

Agency for Change Podcast: Jaymi Anderson, Executive Director, Genesis Project of Northern Colorado

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Jaymi Anderson: 0:01

Check on your neighbor. They're probably struggling more than you think.

Announcer: 0:07

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: 0:34

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman. Welcome back to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Today, I am starting with something just a little bit personal. Most of you know, I have a new grandbaby and my grandson, Shiloh Rhodes-Clark, and his parents and older brother, Ronan, are all doing great, but during this time, I am really reminded of how it truly takes a village to raise a child, and this is why I'm really excited today to talk with Jaymi Anderson. She is the executive director of the Genesis Project of Northern Colorado, so the Genesis Project serves as a beacon of hope for single mothers and their children, who have faced immense challenges, such as addiction or abuse or poverty and even homelessness, and this nonprofit equips families with the tools that they need to achieve their goals and thrive through comprehensive programs that include life skills training, parenting and financial education, as well as faith-building opportunities and professional partnerships. So Jaymi, I'm really eager to talk with you today. Welcome to the podcast.

Jaymi Anderson: 1:57

Thanks, Lyn, I appreciate you inviting me on.

Lyn Wineman: 2:00

Absolutely. I am really excited, particularly because of my personal experience with new grandbabies, but would you just start by telling us more about the Genesis Project of Northern Colorado?

Jaymi Anderson: 2:14

Absolutely. Our mission is empowering single mothers in their pursuit of a new beginning, and we really seek to serve the most vulnerable of those single mothers among us, so women that have come out of domestic violence, substance abuse or just all of the factors that contribute to generational poverty. We really want to allow them to become economically self-sufficient.

Lyn Wineman: 2:42

Jaymi, I think this is really important work. And the next question might just seem like a softball, but I want to hear it in your own words. I think we all can imagine why this work is important, but tell me more. Why do you see this work as so crucial for mothers and children and communities?

Jaymi Anderson: 3:03

Well, on a service level, it goes down to the cost of living. We are in a county in Colorado and we're definitely not the highest rent district in Colorado, but still a mom with one preschool age child needs to make over \$25 an hour working full time in order to just meet basic needs. So just a one bedroom apartment to basic groceries, all of those things. And then if you lump in those other risk factors that I talked about before, and maybe even not having a high school diploma, the problem becomes immense.

And when we are lacking housing, lacking stability on that front, it's very hard to move forward in any other aspect of your life. And so that's not a story that is unique to us, and even in other communities perhaps the rent or cost of housing might be less, but also the wages are less. Or if someone doesn't have social supports in the area of you know, reliable family members or other people in the community that can just take their kids for a little bit. If they have to call in sick to work because their kid couldn't go to daycare, they could lose their job and that is all they have. So many single parents in this country are just hanging on by a thread.

Lyn Wineman: 4:28

Yeah, I can only imagine once again going back to my own experience, which is not the same, I know, but it's just having a baby and children just can be really overwhelming. It's a huge responsibility, and so I think it's fantastic that your program is in place. So one thing I always like to learn about, Jaymi, is what was your personal path, how did you get involved in the Genesis Project and what inspires you to do this work?

Jaymi Anderson: 5:03

My path was one I was aware of the Genesis Project in our community. It started 20 years ago. I remember, probably about 15 years ago, when they obtained their first house that they were renting as kind of a trial, and there was an article in the newspaper back when we read newspapers, yeah, and I was just struck by it because I thought this is what we need to do as believers, this is us being the church providing these practical solutions to people in need. And that just really stuck with me and I did nothing about it, other than I just remember that it existed. Fast forward, probably about 10 years later, I was working as a life coach and had an interaction with a board member from the Genesis Project of Northern Colorado. He connected me at that time. We moved into the multifamily house that we operate out of today and he connected me with the director there and I did some life coaching classes for the women. Once again, kind of a couple week thing that I did some life coaching classes for the women and then that was about it.

Five years later I was looking for a new chapter in my life and the Genesis Project was looking for a new executive director and once again, just that opportunity to provide really tangible resources to lift people up and holistically support them just appealed to me so much. I don't come from a single parent

family, but I think because of that and I've not been a single mother myself, but because of that I understand, like you said, it's challenging to be a parent, regardless of your life circumstances, and because of that, I think I really just had a heart for these women that just wanted to do the right thing, just want to get their feet under them and the opportunity for that. I am also very, very passionate about creating generational change and to stop the cycles of poverty, and this meets those criteria just right at an intersection. That is something that exists everywhere in our society.

Lyn Wineman: 7:24

Absolutely. Wow, what a great journey and I can only imagine how your life coaching skills must be really helpful in this role. Even though you may not be doing that work specifically, just understanding the work is probably really helpful, Jaymi, too.

I'm curious about. Could you talk a little bit more, in the intro we talked a little bit about the services, but I'd love to go a little bit deeper on some of the key initiatives and programs that the Genesis Project offers to support those single moms.

Jaymi Anderson: 8:03

Thank you. Yeah, the thing that we're probably most known for is that we do operate out of a multifamily house in downtown Greeley, so we have seven apartments and those are a benefit to the women that are participating in our program. We are unique in that we are a long-term housing solution. As women are progressing through our program, they can stay up to five years and that's very different from any shelter opportunity that they might have. We have some great transitional housing here in Greeley. Most of those programs range from 90 to 150 days and if you are going to create generational change, you need more time than that. So that's just kind of our overarching philosophy that we come from. When people come, when our new participants come in, we connect them immediately with our counselor and they receive weekly counseling. I think that that's a foundational thing that I think everyone can benefit from, especially if you've been through trauma. Some of our women may have received counseling here and there, but having an actual benefit where that's paid for weekly is just. You know they might once every three months, or counseling for only three months, and when you are talking about having PTSD or something like that, it takes more time than that.

