bit because that's what we think of sometimes being copywriters is that we're jealous of the designers, because they can just put it out there and people see what it is that they're trying to communicate. And those writers and possibly the humanities have a little bit more difficulty in articulating themselves in the non-visual arena. So that's-

Chris Sommerich:

Exactly. And we do, and it overlaps a lot with the arts actually. And we talk a lot with our arts council friends, and we are involved with a lot of arts related projects, but not the creation of art or the performance of art, it's really about people relating it to their lives. So we often will, you'll see our name associated with maybe an art exhibit or a performance if as part of that, there's a discussion going on with the audience afterwards about, what did you think of that or talking about the history or the art form or how did that performance relate to your own life or the issues that our community is dealing with. So that would be the humanities.

Kelley Peterson:

Yes. Some deep thinking and relating it to, yes. So, and relating it to life. I love that. Well, speaking of life, we've had some life challenges here of late, and because of COVID-19, many organizations had to pivot or change their strategy. Was that the case for Humanities Nebraska and how so?

Chris Sommerich:

Sure. Yes. And I think you're absolutely right that we all had to in some shape or form. For us, it was a real soul searching exercise in that adaptation because everything we do has been to some extent involving bringing people together. And so when people can't come together physically, how do you implement your mission and continue to do what you're there for? And so there was quite a bit of wrestling with that early on as things really shut down. And we adapted, as an organization, I'm just really proud of how we adapted. And it went less to supporting specific programs that were happening because nothing was happening anymore, to trying to support the organizations all across the state that were all of a sudden losing all of their sources of revenue, that were not able to stay open, that had staffs they had to still pay, to bills they still had to pay and rent and things like that.

Chris Sommerich:

And so we worked pretty hard over the course of 2020 to help fund organizations in a way that we never really had where it was just unrestricted operating support to help keep them solvent, I guess, while they figured out their own game plan and how they would adapt. So we did that in part partnering with the National Endowment for the Humanities and Congress with the CARES Act funding that went out all over the country in various shapes and forms. Some of that went to the National Endowment of Humanities and then went out to the state humanities councils. And we all worked with our local organizations across our states to see where the needs were, and to do everything we could to help with that. And then we did a second round of that later in the year as the needs were, it was apparent that there were still a lot of needs there after the CARES Act funding had been distributed, to work with our close friends and partners at the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, along with major private foundation to do another round of that grant making, again, unrestricted, just helping with operations.

Chris Sommerich:

And we just heard over and over across the state from the museums and the different educational organizations and cultural organizations about how important that was to them being able to, again, keep staff on and do things like adapt to like virtual programming, which we were also doing. That's another thing. A big adaptation for us is we aren't just a grant maker, we do a lot of programming and partnership with other organizations all across the state. And so we did a lot of adapting of our own programs to online. Some things postponed, some going online, some just re-visioned. And again, I just am really proud of all that. And I think I've heard from a lot of people that they could see that we were adapting and pivoting and continuing on rather than just shutting down during the pandemic.

Kelley Peterson:

So much to be proud of there. I can just, if our listeners could see the pride in your face right now that I can, I wish they could. I wish I could send that through audio, because that is a very prideful thing to accomplish that. And I know that that was probably the busiest and different than you've ever had to function, and that really is something to be proud of and slowly, but surely, we're opening things and

people are getting out there. And so tell us about the upcoming events that Humanities Nebraska has going on that we should know about.

Chris Sommerich:

Sure thing. And we just completed our first major in-person gathering just this past weekend. And it was at Chautauqua, which was virtual in the summer of 2020, and just, we did a few things online, but we were able to all come back together and do it in-person in Ashland, between Lincoln and Omaha, this past weekend and exploring the 1950s and all different aspects of the 1950s, like the Cold War and race relations and pop culture and politics and just all of it. And it was just fabulous, but it was weird. It's been, I'm sure a lot of people have experienced this sort of jarring nature of all of a sudden, okay, we can get back out there again. And at the same time, there's still a lot of uncertainty. We all know we're not out of the woods yet, but everybody's trying to be careful, and I have heard plenty of people say how tired they are of doing Zoom sessions and things like that. So it was really good to be in-person for that.

