

Agency for Change Podcast: Dominique Kelley, CEO of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Lincoln and Lancaster County

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Dominique Kelley: 0:01

To whom much is given, much is required.

Announcer: 0:06

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: 0:29

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of Agency for Change podcast. You know that feeling when you witness a spark of potential ignite in someone's eyes, knowing that their future is about to change for the better. That's exactly what our guest today, Dominique Kelley, witnesses every day as Chief Executive Officer of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Lincoln and Lancaster County. Today, we are going to dive deep into the heart of youth empowerment with Dominique, who leads this dynamic organization dedicated to transforming lives and putting us closer to a world where every young person has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. Dominique, I can't wait to talk to you today. Welcome to the podcast.

Dominique Kelley: 1:25

Thank you, Lyn, for having me. I'm super excited to be here today.

Lyn Wineman: 1:29

Oh, I can't wait to hear more. It seems like I'm seeing you and Boys and Girls Clubs everywhere lately, so I can't wait to talk to you. But I'd love to just have you start by telling us more about the Boys and Girls Clubs of Lincoln and Lancaster County, because I bet a lot of people have heard Boys and Girls Clubs before but they may not be familiar with the work that you do.

Dominique Kelley: 2:05

Yeah for sure. This is our 16th year of programming. We are part of the National Organization of Boys and Girls Club of America, but we have existed in Lincoln and Lancaster County for the past 16 years. Basically, we serve as after-school programming through community learning centers and Lincoln Public Schools at three locations, and it's curriculum-based. We're doing lots of things kind of in the areas of

workforce development, healthy lifestyles, mental health, which is a big thing right now. So we're doing a little bit of everything, but it's it's been super awesome to be here.

Lyn Wineman: 2:38

So, Dominique have. My kids are grown now but having been a mom and a working mom, I know the importance of a great after school program. But I'd love to hear from you why is the work of Boys and Girls Clubs important for young people in Lincoln and Lancaster County?

Dominique Kelley: 2:56

Well, I think you just attested to that right there, Lyn, when you talked about being a working mom. We know that facilitating after school programming is becoming more and more of a need, and the thing that I'm probably most proud about is how affordable the Boys and Girls Club programming is. So for just \$20, a kid can have an entire school year membership covered, and at our middle school level they also receive dinner. So we're super proud of that. And then, additionally, you think I think of most kind of afterschool programming that ends probably at that 5.30 to 6 pm time, but we're really proud and honored that we're actually able to stay open until 7 pm to give families a little bit extra wiggle room.

Lyn Wineman: 3:44

That's amazing. Oh man, I remember that rush to get to the afterschool program by 5:30 or just go. Oh goodness, I'm making someone stay late, so that's that's amazing. And people work. You know different shifts and and different like flexible hours. So that's amazing. And I have to ask you you said \$20. That's not \$20 a day or a week, no, or even a month, it's \$20 for the whole school year.

Dominique Kelley: 4:14

So \$20 for the entire school year. I'm actually in the works of kind of putting together like what all does that encompass? But it's valued at about right now, \$3,500. We want to make sure that we continue, especially in light of inflation, to continue to be affordable for all families to be able to utilize and take advantage of the awesome work that we're doing.

Lyn Wineman: 4:40

That's so amazing. Cause the other thing we know about families with children and young children not only are they stretched for time, but usually budget is an issue. So well, I just want to make a shout out to anybody out there that's supporting nonprofits. This one seems like a fantastic value as well. So let's talk about some of those key initiatives. I love that when you were describing the work you were talking about, I think, healthy lifestyles, workforce development, academic success. You also mentioned mental health, which I love that we're getting so much more comfortable talking about mental health. Talk to me about some of these initiatives and programs.

Dominique Kelley: 5:28

Yeah, so those are kind of national pillars of Boys and Girls Club of America, but they're extremely important to me personally, just as an individual, but also as the leader of this organization. We know

that, specifically in the area of mental health, we know that people and kids primarily have continued to struggle after the pandemic, and so we want kids to have a safe place to go, a safe place to explore and get in tune and in touch with who they are and who they're becoming.

