

Agency for Change Podcast: Walter Gilliam, Executive Director, Buffett Early Childhood Institute

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Walter Gilliam

If your heart ain't where your head is, it doesn't matter where your head is.

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

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Today, we are absolutely privileged to host Dr. Walter Gilliam, Executive Director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. With a wealth of experience in early childhood development and education policy, Dr. Gilliam is at the forefront of shaping the landscape for our youngest learners. We are going to dive into the critical importance of early childhood education and discussing the profound impact of Dr Gilliam's research on shaping the policies that positively influence children's lives, both here in Nebraska and beyond. We are also going to be discussing the Institute's involvement in the We Care for Kids campaign, which works to ensure that all Nebraska families have access to quality early childhood education. Walter, I am eager to talk with you today and learn more about the great impact you are continuing to make on babies, young children, their families and, ultimately, our communities.

Walter Gilliam

Thank you so much, Miss Wineman, is it okay if you call me Walter, if you're comfortable doing that?

Lyn Wineman

I would love that. Is it okay? If you call me Lyn, will do.

Walter Gilliam

It's a deal.

Lyn Wineman

Alright, the ground rules are set. So, Walter, I'd love to start by having you tell our listeners more about the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska and a little bit about your role there.

Walter Gilliam

Sure. So the Buffett Early Childhood Institute has been around for closing in on 11 years now.

Lyn Wineman

Wow.

Walter Gilliam

And it is devoted to young children and their development and their families and their communities and those amazing, wonderful professionals who care for our babies, toddlers and preschoolers and young children every day. That's what we do as an institute, and it exists because of a private public investment with Susie Buffett, who gave a very generous gift to the university to allow us to be able to do this work and the university matching that gift and as a result, it is truly the only thing of its kind in the nation, and when I came here from the other gig that I had for 28 years, I came here with the full knowledge that I'm going to an institute that is truly one of its kind and represents the most dynamic investment in any university anywhere in the country on behalf of children and families.

Lyn Wineman

You know I am so glad you're doing this work. People who listen to this podcast know that I am a relatively new grandmother, so experiencing and observing all over again what it's like for young families to find and afford and maintain quality early childhood education. So I appreciate that and I know you have been doing this work for a long time. I'm really curious how did you get interested in this, and are there people who were influential in your interest and this career?

Walter Gilliam

Oh well, that's a very big question. I started out as a K through 12 music teacher.

Lyn Wineman

Oh, wow.

Walter Gilliam

In a small K through 12 school, all in one big building in Appalachian, Kentucky, where I grew up and my wife taught biology and chemistry and physics. She was the biochem physics department and I was the music department. In this small K through 12 school with all the grades combined together in this really small, rural, tight-knit community. It was the kind of place where people referred to teachers as either

like a teacher or a grand teacher or a great-grand teacher having to do how many generations of children have you taught.

Walter Gilliam

There were teachers there who not only were teaching those children but they taught those children's parents and those children's grandparents too, and it was just this wonderful, tight-knit community. But unfortunately, in the time that my wife and I were there, two children committed suicide and one child died in a moped accident in front of the school late at night. And another child committed suicide her freshman year in college after she had graduated all of them, of course, two years and it caused me to rethink what I wanted to do with my life and I wasn't doing much music teaching at the time. I was really a grief counselor who didn't know what he was doing.

I decided to go back to graduate school, knew that I wasn't going to get into a clinical psychology program. I was interested in why children would do something like that and I knew I couldn't get into a clinical psych program. I didn't have any background in clinical psych, so I went into a school psychology program, figuring that my pitch will be since this is a school psychology program, would it be good for at least one of your grad students to have spent some time actually teaching in a school and was able to convince them and came there and this is the part where it gets kind of luck of the draw.

They had these two Department of Education training grants, one to train school psychologists to work with children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and the other one to train school psychologists to work with preschoolers with developmental disabilities. And this was because in the early 90s, ADHD was a very hot topic. Early childhood was a hot topic because the nation had passed early childhood special ed laws but we didn't have school psychologists and occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists who knew how to work with early on children. So they were investing in training programs for them and in wisdom that only an institution of higher education could possibly have. They decided that if you entered into the program on an odd number year they would put you in the attention deficit training program, and if you got there in an even number year then they would put you in the preschool training grant. And I got there in 92.