Chris Sommerich:

And then we're turning, looking forward in September, we're going to begin touring a Smithsonian Exhibition across the state, opening it up on the far western end of the state. And it's called Crossroads: Change in Rural America. And this Smithsonian exhibit is especially designed for smaller museums, smaller spaces, but really it's got the Smithsonian professionalism on it and everything. And it's really looking at what are the challenges and opportunities for rural America and for rural communities in Nebraska. We sure are addressing that, the kind of worry about the rural-urban divide and sort of demographic shifts and things like that. So that's going to start in September, out in Kimball, and then it's going to just move around the state over the next eight months or so. So we're really looking forward to that.

Chris Sommerich:

And then I would say, the other thing I would just mention for people to think about attending either in-person or it will also be live-streamed, is our governor's lecture in the humanities this October 12. And that will be at the Holland Center in Omaha, and we're bringing Henry Louis Gates Jr., who has many amazing characteristics and accomplishments. But this is for, he has a PBS series called Finding Your Roots, and he's a Harvard professor, one of the leading black intellectuals in the country, just a remarkable author, filmmaker, things like that. But Finding Your Roots is a really popular PBS show exploring people's ancestry and genealogy. And so we're going to have him on October 12. And I would say that is one thing that we won't want to miss.

Kelley Peterson:

Hang, Chris, I need to get on the road here, and you start making plans. All of this sounds, these events sound so great. And I have to say, when you mentioned as a marketer in the Smithsonian, it does just speak to that professionalism that you also mentioned and what an incredible brand. And it's because they deliver experiences like no other. So all of those events, what a great thing to bring to the state. So, can't wait for that.

Chris Sommerich:

Yeah. So a lot of the smaller towns in Nebraska, they'll have a great historical museum or library or someplace, and they struggled to bring in new exhibits or anything of really high quality, but boy, talk about a powerful brand. You're absolutely right. The Smithsonian. So, when they can show the

Smithsonian's logo and get an, I mean, it draws people from all over and the sites are all really excited about it. So if you follow Humanities Nebraska on social media, our website, you'll see more about that tour in the coming months.

Kelley Peterson:

Such great opportunities for all of us. So Chris, let's talk a little bit more about your role at the organization. How has your role evolved over the years and how do you move the mission forward?

Chris Sommerich:

Sure. Yeah, that's a great question. And I started, as you mentioned at the beginning, over 16 years ago now, and I was the development director. So my primary role was on the fundraising side of things. And I did that for six years, of course, working closely with program, staff and our executive director and our board and everything and getting out around the state. And I thought I knew my way around this organization until I became executive director. And then I felt like a new guy again. It was really eye opening how much more there was to learn when you're involved in everything to some extent or another. My role is to help provide a strategic direction, to do a lot of the external outreach, to really engage our board of directors who are just fabulous people from all over in Nebraska, to do the government relations side of things and continue to help with the fundraising side of things and work with staff on programming. It's all over the map.

Chris Sommerich:

And I tell anybody who's interested in the nonprofit sector, one of my first questions is, are you prepared to just have your day thrown into complete chaos so that, as soon as you walk in the door and just, if you're the kind of person that needs to check certain exact things off your list by the end of the day, it may not be for you because you can try, you can start that way, but you never know where things, the day will take you. And I love that personally. I don't necessarily feel like I need to stick to a list all the time, but it's a juggle or staying organized and also taking care of things that emerge over the course of the day or the week and keeping an eye on the future because you always have to have one eye looking ahead at what's coming up in the months down and years down the road.