Middle school is a very challenging time, yes, and there are so many things this day and age that are that are pulling kids in different directions, and so we want them to have a safe space to come to, and we also want them to feel safe that they can talk about their feelings and some of the hardships that they're encountering and going through. And we're super proud of our partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska. We just received a super amazing gift from them and actually created what we refer to as the Zen Den at Park Middle School, so we're gonna provide counseling and mental health services in that space, but basically we turned like a storage closet into this Zen Den that has really cool lights. It's just a really cool space for kids, that kind of step away from all that they're going through and take some time to reflect and settle down.

Lyn Wineman: 6:56

Okay, I'm smiling ear to ear. People won't be able to see me because this is a podcast, but I mentioned. It feels like I'm seeing and hearing about you everywhere, and that is one of the latest things I saw was a picture of the Zen Den on social media, and it made me think. You know, KidGlov has set up one of our conference rooms that can be repurposed into a meditation space, but, man, we all should have access to a Zen den during the day. That just sounds so calming and fantastic. So, Dominique, one of the other things I've really heard you talk about is the significance of representation within the Boys and Girls Clubs and why it matters to empower youth from diverse backgrounds. Tell me more about your thoughts on this topic.

Dominique Kelley: 7:48

Yeah, I think it's extremely important, particularly for the demographic of students that we serve. We're in very diverse neighborhoods and so we want our staff to kind of reflect those demographics as well, and we've been very blessed and fortunate to be able to kind of deliver on that side of things. I also think that it's really cool that I've kind of transitioned from so many different sectors of work and now I'm in this capacity showing young women primarily, who look like me, that you can be so many different things. We're really proud that our kids are able to kind of look up to the staff who work with them on a daily basis and they look similar and they're from all different, diverse walks of lives and they just have mentors that can kind of pour and invest into their lives and there's so much learning going on both ways. Our part-time staff learns a lot from the children we serve and obviously we're pouring and investing into a lot of young people's lives as well.

Lyn Wineman: 8:54

That sounds good. It sounds like a fun job, right Like. I'm sure it's challenging and whenever you deal with kids especially middle school kids, if I remember my own kids it's challenging but it's got to be quite rewarding knowing the difference that you make as well.

Dominique Kelley: 9:12

It's such, like I said earlier, an impressionable time in kids' lives and so I don't. That's. That's a little bit of the drawback of this job compared to some other jobs that I've had. I'm not in the weeds of it day to day, so I miss that from time to time. But I am like I ran a club fourth quarter Park middle school and I got just like super close to a lot of the kids and to just kind of see kids stepping outside of their comfort zone and trying different things that maybe they wouldn't have tried because, like you, made a connection with them is is always just really cool to see.

Lyn Wineman: 9:50

Yeah, you know, Dominique, someone asked me recently what has been a common thread in all of the guests we've had on this podcast, and what I said and I feel it in you too what I said was the people that come on this podcast are so deeply passionate, they care about the work that they're doing and they believe that they have the ability to make a difference. And I just see and feel that in you and I hope our listeners see and feel that in you as well. So I love storytelling and I'm curious we've kind of talked big picture about the impact and the program, but do you have any stories you could share about the positive impact that the Boys and Girls Club has had on the lives of young people?

Dominique Kelley: 10:45

Yeah, well, there's so many. I think the one that I can attest to very genuinely, organically and authentically is a student that I told you I connected with through the basketball club that I ran fourth quarter. Yeah, he has not always had the best attitude. We've kind of struggled to make positive relationships with staff and she struggles with feedback and taking direction and is not a kid that plays basketball by trade. She's also an eighth grader so the fact that she would kind of want to transition into our basketball club was like pretty unique and and I thought spoke a lot about her.

But I started getting to the club a little bit early, on the days that I facilitated the basketball club and just started talking to her on her level about like how, how and the importance of representing yourself as an African American female in a positive light and why that's so important. And she, like slowly but surely, kind of began opening up to me and we just made a natural connection and then, before I knew it, week after week, she was showing up to basketball. She's not a very decorated athlete, I wouldn't say by any means, but because I took the time to invest and get to know her on a personal level, she opened up and became more vulnerable and was willing to try things that maybe she wouldn't otherwise have tried, and so that's. That is just a very small story. I know that our staff is doing that work on a daily basis and we have amazing program directors, we have amazing part-time staff, and I've seen those stories time and time again in the short eight months that I've been here.

