

## Agency for Change Podcast: Peg Harriott, President and CEO, Child Saving Institute

### **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.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Those of you who are parents know what it's like to respond to the cry of a child. First you're on alert, but then you want to soothe them and take care of them. Hey, everybody, I'm Lyn Wineman, President of KidGlov, and today on the Agency For Change Podcast, our conversation is with Peg Harriott, President and CEO of Child Saving Institute, an organization whose mission is to respond to the cry of a child. That is beautiful. Peg, thanks for joining us. How are you today?

### **Peg Harriott:**

I am great. And it's such a delight to join you. And, of course, it's a wonderful mission to speak about so I think we're going to have a great conversation.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

I just know that we are as well. I am so intrigued to that whole idea of responding to the cry of a child. And I know you do so many things, more than you could put in a mission statement, but I also know what you mean. Would you though just take a minute to tell us more about the Institute and how you fulfill that mission?

### **Peg Harriott:**

Absolutely. Well, sometimes it's helpful for folks to know that our mission, the responding to the cry of a child, actually comes from our founder over 130 years ago.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Oh my goodness.

### **Peg Harriott:**

Clark was responding to a newspaper article about, why was he helping kids that were out on the streets. And his comment was, "I'm simply responding to the cry of a child." And so we've kept that mission from those many years ago.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

### **Peg Harriott:**

But really, how we do it today is that we are focused on the prevention and intervention of child abuse and neglect. So we're focused not only on helping families thrive and be the very best they can be, but we're also helping those who have experienced pretty significant abuse and trauma and helping them heal from what's happened in their life.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. What a worthy cause, and that's a great overview. Next, could you talk us through some of the organization's core programs and services? Let's get a little bit more specific with these.

**Peg Harriott:**

Sure, you bet. So our early childhood education programs provide childcare for families six weeks to five years of age. On any given day, we have two large childcare centers that we're providing services in, with 100 little ones in each one.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh my.

**Peg Harriott:**

Our focus really is on the emotional social development of those little folks and helping the parents know how to help their children thrive. So that's early intervention, that's prevention, reaching children before anything bad happens.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh yeah.

**Peg Harriott:**

For sure. We have a Young Parents Program where we're helping teen and young parents know how to be great parents and also how to meet their own developmental steps into the career world and what their next steps in their adolescent development is. We provide in-home services in a number of fronts but more on the child welfare service side. We're helping families either keep their children in their homes because they've been identified as potentially some abuse or neglect in the home, or we're helping them make the changes they need to make to come back into the home. We also do foster care, and I know we'll probably talk about that a little bit later, but we recruit, license, and support foster families and adoptive families for kids that are in the foster care system. We have a shelter, a 12-bed shelter of teen boys who've gotten themselves in a little bit of a challenge with the juvenile justice system. But we're there to help them and their families get them back on the right track. I could keep going on, but I think those are some of our biggest programs.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Okay. Peg, really a whole range then from early childhood to teens to helping parents. I mean, honestly, at KidGlov, we have a young man in our office who is literally any minute now going to have his first child and it's so exciting to watch that young couple, but also so stressful. Parenting a child is a stressful thing. But onto a more serious topic because really responding to the cry of a child and the services you provide for child abuse and neglect, I've always heard that early intervention and community support can make all the difference. Can you tell us a little bit more about why that is so important?

**Peg Harriott:**

Well, a lot of it has to do with a couple things, but what we know happens with brain development and what we know happens with attachment and bonding and how important it is if kids get what they need

at a very young age and they learn to trust others and they learn that they can explore and be curious about the world and the adults around them will help them, versus that the adults don't provide them with their basic needs, are scary, don't keep them safe. It's a whole different trajectory for a child if they start out with those wholesome roots. And then we've learned quite a bit about intergenerational trauma, and families carry that trauma from generation to generation.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Mm-hmm.

**Peg Harriott:**

But if we can get that turned around and we can help provide families with different ways to raise children, the outcome is so much greater than it is if we're helping a teen, maybe at 17, who has had a life of trauma.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. The generational impact is really, when you think about it, I mean, it's terrible to think of one individual having trauma, but then you follow that trauma through the different generations and that's a big deal. So sometimes the best option is foster care and kinship care, and I know that's a huge part of what you do. Peg, on a side note, sometimes I wish there was a number like the blood bank. When the blood bank is low, there's a report and people know. When the state is low on foster parents, there's not always a report for that, and maybe that's because we're always in need of foster parents. But for people that are listening and thinking about fostering, what advice and tips would you give them about that process or getting started even?