Chris Sommerich:

Certainly when you mentioned about adapting to the pandemic, a lot of my thinking right now is what are we going to be going forward? How are we going to be different? And I think a lot of executive directors of nonprofits and a lot of leaders of businesses or anything are thinking about that too. Where is this an opportunity to kind of shift a little bit what you do and how you do it, and what are the needs of Nebraska going to be going forward? And so these are all things that as executive director are kind of on my mind at the same time. And fortunately, there's a really excellent staff here. A lot of them have been here for quite a few years and they really know what they're doing. And sometimes it's me just trying to keep up with them and then having people on the ground all across the state on it, from our board and supporters across the state and partners across the state who we couldn't do anything without them. It's a really interesting kind of job to be in. That's for sure.

Kelley Peterson:

For sure. I love your definition of the nonprofit sector, and I've been hooked on the nonprofit sector for quite some time now, and I just love it. And how you explained it, I guess I've never explained it that we're pro jugglers, but we are pro jugglers. And the thing that I love about it is that every day is not the

same. There's always something new to have a challenge and have a solution and bring everyone together to make it happen, so.

Chris Sommerich:

Well, and if, I want to put in a little plug for somebody like KidGlov. I mean, non-profits rarely have the resources to have staff that have high levels of expertise in things like marketing and graphic design and things like that. And so another thing as a nonprofit that you do is reach out to the experts and people like KidGlov who especially work with nonprofits a lot. And similarly, in other areas of our work, making sure and on the financial side that we're working with pro accountants and things like that. Nonprofits, it's challenging because you're baked into what you are, is the idea that you're conserving your resources and you're not making money hands over fist, you're putting it right back out there. In some ways it is like a small business, I think. To be honest, I think there's a lot of similarities to what small businesses deal with too.

Kelley Peterson:

Absolutely. Because you have to make sure you're afloat too and then now you're making sure others that you touch are staying afloat during a pandemic, and that's a lot. So, yes, I love that nonprofits are frugal at times, they're nimble, they're flexible, and what that does is force some of the best strategy that you could ever come up with, because there's all of those obstacles and those barriers and non-profits overcome them anyway. Every single day.

Chris Sommerich:

Yeah, absolutely. And I would encourage anybody who's listening and has any interest in things going on in their community to look for the nonprofit to get involved with as the volunteer. And I think just people get a lot of enrichment out of it and the nonprofit gets a lot out of it too, because we all rely on volunteers, whether it's board members or people helping with events or whatever.

Kelley Peterson:

That is a great point and a really good way to experience humanity within your community, is to volunteer and give of your time and meet new people and do some good. So Chris, you haven't always been a Lincolnite, but you've been here for quite some time now. Can you tell me more about how Nebraska has evolved over the years and how Humanities Nebraska has had an impact on that?

Chris Sommerich:

Sure. And it's really interesting, I moved to Nebraska when I was 16, it was 1985. So you can do that math, I've been here a while now, but I... And I moved from the St Louis area. So kind of a bigger city, but still Midwest, but it felt like moving in Nebraska was going to be the end of the world as a 16 year old. I mean, just who had no concept of what Nebraska was. But it didn't take long to really start first liking it and then really falling in love with it ultimately, and I'm very grateful that I ended up in Nebraska.

Chris Sommerich:

I think Nebraska has a lot of things going for it that, I mean, we have our challenges, of course, but I think that Nebraskans are just such wonderful people and it's a small, the small population in Nebraska, it's just funny when you go around the state how everybody sort of knows each other or at least maybe two degrees removed, but, and the cultural scene of Nebraska has really grown, I felt over the years. And I

started out in nonprofits after getting my master's degree in political science at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. And I just kind of fell into it.

Chris Sommerich:

And I worked four years for Audubon Nebraska, the state program for National Audubon Society. And then you have an opportunity to kind of move up to the next step, came open at the Humanities Council. And so I've been here since 2004 and that's when I really started... As I got around the state and started learning more about Nebraska's cultural gems and just different communities, I have just felt that it's been wonderful to learn about, every community's a little bit different and there are a lot of gems all over the state that some are relatively unknown and some are places that you just, should be on everybody's list to check-out.

