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EMILY HARRIS:

Welcome to the Disability and Philanthropy Forum's Learning series. My name is Emily Harris. I use she/her pronouns and I'm proud to be part of the disability community. I'm the executive director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum and come to you from the unceded Land of the Council of Three Fires, the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations, now known as Chicago. As part of our commitment to accessibility, our panelists and I will each provide an audio description of ourselves. I'm a white woman with dark, curly hair and glasses wearing a royal blue blouse. Behind me is a tan and white screen. My access needs are met today because we have cart captioning. A few housekeeping items, there are two ways to access our live captions today. Use the CC button at the bottom of your screen or to access the captions in a separate window, see the link to the external caption viewer in the chat.

Today, only our moderators and panelists will be on camera. You'll be muted throughout the event. The webinar is being recorded and you'll receive a link to the recording in the next few weeks. Although we will be using the chat to share links with you, it will not be available for you to communicate out. Instead, please use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to share your questions anytime during the session. We will try to integrate them into the discussion as they come in and we will also make time for questions at the end. If the Q&A is not accessible to you, feel free to send your questions to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org. We will be live posting on X, formerly known as Twitter today and hope you'll join us on social media using the hashtag disability Philanthropy. You can also follow along with us on X @DisPhilanthropy.

Before we start today's conversation, just a short reminder that disability is a natural part of the human experience. One in four adults, 61 million people, have disabilities and our community continues to grow as the population ages and as people contract long COVID, other chronic illnesses, mental health, and other conditions where society creates barriers to full participation. Today we will engage the lived experience of disabled people to explore the intersections of race, culture, and disability. We have a poll question to help set the context for our conversation today. Please answer it now if you don't mind multitasking a little bit. How many disabled adults who are head of household in the United States are eligible for housing assistance but are not receiving it: 23 million, 15 million, 10 million or 18 million people?

If the poll is not accessible to you, feel free to email communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org or note in the Q&A while you're answering the poll, I'll start the introductions To moderate our panel, I'm delighted to introduce Miguel Santana, who has just stepped down as president and CEO of Weingart Foundation, a member of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum's, president's Council, and is about to join us as the incoming president and CEO of the California Community Foundation. Miguel is joined on the panel by three housing justice thought leaders and advocates. You can learn more about the panelists from their bios that are linked in the chat Before we start and I turn it over to Miguel, the correct poll answer. Kayla, could you pull up the results? Great. 39% of you got it right. The correct answer is 18 million disabled adults who are head of household in the United States are eligible for housing assistance but are not receiving it. You'll hear more from our panelists about that. And now without further ado, it's my pleasure to introduce Miguel.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Well, good morning, [foreign language 00:04:39]. My name as you heard is Miguel Santana and I look forward to starting on October 16th as the new president and CEO of the California Community Foundation. I am a Latino male wearing a blue jacket in a sparse office here at CCF, and I'm coming to you from Los Angeles, the unceded land of the Gabrielino-Tongva people. I go by he/him.

I'm really excited about today's discussion because I've been working on disability justice for much of my career, not only at the Weingart Foundation, but through most of my career actually spent in the public sector and as the city administrative officer for the city of Los Angeles, I helped settle one of the largest cases to ensure that our disabled community received housing necessary to meet their needs, and so it's something that I am very proud of to have been a part of and continue to look forward to working on at CCF in philanthropy. I'm so pleased to welcome our guest today. We have Amanda Andere, Allie Cannington, and Dessa Cosma. Rather than to read out their bios, I encourage all of you to go into the chat and you'll see their abbreviated self introductions. Oh, sorry about that. Let's start by having each panelist introduce themselves and give their own description starting with Amanda, Allie, and Dessa.

AMANDA ANDERE:

Hello everyone, Amanda Andere, she/her pronouns. I am a Black woman wearing a red shirt and a bright yellow necklace. I'm in my home office with pictures of women of African descent behind me, and I am on the unceded land of the Mohawk in Reston, Virginia right outside of DC and I use she/her pronouns, thank you.

ALLIE CANNINGTON:

Good afternoon. Good morning everyone. My name is Allie Cannington. I am a white, a queer, non-binary person with aviator glasses, some piercings on my nose and lip, and a collared white and gray shirt with some turquoise earrings and a white background, and I come to you from the unceded territory of Arapahoe, Apache, Ute, and Cheyenne, otherwise known as Denver, Colorado, which is where I stay nowadays. So I'm grateful to be here. I use they and she pronouns and excited for the conversation.