**Peg Harriott:**

Absolutely. There are a number of organizations in the community that are looking for foster parents. And we have foster parents who are willing to serve two and three-year-olds and babies. But, frankly, that's not who we need the foster parents for. Who we need the foster parents for are older children, teens, groups of siblings, three siblings, four siblings, all at once, we want to keep them together, kids who've had some pretty significant trauma in their lives and so their behavior shows that they've had some trauma and they really need a trusting home that will hang in there and help develop that trust to meet their needs. So anybody that's considering it, you can reach out to any child serving organization, clearly, Child Saving Institute, but many of our peers also. And there are free orientation meetings where you can talk to people who foster and learn about it and you don't have to make any commitment right away.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**Peg Harriott:**

There are classes that then you take and you learn more about that and see if this is a right match for you. And then you go through the licensing portion of that piece. One thing that some folks think is that they have to be wealthy to be a foster parent, and that is absolutely not true. You do have to be financially stable on your own. The state does provide some reimbursement for the cost to have a child in your home, and there's Medicaid insurance that covers the health insurance of the child. So you don't

have to be wealthy. You do have to be loving and have an open heart and have the time to invest in a child or a teen. It's not a requirement to be wealthy, and actually, we really want to try to keep the kids in their home schools if at all possible.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Mm-hmm.

**Peg Harriott:**

So then you have foster parents all over the city and all kinds of foster parents, and Spanish speaking foster parents. We need a variety to meet the variety of needs of the kids that come.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That makes a lot of sense. After the last year and a half, and I wasn't planning to talk about the pandemic today, but we've been through a lot as a community and more and more people really are re-evaluating and thinking of making a difference. I can't imagine a better way to make a difference than to bring in a foster child or foster children. I mean, the thought of splitting up siblings in a time when they really need to be together and need support makes a difference. Well, it's great work that you're doing, Peg. One fun thing that I came across on your website since I think we're within 100 days from Christmas now, so it's time to start thinking, I came across your Substitute Santa's Program and I'm intrigued by the name. Can you tell us a bit more about that initiative and how people could get involved maybe as they're doing their own Christmas shopping this year?

**Peg Harriott:**

That's right. So we have a lot of little kids that need some help with holiday shopping and Christmas presents. And we have a lot of teens and young adults who would not have Christmas without the help of others. And at Child Saving Institute, we do Substitute Santa where many great, wonderful people in the community purchase toys, things for babies, things for teenagers. So Tonka trucks or favorite games or dolls, and I've got to tell you, many of our children are African-American or Latino and so we really want to have dolls that represent them. So ethnic based baby dolls are a high commodity for us at the holiday time. We don't do adopt a family. We really are all about trying to help support the parents.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Mm-hmm.

**Peg Harriott:**

And so what we do is we help get the parents what they need to provide a holiday for their children.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's lovely.

**Peg Harriott:**

And then the parents get to decide who those gifts come from. Do the gifts come from Santa Claus or do the gifts come on Hanukkah? How do those gifts come? And the parent is the one in charge providing their holiday. So, that's a little different than some organizations that do adopt a holiday. So folks can

bring holiday gifts, gift cards, cash to Child Saving Institute that first week in December, and we will make sure that children that are definitely in need have a very happy holiday.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Ah, that's a lot of fun. Sometimes too, my children are grown and I miss shopping for toys and for teens, so that's a fun thing that I can add to my list as well. So, Peg, you have announced your retirement. And, first of all, congratulations are in order for really a very successful and long career. Reflecting on your time at Child Saving Institute, can you tell me what you're most proud of and also what you'll miss the most?