Chris Sommerich:

And for Humanities Nebraska, it's important to be out there, meeting people and going to these places. You and I were talking about this a little bit earlier, but you can only do so much on phone calls and Zoom meetings now or emails, but when you're sitting down face-to-face with whether it's one person or a small group of people or a larger audience, that's when you really get to know people and build those relationships. And so for us, Humanities Nebraska, that's been pretty important to our work because then we know who to work with whenever any kind of opportunity comes up, programmatically or whatever it is, we kind of figure out who to work with and wherever in the state. And it's, I think it's really helped us in our mission.

Kelley Peterson:

Absolutely. Well, I appreciate you finding those hidden gems and then helping them be discovered and explored by others within the state. So at KidGlov, we work with several organizations that are dedicated to uplifting and bringing awareness to underserved communities, and I love hearing how organizations are giving back. In your opinion, how does Humanities Nebraska give back? Even though you've already given so many examples.

Chris Sommerich:

No, that's a great... I was thinking about that in terms of, we're just talking about the grant making and giving back literally in a way funding. And I felt it was really interesting during the pandemic how I felt about like, this is taxpayer dollars essentially that are coming to us and it's up to us to get that back out there as efficiently and effectively as we can. And so I felt this level of... I mean, we always think about that with any of our sources of revenue. Like, are we being good fiscal stewards of our funding? But for some reason, with the CARES Act funding, it took on a little bit different feel to it in like making sure, feeling that pressure. This is taxpayer dollars. And so we need to really do the citizens right with this.

Chris Sommerich:

But beyond that, I think the way we're giving back as an organization is we are not like a huge nonprofit, we're a fairly small staff of like 10 people. Our budget is little less than \$2 million a year, which, I mean, in some ways it sounds like a lot, but compared to some nonprofits, it's not that big. But there's an inherent value in what we're doing for this state that is just in the fact that we are a convener or a, we connect people and organizations, and we convene people to come together as I was talking about. And I guess for another C-word, a catalyst for things to happen because once people start coming together and

exploring some topic, it's a catalyst for things to happen. And there's, I don't know how to put a price tag on any of that, but it's, I think, of great value.

Kelley Peterson:

Yes. I am coming back to the... And I'm always a brand loyalist, and I'm trying to think in my brain, what campaign was that of the credit card that did the priceless? But that's what you're describing is that priceless campaign, because you can't put a monetary amount on that and truly connecting people in the way that you do is a gift. So that is priceless.

Chris Sommerich:

Thank you. And I also have been thinking about how it's becoming more and more rare in a way, because we know, we've heard a lot about how politically divided our country is now and everything and. People... I think we all are guilty of sort of self-selecting who we surround ourselves with. And it's too easy now, whether you're talking about social media or who your friends are, or what events you go to, it's too easy to just be in an echo chamber of like-minded people or people that look like you, or people that think like you. And so taking it one step further about a way to give back, I think, is trying to do everything we can.

Chris Sommerich:

So it'd be one of those places where people can still come together, are around people who don't think like them and don't look like them. And so we talk a lot about in terms of age and race and geography and everything, it's like, how can we get more people in a room, whether it's a virtual room or a real room, hopefully real, to listen to other's perspectives. And I think that's actually one of the things that is incredibly important to our country right now, to have more of that.

Kelley Peterson:

I completely agree. And part, social media has been an interest of mine for a long, long time, and part of some Instagram groups and specifically, and they're always trying to beat the algorithm, so that you're not served up in your little vacuum, what those things are. So I really like what you're saying there about we don't think we're self-selecting for ourselves, but it just is that way sometimes. So it's great.

Chris Sommerich:

I mean, you have to work hard at it, harder than-

Kelley Peterson:

You do. To reach those that you don't know or haven't reached before, you do have to work hard at it, especially as marketers, we know that the best that you have to work hard at it to reach different people in different audiences too, whether that's helping a nonprofit gain new fundraisers, new philanthropists, or if it's for-profit, how do you gain those different audiences that may not know what you have to offer? And it's hard to break through those channels sometimes because they are hard-wired.

Chris Sommerich:

Yeah. For sure.

Kelley Peterson:

So we talked earlier that we're not really going to do the math, but you've been at Humanities Nebraska for, I'm not going to say a long time, just for a while, but where did your journey begin and how did your path lead you in this direction?