DESSA COSMA:

Hi everyone, my name is Dessa. I use she/her pronouns. I'm the director of an organization called Detroit Disability Power. I'm a white woman in my early 40s with long blonde hair wearing a purple shirt and sitting on my back porch. It's a beautiful day here in Anishinaabe land, also known as Detroit. So glad to be here, thank you.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Well welcome and we look forward to this conversation. As we all know, disability justice issues cross every sector and the intersectionality with race, with issues of other forms of justice are clearly consistent with this issue, but for all of us, it starts with our own experience and our own relationship to this issue. So I like to start off by hearing your story. How is it that you became a leader in the disability justice movement? What draws you to this work? So why don't we go ahead and start with Dessa, if you don't mind kicking this off, and we'll proceed with Amanda and then Allie.

DESSA COSMA:

Sure, absolutely. This is Dessa, thank you. So I am both a little person and a wheelchair user. I'm about three and a half feet tall and so the experience of disability has been for my entire life, and it has shaped the way I've experienced the world and has shaped the way people have treated me, the way I relate to folks and it certainly ignited my fire for making the world a better, more equitable place, and literally being three and a half feet tall has made my view of the world different. It has figuratively shaped my perspective. It also literally shaped what I have seen and how I see things, and so this experience has touched every part of my experience of the world. I think it has also helped me better understand other people's struggles, ones that I don't necessarily share but can have empathy for.

And it's really shown me that not only do we need to change the built environment so people like myself and other disabled people can actually navigate, but it's also been very clear to me for a long time that a new culture is needed, one in which people can be their full selves and still succeed and still thrive, and one in which we can be respected for our differences and uplifted for our differences instead of penalized and so that's why I do social justice work. It's very personal to me, and frankly, I've had housing struggles most of my life as a result of class and as a result of disability, and so I am really happy to have this conversation. I think it's a really important one and I think we're at a really interesting moment in time for lifting this up as part of the bigger picture, but specifically as part of philanthropy and as part of disability justice conversation.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Could you give us a little bit of context behind the Detroit disability power? What led you to create it?

DESSA COSMA:

Absolutely. I mean this is a story I love to tell because I'm a proud mama of an organization that is five years old now that is just doing I think really informative work here in Detroit and I have such a great team doing this together. So I've been really lucky to spend my career in social justice. I've done reproductive justice, environmental justice, LGBTQ, racial justice, economic justice. I've been just really fortunate to be a part of some really powerful movements and to see how organized people can make a big difference in a community, and for most of those years, for at least 15 of those years, I was a disabled person doing that work and not seeing my own experience as a disabled person reflected in most of those movements and feeling like there was this major gap in understanding and in priority for my community of disabled people even though the struggles were aligned.

Even though the values and the priorities were actually very strategically aligned and so it felt like a missed opportunity and it felt wrong to not have disability justice more integrated into other social justice movements, and I would bring it up to people and they would say, "Oh, that's nice." Or they would say, "You're right." But then have no commitments, or they would say, "Actually, but right now we're talking about class." I'm like, "How can you separate class from disability? How can you separate race from disability or gender?" So after thinking about it for about 10 years, I started Detroit disability power five years ago, both to organize disabled people to build power.

We're very clear that we are here to build power and we do organizing in all sorts of ways to that end, but also to really transform the social justice ecosystem into one that actually has a disability justice analysis, whether they're focused on disability or not and so I would say we're having a lot of success. It's very hard, but we are starting to really see the fruits of our labor in terms of winning policy and culture change in government, but also in social justice movement spaces and housing has been a really important part of that work and will continue to be.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Great, thank you for sharing your story. Amanda, what has brought you to this work?

AMANDA ANDERE:

Hi everyone, Amanda here. I don't have lived experience of a disability, but I come at it from the intersection of housing justice and my work in ending homelessness for over 20 years. Seeing the inaccessibility in housing in general, not only in housing, but in access to our shelters and temporary housing and knowing that like Dessa, if we're going to talk about racial justice or we're going to talk about LGBTQ Justice, we have to have that analysis and framework, and so I'll talk later about how that came to be for me, but the last three years was a full-time caregiver for my mom before she passed away after a major stroke and that gave me personal insight into what does it mean to have access to housing, to care, and sorry, that allowed me to have a different type of insight that I struggle with because I firmly believe we should not have to go through something in order to have empathy, but it took the intellectual policy work that I've been doing and made it really personal and thank you for allowing me to share that.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Well, thank you for sharing your story and what brought you to this work. I'm curious, in what way does the disability lens relate to the issue of homelessness? Obviously there's a huge amount of overlap in these two significant issues.