I'll admit, though it didn't feel lucky at the time. I actually thought that maybe the other one made more sense, given that I was interested in why children might commit suicide and how to stop that, and so much of it might be due to impulsive behaviors and decisions.

But the more time that I spent spending with preschool teachers, head start teachers, early head start teachers, childcare professionals and home based childcare providers and early childhood special ed providers those people who work with really young children, the more I became convinced of the importance of the upstream intervention, that if I really cared about adolescents committing suicide in their adolescent years, then I should care all the more about them when they're young, when their teachers haven't given up on them yet and their parents still think they're going to grow up to be president someday.

It will never get easier to intervene in their lives. When they're young it's so much easier to marshal resources around them. They're cute and their problems may not seem quite so large. But the older they get and the less cute they may seem to some people and the bigger their problems become, and the more those challenges strip away the social support networks around them, the more challenging it

became, and so I decided then, at this point, over 30 years ago, that I was going to spend the rest of my life in service of young children, by serving those who care for young children.

Lyn Wineman

Wow, that's an amazing journey. And right there, you've already not that I'm not already sold on the importance of quality early childhood education, but, wow, I can see where this story is going, Walter, and I'm curious about the science. What is the role of science in informing and shaping these practices and policies that impact children and their families and, of course, those who serve them, who are just such an important part of all of this?

Walter Gilliam

Well, Lyn, it's not enough for us to just want to do good. We have to actually accomplish the good. We have to know that the things that we're doing on behalf of children and families and those who care for them is actually helping, that it's successful. And the only way to do that is by studying what it is that we do. There's this movement in the United States that began over a hundred years ago called the Child Study Movement. This is where pretty much all of the departments that study child development came from, and all these different child psychiatry programs and psychology programs that were interested in the development of children came from this early 1900s Child Study Movement. And the Child Study Movement really took off in the United States because of a Midwest farmwife who was testifying in her state and asked a very simple question: Why is it that we spend so much money learning how to grow better corn, learning how to grow better hogs, learning how to grow better cattle and not hardly a dime learning how to grow better children?

Lyn Wineman

Wow, what a great question. That's amazing. So, if you're going to wrap this all up, what is it that people really need to know about the importance of early childhood education? What is the answer? I mean, the answer to the question of why we aren't spending money is, I think, part of what you're trying to and working to resolve, but what would you need to know about the importance?

Walter Gilliam

Yeah, the reason that we don't spend money oftentimes is just often just political will.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Walter Gilliam

We already know what the right thing to do is, but we don't always choose the right thing to do. I think most everybody, if you ask them what are the most important things in the world, say our children, our doing right by our children. People talk a lot about leaving a better world for their kids than the one they found. They talk about the importance of families, about the importance of their legacy living on through their children and their children's well-being. But I think about this kind of question, about what

is it that lets us know the importance of early childhood? A big part of it just has to do with the fact that I think everybody already knows that.

But if you need science, if you need science, we certainly have the science that shows that indeed, it's a good idea to love your children, spend time with your children, feed your children, take care of your children, to shelter children from the stresses of life, to realize that many parents do have to go to work in order to make ends meet.

When they're at work, someone needs to be caring for their children. In Nebraska, compared to the rest of the nation, a larger proportion of children are in homes where all adults are working. That's the case. Somebody needs to be caring for that child. And how do we make sure that the care that that child is receiving, the care that that child is receiving, is not sacrificed simply because of the economic needs of parents having to go to work, that they're still going to have access to a caring adult who's available to be able to interact with them, to be able to stimulate their imagination, their attention, to have the skills necessary to be able to care for not just one children but, in many cases, 10, 20 children, young children in the classroom, the children of other people. It's a difficult job to do.

Lyn Wineman

Absolutely.

Walter Gilliam

And if you don't know that for yourself, just go to any child care program. But if you want to just take my word for it, you can take my word for it because I've been to a lot of these child care programs. Yeah, it's a tough gig. It's not easy to do. There is research that shows that every dollar that we spend on early childhood care and education programs yields \$7.14 in societal savings by the time the children are 27 years old.