So that's one of the things that I'm especially proud of that we offer, and we also offer family counseling. Whatever the counseling, we connect the kids to different counselors whatever that we need for that family to become whole. So that's the number one thing for us. On staff, we have a family advocate that works with our moms individually and helps them design their journey as they progress through. That might mean everything from connecting them with reliable child care to making sure that they are getting the benefits that they're eligible to, and then just that practical week-to-week budgeting, meal planning. You know what are you going to do this week to further your journey. Those are, I think, our two strongest legs. And we do provide different learning opportunities here at the house as part of our program. We have classes in boundaries and social emotional development, in financial coaching, career direction coaching and healthy living. Those are some great things that we do, but I think that all of that is done in community and that's probably the biggest benefit to our moms.

Lyn Wineman: 10:37

That's fantastic. I love the way you put that designing their journey and the fact that you let it be their journey, their goals, but you've got the tools then, once they have identified that, to help them. And I also love the concept of time, because you're right, these things, the healing doesn't happen, the learning doesn't happen, the generational change doesn't happen in 60, 90, 120 days. It takes time, it takes time. So I love as a storyteller myself. Jaymi, can you share any stories, maybe about how someone's come in and been part of your program, designed their journey, maybe? I'd love to hear a success story.

Jaymi Anderson: 11:23

Kind of a conglomerate of stories. One of the unique things that we are able to do is to help women reunify with their children. So if they were separated from their kids and the kids are in foster care, whether that's kinship care with grandma and grandpa or in a foster home, some of those happen for a variety of different reasons. One of the real problems with women that are in that situation is that they need to have stable housing in order to be able to get their kids back.

But you can't get into low income housing if you don't have your children with you, and the expectation that you have a full-time job and then get your kids back without established daycare, all of those things. It places them in a really, really different position. So we have realized that because we are donor funded, we can stand in that gap for those women and we can provide the solution that doesn't exist in most public agencies. They can come in, they don't have to have their children in their custody and yet they can work through all of the things. And it's become such a known entity that actually we have social workers from the county calling us and asking us if we have places available, because they have women that they want to place in there. Since I started, two and a half years ago, I believe, we have reunited six families.

Lyn Wineman: 12:51

That's got to feel great, Jaymi. It's got to feel great for you. It's got to feel great for the families.

Jaymi Anderson: 12:57

Absolutely, and you know I was in court with one of our moms our most recent mom that was able to be reunited with her kids and she comes from a quite a rough background, and the attorneys in the case said we didn't know how this was going to go. We know this family, we know this extended family and we didn't have a lot of hope. And here we are, without question, awarding custody back to this mom. And that's her hard work. That's not our hard work, and yet the fact that we get to be witness to that is a great blessing.

Lyn Wineman: 13:35

I love that. Jaymi. I'd love to hear if you have any advice for our listeners. Let's say, we have someone in our lives and we want to show support for a single mom that's in our life, or a single mom and her kids. What are some good ways to do that?

Jaymi Anderson: 13:57

Just share your resources that you have, if that is time offer to take their children for them. Maybe you have the opportunity to be that person that can take the kids if daycare they can't go to daycare because they're sick or can't go to school.

Maybe it is offering to help with groceries, giving them a gift card, taking them dinner. I just think that we can't underestimate. There's some amazing strong single parents and they probably look like they have it all together. But again, I know as a parent myself like with a spouse that was supportive and present. You know it's not always easy, it's hard Just not making those assumptions that they have it all together and to just not put it on them, but to just offer that help in any practical way possible Because I guarantee they're probably struggling more than they might let on.

Lyn Wineman: 14:56

Yeah, honestly, I think that's true of most humans, most of us are struggling more than we let on, and I think for a single parent that could be particularly difficult. So, Jaymi, for our listeners who would like to learn more, maybe send a donation your way. Where can they find out more information about the Genesis Project of Northern Colorado?

Jaymi Anderson: 15:19

Definitely would direct you to our website genesisprojectnoco.org. So, genesisprojectnoco.org, we just redid our website. You'll get to see this podcast on there someday. Um, as well as different videos and explanations of our programs, opportunities to give, opportunities to volunteer, all of those things are available on that website fantastic congratulations on the new website.

Lyn Wineman: 15:48

That can be a big opener, but it's a lot of work.

Jaymi Anderson: 15:53

So I had a wonderful partner that launched that for me, for us, and worked with us.

Lyn Wineman: 15:57

That's great. Well, we will make sure to have that link in the show notes on the KidGlov website as well, so that will be in there for people if you didn't get it. So, Jaymi, one of the things I love about doing this podcast is I get to talk to so many interesting people. I am inspired by motivational quotes and I'd love to get a Jaymi Anderson original quote. Can you give us some words of wisdom?

Jaymi Anderson: 16:24

Well, I'm glad you asked me this ahead of time so I could think about it a little bit. But I think for me, what I want people to know is you know, check on your neighbor. They're probably struggling more than you think.

Lyn Wineman: 16:39

Yeah, that's beautiful. Check on your neighbor. They're probably struggling more than you think. I think that's really sage advice and it's a good way for us to take care of one another. Jaymi, as we wrap up this conversation today, I'd love to hear what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing at the Genesis Project of Northern Colorado.

Jaymi Anderson: 17:08

Our number one value is to be Christ-like, and that means that there's not rules and regulations. There's love, compassion, acceptance and empowerment.

Lyn Wineman: 17:20

That's beautiful Love, compassion, acceptance and empowerment. If we all lived our days like that, think about what a lovely world this would be. Jaymi, I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more organizations like the Genesis Project of Northern Colorado doing the good work that you do. Thank you so much for taking the time to share with us today.

Jaymi Anderson: 17:45

It is my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

Announcer: 18:03

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.