Chris Sommerich:

Yeah. Well, yeah. Okay. Everybody's story is so interesting. When you sit down with people, sometimes they just think it's a fun exercise to hear how they got where they are. And for me, it definitely was not all planned out. My wife knew from the time she was a little girl she wanted to be a school teacher. She stuck with that all through college and has now been a school teacher for 20 some years and loves it every minute. And I don't know about you, but like my kids are, who are now in their teens and twenties are still stressed about what they're going to do with their lives. And this is like, that's more common, I think. And for me, I didn't know for sure what I wanted to do at any point, really, until I fell into it, like I was mentioning before, the nonprofit sector.

Chris Sommerich:

I do think that getting a political science degree set me up pretty well for doing this kind of work, but I think one thing is that keeping your antenna up for opportunities that maybe weren't in your plans is one really good way to kind of end up on a different path than you thought you were going to. And that is sort of what happened with me. I started out, somebody asked me to do some grant writing while I was working on my master's thesis. And I didn't even know what grant writing was. But I said, "Sure," I could use a little extra cash. And then next thing I knew I was done with the master's and I had a job offer with Audubon. And I still love that organization to this day.

Chris Sommerich:

And then just the Humanities Council, like a lot of people, I was like, well, I don't really... When I started working for Audubon, I didn't know my birds very well. And when I started working for the Humanities Council like, I would stumble all over myself trying to talk about the humanities, but I knew I was drawn to it. I just couldn't articulate it very well. And so, and now I've blinked and it's 16 years later. And, right. That's the way life is, I guess.

Kelley Peterson:

In KidGlov's world, we talk about, and this is no pun intended to your previous career, but we say that writers are very rare birds. And I would say that quite possibly grant writers are even more of a rare bird, so that you have that talent in your arsenal is pretty remarkable actually.

Chris Sommerich:

It certainly wasn't a talent when I started, I just, I needed a lot of handholding.

Kelley Peterson:

I don't know very many people who say, "Yes, I just fell into grant writing."

Chris Sommerich:

And how many people do you know that go to school planning to be in the nonprofit sector? I mean, I think there's more pathways to that now in education, but 20 years ago, I think it wasn't that much. People land in nonprofits from all over the place.

Kelley Peterson:

Yeah. I completely agree with that. And what I love about the research that's done about generations is that the generations that are coming have, I don't like to think about this myself, that we don't have as much of that nonprofit or doing good, or we weren't raised that way, but the generations coming certainly do, and it's at their core to want to do good. And they quite possibly might have a better definition of humanities than maybe what we grew up with. So I'm for the future for that reason.

Chris Sommerich:

I agree with you. That's true.

Kelley Peterson:

So as a leader that's been doing this work for a while, what advice do you have for other leaders who want to make a difference in the world?

Chris Sommerich:

That is a great question. One thing I remember from when I was interviewing for the executive director position here was, I told the interview committee that it was going to be important to me to have a good work-life balance, and I had little younger kids and just, I watched other people kind of burn out from just nothing but work. And so I just said it's going to be important to me to have a work-life balance, and it has worked well. I mean, 16 years later, or 10 years later, I guess for this position, I feel like that has been important. And it's helped me be a better leader by not burning myself out by working 70 hours a week or whatever. And so that would be a bit of advice is to everybody think about that balance.

Chris Sommerich:

And I think, also I would encourage people who are interested in making a difference in the world to always, if you're striving... You need to always be striving to learn if you're going to make a difference. And so you really need to be able to listen. When you're around a lot of smart, successful people, like your instinct is to want to talk all the time. Sometimes it's shutting up and listening to others and truly listening, and then you might be surprised at what you learn and what you take away from it. Just being curious and being hopeful. I think being hopeful about where things go, if you want to make a difference in the world, it's easy to despair about the world and we'll need to keep hope in order to have the energy to keep tackling the problems.

Kelley Peterson:

What great advice. Sage great advice.