Lyn Wineman

Wow, every dollar turns into \$7.14. Is that what you just said?

Walter Gilliam

Yes, by the time the children are 27 years old. Because in randomized studies where they randomized children to either attend a high quality preschool program or to not, those that attended the high quality preschool program were less likely to fail at grade. Grade retention costs money. It costs another year of education. There were less likelihood needs special educational services. Special education costs more than regular education. They were more likely to graduate high school, more likely to have a job. Having a job saves money because now people are paying into the coffers instead of needing to have the coffers paid for them, and they were less likely to be incarcerated, and crime and incarceration costs money. In fact, those children who were randomly assigned to go to a high quality preschool program were randomly assigned not to In the early 60s, when the study began. Those that went to the high quality preschool program were also more likely to own a home and more likely to pay property taxes. What pays for schools?

Lyn Wineman

Property taxes.

Walter Gilliam

In other words, it pays for itself. By the time the children were 45 years old, \$7 became \$17 in societal savings. Money just keeps accruing over and over again. If you were going to invest in stock, you'd want to invest early, right.

Lyn Wineman

Yep.

Walter Gilliam

Same exact principle. Invest early in our children and families and you'll reap the biggest dividends, as opposed to investing later. We're waiting for challenges and problems and difficulties to arise in the lives of children and families and then trying to spend your money on remediation. You could have been spending it on prevention. When I was in my former gig as a professor in Connecticut, and a professor at Yale, the School of Medicine for 28 years before I came to Nebraska.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Walter Gilliam

When I was there I did a lot of work in Washington DC and I would fly back and forth, speaking to people on the Hill, people in the administration and on the way to Washington DC one day I stopped at a deli, I lived in a rural area of Connecticut, not too far from Yale but in a much more rural area, and we had this little deli there on the way and there was this man who was an octogenarian at the time. He was the town expert on all things horticultural. He was a peach tree farmer. His last name was Doolittle. His name was Richard Doolittle and everybody in town of course called him Dr. Doolittle. And I remember going in to the deli on the way to the airport and I said, Dr. Doolittle, you're a peach tree farmer, and he said yes of course, and I said but if you want it to grow good peaches,

and say, for instance, we could take the life of a peach tree and divide it into three different stages. Stage one is when you put the seed into the ground until it sprouts. Stage two is when the sprout turns into a tree. Stage three is when the tree starts to mature and bear fruit. You want to grow good peaches. And let's say, for instance, you could make one of those phases perfect. Perfect weather, perfect sun, perfect rain, perfect everything. And the other two, you don't know what you're going to get, but one of them you can make perfect.

And if you wanted to get those good peaches, in the end, which one of those phases would you pick to make perfect? And without hesitating at all, he said well, I picked the first one. And he said because whatever you do for that seed sets the potential for everything that tree can become. We do have

science that shows us that caring for our children and being responsive to our children's needs can pay dividends. Quite frankly, it doesn't take a lot of science, it's pretty much common sense. We all know it. It's just a matter of that. We choose to do the right thing by our babies or choose to focus on something else.

Lyn Wineman

You are very persuasive in making this case and obviously you do it a lot, but everything you said there makes so much sense and I even, I've never thought about the example of investing. I think that's something most of us can really understand, and then you back that up with all of that great data. I thank you for that. I think, in addition to just doing the right thing, there's another common misconception in this field. Maybe you can straighten me out if I'm wrong, but I think the misconception is that anyone can do it, and I volunteered for a short time to help when my children were younger in one of their classes, and I learned very quickly that I cannot do it, right. But do you find that misconception that anyone can do this job?

Walter Gilliam

Yes, yes, I hear that from time to time. I don't hear that for anyone who has actually done the job. From other people. You know, many of our children spend as many or more waking hours every day in the care of a paid early care education provider and professional or preschool teacher as they do with their parents.

Lyn Wineman

Yes.