Lyn Wineman: 12:36

That's a powerful connection. It warms my heart. I also love that you mentioned basketball, because in Nebraska we know your name as a decorated basketball player. But I'm curious like what has your journey been like, Dominique, how, how did you get to this position of leadership at Boys and Girls Clubs?

Dominique Kelley: 12:59

Honestly, Lyn, women, like I've had incredible mentors, and that's something that's super imperative to me, this kind of giving back component I've just honestly been blessed with, I had a mom who didn't always have the answers or the resources, but she was always so gracious and willing to open her heart up and to share me and my siblings with other people who could afford us different opportunities, and it honestly was a lot of the lessons I learned through basketball, like how to be a good teammate and a good communicator and how to work hard and be disciplined. All of those lessons that I learned from the game of basketball transitioned to real life things, and so that, coupled with I'm definitely a people person, maybe not in the same capacity that I was as an 18 year old, but relationships are very, very important to me and, without a doubt, I'm sitting at the table that I'm sitting at now because of so many amazing women that I've been surrounded by.

Lyn Wineman: 14:04

Dominique, I'm just going to say this I could see where you would be a joy to mentor, right, and I say that as a person who has been mentored, who has mentored others. But it's always fun to mentor people who open up to you and really like embrace the change.

And I'm sure, as you deal with middle schoolers in particular. Once again, I don't want to pick on middle schoolers. They don't naturally open up right. That is not their nature. So I know you and your team have some skills to help them open up and they can feel your authenticity in that process. So what's next, Dominique? What exciting new initiatives or projects are on the horizon? You've got the Zen Den. You've done some new camps. What are the fun things that are coming up?

Dominique Kelley: 15:01

Yeah. So more recently we had the Duncan Aviation and Boys and Girls Club campaign that we completed in October, right when I, right when I began. So we're really looking to kind of like take that off this school year, kind of more workforce development and aviation focused at Northstar, at Park. We're just right now, we're currently in the process of it's always such a this is a strange time because part-time staff kind of transition and they graduate from college, so we serve about a hundred kids every single day at Park.

Lyn Wineman: 15:39

That's a lot of kids, the thought of a hundred kids all together is overwhelming to me.

Dominique Kelley: 15:47

So right now we're just trying to hire and facilitate a lot of good trainings this summer because we know that again, like I said earlier, we're going to continue to need to serve more families. We have some awesome camps going on this summer, as you mentioned, with Nebraska Athletics in the states of men's and women's basketball and volleyball. So those have filled up very quickly and are just around the corner and we're super excited to be able to afford kids that maybe otherwise wouldn't get that experience, that opportunity and, yeah, we're just lots of good things going on.

Lyn Wineman: 16:28

So I'm really curious, Dominique, and all this work that you're doing and the experience that you had, if there are other individuals or organizations out there who want to make a positive impact on youth development and community engagement, do you have any advice for them?

Dominique Kelley: 16:50

I think for me and I'm blessed because I have the lived experience of being a kid who grew up in a community center, but I think, like you have to exist in those spaces, like and that's so important for me, as I like go out and try to raise funds for the Boys and Girls Club as well. One of the things that I've changed is like I won't accept a gift from you if you won't step foot into our clubs to see the programming that we're facilitating, because I think it's so imperative that people know where and how their dollars are being used. But so I would just say, like you have to exist in that space, and I think that can look a lot of different ways, but you should volunteer there. You should just go and check it out. You should go and talk to kids about what's working really well and some of the things that they would change if they were able to. I think that's really important.

Lyn Wineman: 17:48

My jaw literally like dropped, as you said that, because I've talked to so many nonprofit leaders and fundraising is so important to the work, but the exposure is so important and I I've got to believe that anybody that sees the work that you're doing that it's, it's infectious and it's going to lead to not just one gift but more gifts. But it's it's not just about the gifts, is it? It's about the support, the understanding and being part of the community. So that's, that's fantastic. So for our listeners who would like to learn more, maybe give a donation, maybe volunteer, how do they find out more?