**Peg Harriott:**

I would say I'm most proud of the expansion that we've done in the Early Intervention Services.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**Peg Harriott:**

Yes, we are all about helping children heal, but the expansion that we've done on early intervention, whether it's expanding our Save Programs that's in the community schools, helping kids who are having problems with achievement or attendance or behavior or our Kids Squad Program that provides consultation with some other local organizations to help children that are having problems in childcare. We newly added a program that is working with parents who are survivors of domestic violence and their children and working together with the children and the parents to help heal. All that expansion and early intervention helps me know that there will be less children that are in need of the deep trauma work.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love that thought. Congratulations on that great work. So now, what will you miss the most?

**Peg Harriott:**

Hearing the stories of the difference that we've made in a child's life. And, frankly, also watching the young professionals that have dedicated their lives to this work and they're passionate about this work and watching them grow and being a part of helping them grow in their careers. I'll miss that, and that happens on a daily basis.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's fantastic. I mean, people who decide to go into this type of work, really, they're really special people. Their hearts are in the right place. It's not always easy, but it can be very, very rewarding knowing that you're changing someone's life, so that's just great. So as a leader, Peg, because you have been seen as a leader and a role model in the Omaha community and across the state for quite some time, what advice do you have for leaders who want to make a difference in the world?

**Peg Harriott:**

I guess my advice is to lead with an open, welcoming, and grateful heart and to lead with the best of intention, the strongest focus on helping those around grow and thrive and develop, but to keep that heart open and not get jaded or judgmental or frustrated, but to keep loving everybody.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love that. Hearing you say that, I've never thought of it like this, but leadership is somewhat like parenting. There's no one who can tell you exactly what to do in every circumstance. There's a lot of books but still you don't always know what to do, but having that open heart and your heart and your mind in the right place is really great advice. So all of our listeners know, Peg, that I am inspired by motivational quotes and I get to talk to really interesting people and so I always like to ask, could you share a few of your own Peg Harriott words of wisdom that we could share with our listeners?

**Peg Harriott:**

Well, probably the one that folks hear me talk about with some frequency is that I believe we need to treat family as if it's a verb and to be very active about how we family. Families, whoever you define them to be, it could be biological family, it could be extended family, it could be friends, but you're not going to have a wonderful supportive family unless you actively make that happen and you develop loving traditions and you spend time together and you commit to the importance.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That is a really great idea, and you do have to invest time and effort and love and all kinds of things into familying. Familying is my new word of the day. I don't even know if it's a real word, but I like thinking of it as a verb, Peg.

**Peg Harriott:**

That's right.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Let's make it a real word. Let's make it a real word. So for our listeners who would like to learn more about your work, how to support you, maybe how to sign up for a foster parent orientation, how can they find out more about Child Saving Institute?

**Peg Harriott:**

Well, the easiest thing to do is go to our website, [www.childsaving.org](http://www.childsaving.org). And the one trick about that website addresses is we're not a bank, so it's not child savings with an S.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Ah.

**Peg Harriott:**

It's [childsaving.org](http://childsaving.org). But that's probably the best place. We are also active on Facebook and Twitter so those are also options. And if you're just wanting to talk to somebody about foster parenting, calling us at 402-553-6000, that works too, the old fashioned way.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's great. I love it, and for anybody who didn't catch that, those will be in the show notes on the KidGlov website as well so you can grab any of those avenues of communication. So, Peg, as we wrap up our time together and as you're nearing retirement from a fabulous career, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

**Peg Harriott:**

Well, I'd like folks to remember that the future success of any community depends on the ability to foster the health, education, and economic wellbeing of children and families. And when a community does that well, they prosper and the citizens prosper, and there's productivity and there's thoughtful citizenship. But when not all children have equal access to just the basic needs of wellbeing, health, education, things are at risks, the community's at risk. And so I would ask everyone to consider investing in the children our community.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, Peg, that just gave me chills. It honestly gave me chills. So it has been so fun to talk to you today and I fully believe that the world needs more people like you, Peg Harriott. Thank you for taking the time to share with us.

**Peg Harriott:**

Well, we appreciate the opportunity to talk about Child Saving Institute any day and it's so fun to talk with you, Lyn, and see you again.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Absolutely. Peg, congratulations on a lovely career. Enjoy your retirement immensely. And I know the Child Saving Institute will keep on with the good work.

**Peg Harriott:**

Great. Thank you so much.

**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 change maker you'd love to hear from, visit [kidglov.com](http://kidglov.com), at [K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com](http://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.