Walter Gilliam

As waking hours in the care of someone else who has devoted their life to caring for other people's children. These incredible, amazing people who care for other people's children and in the process, support that child's development and makes that family more employable and keeps our economies moving. These incredible, wonderful people. And in many ways they are indeed a part of that child's family. They are providing mothering and fathering and care for these children and I wonder how many of these people who say anybody could do this would say that anybody could have been their mother.

Lyn Wineman

Wow, yeah.

Walter Gilliam

Anyone could have been my father. It short sells the important work that they do.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Walter Gilliam

And I to some degree, we have a long history of short selling work that we've historically associated with the work that women do.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, I understand that one.

Walter Gilliam

This work is incredibly important. In many ways, the reason we are here on earth to care for our children and to give them and their inheritance a better world than the one that we inherited. And some of the times we can't always be there for our children because we have to have jobs, to work, and in Nebraska, significant proportion of families have all adults in the family employed. As a matter of fact, Nebraska is above the national average in terms of young child families and all the adults actually being employed. Nebraska works, Nebraska is a working fleet, and when Nebraska works, someone has to take care of the children or the children's experiences, the children themselves, are paying for that labor through diminished experience. You know, we have to make decisions, sometimes for economic purposes, but it should not be our babies that shoulder the burden of that cost and that's why it's important to make sure that we care for all of our children and some of the times that it's making sure that parents can afford early care and education and realizing that early care and education cannot become cheaper because those who provide early care and education are barely scrapping by and parents can't afford to pay more. In instances like that, where something is integral for a society to operate, but the customer can't always pay for the true cost, we treat it as an infrastructure, like a road system.

There were two things that Nebraskans needed today to get to work. Many Nebraskans needed two things in order to get to work today. They needed a road and they needed somebody to care for their kids.

Lyn Wineman

What are we spending more on?

Walter Gilliam

I want to say, sure roads, but in the end, caring for our children is an infrastructural need and cost of the state. We should be treating it that way. It may not be a luxury of those who can simply afford it.

Lyn Wineman

So when you talk about making sure that all kids have quality early childhood education, we know there are gaps in that right and I mean, how does that happen and how do the gaps, I imagine they widen over time.

Walter Gilliam

Yeah, well, there's certainly gaps in the funding, we don't put enough resources into the care of young children. Some people believe that young children should be at home with their parents, and the reality is many parents are at home to begin with, they're actually working, and they're working because we need them to work. We have to set up expectations in a way to require families to be able to work, and so somebody's going to have to be able to care for those children. And so part of it is like how do we come to reality on the issue of the fact that families have to go to work.

Young children need to be in care someplace, and we will never be able to afford childcare that isn't educational and beneficial to the child, or early care and education that isn't also viable childcare so families can go to work. We need to be doing these together and we can. We can perform early care and education that serves both of those functions, provides childcare for working families who need it and provides some educational benefit to the children who work in it. And in the end, what we do is we end up with economies that can operate. We end up with employers who have employees who can come to work reliably. We end up with families who can actually sustain their employability and we end up with children who enter into kindergarten or first grade more ready to learn and able to succeed, and in the end it pays for itself.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, yeah, I know, Walter, one of the ways the Buffett Institute is addressing this need is through a campaign that's been going on for, I think, a couple of years now, called the We Care for Kids campaign. Can you tell us more about this effort and how it's influencing policymaking to help improve this situation?

Walter Gilliam

Guest

Sure. So the We Care for Kids campaign is a campaign of multiple organizations actually in the state of Nebraska and the Buffett Early Childhood is one of those and we help coordinate it. And the campaign is about educating people about the importance of early care and education and that these are all of our children and that we have a societal responsibility to our children to care for our children, to be good stewards of our children and their development. And we conduct polling to see how voters feel about early care and education. We collect information about how they prioritize caring for children and families, how they prioritize early care and education, and we even ask some questions having to do with, well if you care for it that much monetarily, how much of the state coffers would you be willing to put behind that? Do we care for our children in word? Do we care for our children in word and deed?

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, Are you actually willing to put your money where your mouth is, right?