Chris Sommerich:

I'm running the gray hair. I think this is a gray hair.

Kelley Peterson:

I am inspired by motivational quotes. Doing a lot of writing words are really strong to me. Could you give us a few of your own words of wisdom for our listeners?

Chris Sommerich:

This would connect somewhat, maybe what I was just talking about. And I would say nourish your mind, body and soul. I think you have to take care of yourself in all three of those areas. Nourishing your mind is always staying curious, like I was just talking about and learning, be a lifelong learner. Nourishing your body is just the importance of just taking care of yourself physically and it really, that feeds into your mental state, too. And so I do a lot of activity just to blow off steam from the day running and biking and whatever. And when it comes to your soul, I mean, that can mean a lot of different things to people, but for me, it's trying to find ways to use whatever creative juices I have. So like photography and music are two things I may make key part of my life that helped my brain sort of reset, I guess. For some people it's yoga, I've never tried yoga.

Kelley Peterson:

Well, you were just talking about how you need to broaden and be in places that you've never been before with people that you wouldn't normally associate with-

Kelley Peterson:

The next time we talk, I want to hear the yoga story.

Chris Sommerich:

I'm going to keep avoiding you.

Kelley Peterson:

Yoga can do a lot of good things for sure. Well, I'm ready for that, a motivational quote to be a poster or a billboard soon, because I think everyone needs to listen to those motivational words. So Chris, for our listeners, who would like to learn more about your work and how to support you, how can they find out more about Humanities Nebraska?

Chris Sommerich:

We do a pretty good job on an ongoing basis with our social media accounts. And so finding Humanities Nebraska on Facebook or Twitter, Instagram would be a good place to start and signing up for an e-newsletter. We do an e-blast every week that just lists the programs that we're either doing or funding all across the state. And people really like getting that because they can just see a list of what's happening over the next week or two, anywhere in the state. And so that's something that you can easily sign up for from our website. We're based in Lincoln, but we love meeting people all over the state. So if anybody is interested in learning more, they can drop me a line. And I would love to talk.

Kelley Peterson:

Great. As we wrap up our time together today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Chris Sommerich:

I would like to encourage people to really think about and act on what we were just talking about a few minutes ago, about stretching yourselves to go to programs and engage with people that are outside of your normal every day way of thinking and circle of friends and colleagues and so forth. And I feel like that is something that we all and I'm trying to hold myself to that too as much as I can. And whenever I do, I feel like it's kind of a blessing. I come away from it energized. Sometimes it's difficult because we all

think we're right about everything. Sometimes we need to hear that other people who think very differently, but I guess that's... And that's a big part of our work is trying to find ways to do that, I guess that's what I would leave people with.

Kelley Peterson:

I was just thinking the other, that I came across a radio station that I don't normally listen to. And it was an interview that was very different from my beliefs. And I agree with you in that, that was maybe not my right, but it was someone else's right. And to listen to that someone else's right will open my mind maybe not to go all the way, but it's also good to know that there's other people in the world and those views that may not be just like yours. And so I just enjoyed that just as much as if I was going to my regular radios go-to radio stations. So yeah, we need to keep our minds open for sure.

Chris Sommerich:

That is great. A great example, even more so is if you're talking to somebody face to face and you're like, "You know what? I kind of liked this person, even if I don't agree with them," it just takes away the sort of vilifying each other or whatever. And when you get to know somebody personally, it's harder to vilify them and their point of view. And so maybe it's naive, but that's what my hope is that we all do that.

Kelley Peterson:

Well, in that one issue that you may not agree in, isn't the whole person and isn't the whole me. So I want to give that to them. And I hope that they afford me the same. So Chris, I fully believe that the world needs more changemakers like you. Thank you for taking the time to share with us today.

Chris Sommerich:

Thank you, Kelley. It's been great talking with you and thanks to KidGlov for all the great work you do for the nonprofit sector here in Nebraska.

Kelley Peterson:

You bet.

Announcer:

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change Podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities, or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from, visit kidglov.com, at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch. As always, if you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe, and share. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.