Dominique Kelley: 18:28

Yeah, well, they can personally contact me. I'm a people person. I love to show people the club. Like I said, I think it's really important that they see the work that we're doing. I kind of like for my staff to be a part of that process as well. Because, as I mentioned, I'm kind of not the person who's in the weeds of it day to day.

And again, those are all lessons I've learned from my days of being a student athlete, so I don't like to pretend to be the expert day to day. I really lean on our Director of Programming and Club Operations to kind of help me facilitate that experience for potential donors and givers. And we also engage kids in that experience as well, because I think if you're doing a really good job in that programming, the kids will be able to captivate that beautifully for you. So they can contact myself directly and I can share that information with you. They can also go to LincolnBGC.org. We have a very cool website. It's very interactive, super easy to navigate and move around. But I would love to show people the hard work that we're doing and the value that they're, even \$20 gifts literally. It's as simple as \$20, right, we spend that on like. You can't even get a meal with that, barely at McDonald's now.

Lyn Wineman: 19:53

Right right right, I think I had a fast food last night and I spent \$18 for two people, right? So a \$20 gift that could pay for a whole year.

Dominique Kelley: 20:04

It can pay for nine months of programming for a student and it's just really really cool.

Lyn Wineman: 20:12

So, Dominique, we'll get the website address LincolnBGC.org in the show notes and thank you for being so gracious. We'll also get your contact information in the show notes as well for anybody.

All right, I'm going to ask you the question I've asked on every single podcast over 200 episodes because I am so blessed to be able to talk to such motivational people and I'm inspired by people's quotes, so I'd love a few of your own words of wisdom to inspire our listeners.

Dominique Kelley: 20:50

Well, one of my kind of life verses is from the Bible and it says to whom much is given, much is required. Oh yeah, I think I've just been afforded like I kind of spoke to earlier a lot of opportunities in my life and yes, I had a good work ethic and yes, I kind of had some God-given talent in favor. But I think it's just my duty to kind of give back and make sure that other kids have opportunities to change their life trajectories, because without the resources and opportunities that I was provided, I certainly wouldn't have been able to accomplish everything that I have. So, to whom much is given, much is required.

Lyn Wineman: 21:34

I love it. That is fantastic, and I think it ties into the whole idea of philanthropy and giving back and taking care of our kids and community. So that's fantastic. So, Dominique, it's been so fun to talk to you today. As we wrap up this time together, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Dominique Kelley: 22:01

That it's never done. We always. It kind of sounds cliché and I honestly hate saying it, but like we always need more, I think a gap for us honestly right now is not having our own space, and that's kind of on my short two to three year plan for the Boys and Girls Club. We are so grateful for all that the community learning centers and LPS afford us, but I would love to have a standalone Boys and Girls Club space and there are some amazing locations. I won't go into that, but there is a gap and we can always serve more kids and the work is not done. And so, yeah, I just invite people that maybe don't know more but love to give and are looking for spaces and capacities to give, to connect with me and allow me and my amazing team to kind of share our vision for how we hope to continue serving as many kids as we can in this city.

Lyn Wineman: 23:00

That is fantastic and I love putting that out there in the universe. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Lincoln and Lancaster County could use some dedicated space in. Dominique. I have loved this conversation. I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more organizations like the Boys and Girls Club, and I just thank you for taking time to talk with me today.

Dominique Kelley: 23:26

Yeah, Lyn, I thank you as well because you're doing amazing work, and I thank you for the platform to kind of share the work that not only I'm doing at the Boys and Girls Club, but all the organizations. Like you've said, you've done 200 plus of these, and so without people like you providing us with the platform to share the work that we're doing, it would make our work a little bit more challenging. So, super grateful to be here today and thank you for all that you and your team are doing as well.

Lyn Wineman: 23:55

Thanks, Dominique. It is truly my honor. Thank you for taking some time today.

Dominique Kelley: 23:59

Yeah, no problem, you have a great day.

Announcer: 24:03

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.