Walter Gilliam

Yes, yes. And do you believe that the children of other families are important to you? I am anticipating that someday I will be retiring and I will be drawing Social Security, and the average person who draws Social Security will draw out of it more than three times that which they put in, even accounting for

inflation over the course of the time that they were working. In other words, the Social Security you're drawing is not just the money you put in, it's the workers who are working now contributing.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Walter Gilliam

The children we care for now, the children that my taxpayer dollars can support in education and early care and education, providing them opportunities, higher education. Children that we care for now will be the children who will be paying my Social Security someday.

Lyn Wineman

Wow, great way to think about it, right.

Walter Gilliam

There's an old parable about the wise person planting the seed of a tree that they will never live to sit under. In this case, we actually do live to sit under the tree.

Lyn Wineman

Right, right. So take care of that tree in the first phase.

Walter Gilliam

Yeah, especially if you want that tree to take care of you someday.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, Amazing. So my next question is two parts. I'm curious what do you see as the most pressing issue in early childhood education and what can our listeners do about it? What can we do to help positively impact this effort?

Walter Gilliam

Well, I think I would say, and many others would say, that the biggest issue in early childhood education, specifically in child care, is keeping enough people in the field to actually do the work.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Walter Gilliam

During the COVID-19 pandemic. An awful lot of people left the early care education field. At the beginning of the pandemic, when I was still at Yale, we started up a large-scale epidemiologic study of early care education providers' health and well-being during the course of the pandemic, and we now have over 126,000 early care and education providers across the nation who participate these data collection efforts. And in the first year of the pandemic, most of those who left the field never to return were people who were older and had been in the field for many years and they were concerned about their own health and so they retired early, left and then after that it was mostly younger people who were new to the field who were struggling with mental health issues themselves because of the stress and depression that they were experiencing. In other words, in the first year of field, early care education lost a lot of its wisdom and then from that point on, it was mostly losing a lot of its future.

At the beginning of the pandemic, when we asked early care and educational providers to complete all these measures about their health and their mental health and their general well-being, we gave them a depression screener and three months into the pandemic, 46% of early care and education providers were screening positive for potentially diagnosable levels of depression and by 18 months into the pandemic, 46% became 56%, and two thirds of them with moderate to severe levels of stress enough to actually compromise their health. Early care and education providers are typically paid half or less than half of what a kindergarten teacher has provided, and in many cases they work more hours and in many cases they work year-round for that. So you're talking about these wonderful, amazing people who devote their life to caring for other people's children. We don't pay them well. They don't typically have salaries, they're hourly workers, so when programs close and open during a pandemic or something like that, they lose pay.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Walter Gilliam

And many of them don't have any benefits. Most of them don't have any benefits, as a matter of fact, it's quite rare for an early care and education provider to have any kind of health benefits or anything else like that. When I was new to Nebraska, I just moved here, this was last year. I've only been here on this Friday, March 1, I will have been here one year.

Lyn Wineman

One year. I knew it was recent. I didn't realize that recent. Well, welcome to Nebraska. I hope we're treating you well.

Walter Gilliam

I love it here. I love it here and I meet such wonderful, amazing people and I'm going to tell you about one of them that I met after having been here just a few months. It was during the College World Series and I ran into this wonderful couple. My wife and I went to one of the games I think it was LSU versus Tennessee, and we were sitting there and, yeah, it was a good one. And we were sitting there and the woman sitting next to me her name was Stacy and she's from Grand Island.

I was talking to her and turns out she is a home-based childcare provider. And her husband, Jamie, is a contractor. And I was talking to her in between innings and asked her you know, to tell me about the work that you do. And she was telling me about her home-based childcare program, where she cares for children in her house so that their parents can go to work. And I said, well, what kind of parents are you caring for? What are the ages of these children? And she said, oh, we have children, really young, infants, almost, you know, just like six weeks old and toddlers and preschoolers, you know, right up until the age they can go to kindergarten. And I said and what kind of families are you serving? And she said well, you know, it's interesting. All of my children are the children of K through 12 teachers in Grand Island.

Walter Gilliam

And she said, yes, every single one of the children in my care. How many children, how many? Well, how many teachers? She said, well, seven, you know, and some of them have two children that are in my care. And I said that's incredible. What would happen, Stacy, if you weren't providing care? And then she said well, you know, especially right now there's waitlists. You know, if I wasn't providing their childcare, I mean, I think they would all say they wouldn't be able to go to work, they wouldn't be able to teach. And I said, wow Stacy, you're the teacher that makes seven other teachers possible.

Lyn Wineman

Chills.

Walter Gilliam

Guest

She said she never really thought about it that way and I asked her what it was like to actually operate this and can you make ends meet? And she was talking about how, you know, really, parents can't really truly afford the true cost of childcare and so you have to, you know, charge whatever people can actually afford. And she can barely make ends meet. And she told me about how much money she was making, you know, from it. And I'm thinking, well, there is no way that you can make ends meet on that. So I said, well, how are you able to do this at all, like, how can you actually be a childcare provider and afford the food, afford, you know, the upkeep on your house, and to be able to make enough money to make this actually worth it, instead of you doing something else, anything else really. And she said, well, the only reason I'm able to do it is because Jamie gets paid pretty well.

Lyn Wineman

Oh, wow.

Walter Gilliam

And so, really, what she was saying is this incredible, important infrastructure childcare that she's providing the teacher that makes seven other teachers possible is only possible because of the fact that she's working and willing to do it for far less than what she's worth and Jamie happens to be there, able to subsidize it.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, wow.

Walter Gilliam

Guest

Because we do pay him what he's worth.

Lyn Wineman

Host

Wow, wow. You know, I hope, because of your work and the work of the Institute and many others, that the tide is changing. Earlier this year we spoke to a guest, Tammy Day, she and her husband own Daycos, which is an employer in Norfolk, and they're a certified B Corp, which means they've met very rigorous standards of taking care of their employees in their community. She spoke about how their company and other employers in the Norfolk area rallied together to develop an early childhood education program, A) because they were concerned about their community and their employees. B) because it was an important workforce development program. And you start to see and I start to see and hear more of my fellow business owners, you know, really leaning in and saying we've got to jump in here and help out for the sake of our team members and their families, which then impacts our business and our communities, and I do love to hear stories like that and I'm sure your work is impacting those efforts as well.

Walter Gilliam

Well, thank you very much for that. Increasingly, employers are becoming more and more aware of the fact that if they want to keep their business open, somebody's going to have to be taking care of their employees' children. That person has to be reliable in order for their employees to be able to reliably come to work and for their heads to be in the work that they're doing and not worrying about who's caring for their child. As a result of this, many employers are now investing more in their own childcare in order to be able to keep their businesses running. There are now public schools and private schools that actually offer childcare programs for the teachers there, because they know that they need that and teachers be able to go to work. There's also other private industry that does this. I was at the Tyson meatpacking plant in Lexington.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, I have family in Lexington, so shoutout to Dawson County.

Walter Gilliam

Yeah, it's a lovely, wonderful community out there. I just love the people out in Lexington I was meeting with the folks there in the meatpacking plant and there's so many people that are employed in that

meatpacking plant. It's huge and such an important anchor, economic linchpin of the whole community there.

I can't imagine what would happen if Tyson meatpacking wasn't there. And so when we were meeting with them and getting a chance to learn more about the plant that they have there and who they employ and things like that, ask them what are some of the reasons that people leave employment. The number one reason was cost of housing. And then the number two really close almost to tie, they said, was availability to childcare. And I said you know, it's an interesting thing. I would imagine that many of the people that you hire, you hire before they're married, they're probably young, and then, in the course of working there, they might start a family, they might have children. So when you're talking about housing and you're talking about childcare, it sounds like it's really the same issue. You know whether growing families will have the resources and the availability of affordable housing and affordable, high quality childcare in order for them to be able to keep a family in Nebraska.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Walter Gilliam

So having to leave. And then it reminded me and I mentioned it out loud too. I know that once upon a time here in the Tyson factory there used to be a childcare program right here in the factory. It's not here anymore, it's closed down, and they knew that it used to be there, but nobody could quite remember why it closed.

Lyn Wineman

That's a shame. You've got me all fired up about this issue now.

Walter Gilliam

It is a shame. Last September, I was asked by the Pentagon to come speak to civilian and top brass in the Department of Defense, specifically about childcare and family mental health. The reason why is they found childcare and family mental health as key elements of military family well-being and central to their ability to both recruit and retain and promote people's ability to be able to be in a military. In other words, key cornerstones of our military preparedness. Depending on how well we treat not only those who are listed as officers in the military, but also their families, including their children.

Lyn Wineman

Wow.

Walter Gilliam

And at the end of March, I'll be in Quantico talking specifically to the Marine Corps. Those who really, truly understand the importance of their business and have the resources to do so tend to invest in early care and education.

Yeah, companies that have the resources, companies who can find the resources, and certainly something as important as the military, realizes that a big part of us being able to have a good economy, to be able to have strong military, rests in how well we take care of the children and those who are employed there in the military. As a matter of fact, the number one source of people applying to be in the military is due to the fact that their parents have been in the military. In other words, those children of those who are currently in the military, that's the next recruits.

Lyn Wineman

And if you break that chain because of any of these issues, that is an expensive thing to fix right. You kind of have a, we know in marketing, you kind of have a marketing channel, you have a family that, generation after generation, has gone into the military to go find a next family for someone who, a family that breaks that generational chain takes a lot more effort.

Walter Gilliam

As Stevie Nicks and Lindsay Buckingham of Fleetwood Max saying you should never break the chain.

Lyn Wineman

I love it. That is a great quote. Actually, I'm going to use that, Walter, as a transition to go to my next question, because I think I mentioned to you when we were getting started this interview is episode 191 for the Agency for Change podcast, and one thing that has been consistent throughout is I always ask everyone this next question because I am inspired by quotes. I have quotes on my wall and in my desk and in my notebook. I get to speak to so many interesting people on this podcast. I would like a Dr Walter Gilliam original quote to share with our listeners.

Walter Gilliam

Ooh, Okay, well, you did forewarn me. So I was remembering the fact that I was at some meeting or I was in some conference and I said something and apparently it moved somebody so much that it got somebody to do some art for it and they sent me this thing that I had apparently said. I didn't even remember that I said it, but I trust her that I said it and she sent me this, this thing that I had said in a piece of artwork and it sits on my desk and it says if your heart ain't where your head is, it doesn't matter where your head is.

Lyn Wineman

I love it. I think that is almost the perfect way to wrap up everything you've said. There's so much science around this topic, but at the end of the day, it's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do. So, Walter, for our listeners who would really like to dive in more, learn more about the work maybe learn about the We Care for Kids campaign. How can they find out more?

Walter Gilliam

Well, they can go to our website. So I'm going to Google up right now. I'm just going to make sure that I can get the, because that's one of those things where you know, like whoever Googles themselves.

Lyn Wineman

You know what? Honestly, I think it's a really good practice to Google your own name every once in a while.

Walter Gilliam

Okay, so you could go to all is one word BuffettInstitute.Nebraska.Edu, and you can read all about the work that we do, but, more importantly, you can read about wonderful, amazing people that we seek to serve.

Lyn Wineman

That's fantastic. We'll also make sure to have that linked in the show notes on KidGlov.com as well, for anybody who didn't get that written down. So, Walter, as we wrap up this great conversation today, I'd love to just end with what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about this work that you're doing.

Walter Gilliam

Aside from the fact that it is all of our responsibility to care for our children and our families and to care for those who care for those children and families, the thing that I would probably highlight the most, especially right now, with the challenges that we have keeping people in the field of our education and treating them well enough that they are able to stay in the field, is this: Our children's cups are filled to the degree that some caregivers cup is flowing over.

Lyn Wineman

Wow, that's good. That's good. Walter, I fully believe the world needs more people like you. We need more advocates for early childhood education and the people who provide that important work, and more organizations like the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. I really, really appreciate you joining us today and sharing this information.

Walter Gilliam

Lyn, I really appreciate you. Thank you so much for having a podcast that would have 191 episodes and planning on the 200th. Thank you for bringing people onto your podcast to be able to talk about all the important things in the lives of children and families and communities here in Nebraska. Thank you for being a storyteller.

Lyn Wineman

Absolutely. People can't see me because this is a podcast, but I'm blushing now. Thank you, Walter.

Walter Gilliam

Thank you.

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 dot 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.