AMANDA ANDERE:

Yeah, well it's the overlap in the significant issue and the lack of choice, quite frankly that we have in the work to end homelessness. We give a lot of false choices to people who are immediately experiencing homelessness or experiencing a housing crisis and a lot of times those false choices don't meet their disability needs, and then it's framed as people are hard to serve, don't want to go into shelter, don't want to live in that neighborhood when really, the access and accessibility and inclusiveness doesn't allow them to live and thrive in a particular neighborhood, or we push people farther out from their community from place of transit because that's the next most affordable place and that means they're also not able to live in community that has supported them in big and small ways. So the issue is critical to not only addressing the acute immediate needs of homelessness, but our long-term goals around housing justice.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Great, thank you. Allie, what brings you to this work?

ALLIE CANNINGTON:

I just want to say I'm so humbled to be in conversation with y'all. Yeah, I come to this work as a multiply disabled person. I was born with a physical disability and then as I continued to age, identify with having mental health disabilities as well, and my personal experience as a disabled person as well as my relationships with disabled people, particularly multiply marginalized disabled people has led me to particularly focus on disability forward housing. I grew up really hating my body, having so much shame for being different, not wanting to be associated with other people with disabilities, and then I begrudgingly went to a youth leadership forum for students with disabilities because I felt the pressures of college and tested bad and needed other things on my resume and five days later, I came away from that leadership forum with disabled proud pins everywhere and was completely transformed.

And that was my first moment of being politicized as a disabled person, where I realized that yes, I have my own personal experiences with having particular diagnosis and barriers, but disability isn't inherently a flaw that actually it is an asset and I am a part of a larger movement of people with all different types of disabilities who fought for my ability to be in integrated classrooms or access the bathroom in public spaces, etc., and that led me to just being awakened and involved in the disability rights movement for over 13 years now, and I have to say though that that moment of being politicized, it was a single story. I was politicized just on the basis of disability. I was sitting there feeling awakened by disability pride, but still deeply ashamed of my queerness. The story that I was told was not intersectional.

The stories of disabled people, they looked a lot like me and the reality is that a disproportionate amount of disabled people are not White wheelchair users. They're Black and Brown folks with non-apparent disabilities moving and shaking things up across the country, and so I learned very quickly that if I wanted to advance disability rights and disability justice, I had to hold myself and my White counterparts in the disability community more accountable for racial justice, for looking at our issues intersectionally and help to shift power.

As I was organizing people across the country with people with all different types of disabilities. Also, housing was a key issue and yet in both the housing infrastructure or ecosystem of advocacy as well as disability rights, there was a gap in organizations really taking a stake in a real laser focus on changing the conditions in regards to housing for disabled people across the country, and so that's where I was really excited to join The Kelsey three and a half years ago that is an organization that is co-led by people with and without disabilities where we explicitly both create housing that we call disability forward, housing that's accessible, affordable, integrated, and inclusive, and while we do that, we change policies and market conditions, so disability forward housing can become the norm across the country.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Great. Well, thank you for giving us your personal story and the important work that The Kelsey's doing. I'm curious to get each of your point of view on where do you think we are on this issue, particularly the intersection of disability justice and housing justice. Maybe starting with you, Allie, you just shared with us the context of the work that you do at The Kelsey, what progress do you see being made? How far have you been able to advance this issue within your own community?

ALLIE CANNINGTON:

Yeah, thank you so much. So this is Allie again. The Kelsey is addressing the issue of housing for disability communities and all communities because the housing that we advocate and create is both for people with and without disabilities. So that's a really important piece. By centering the needs of disabled people, the solutions that are then created benefit everyone and so at The Kelsey, we do that. I want to share a few examples that I feel like are really helping to progress the field. One is The Kelsey's inclusive design standards. So just from my own experience as a disabled person finding housing as well as just the overall context of the field, disability is still overall seen as an issue of compliance. So you've got to comply with these laws, you've got to make certain things accessible, and we could have a whole conversation about those laws, what we may touch on today.

But the reality is when disability is perceived and acted on as a compliance, the relationship to disability is fear-based and there's no way that we're going to solve the housing crisis for all people including the 61 million disabled people across the country if we are acting from a place of fear, and so when The Kelsey was founded, we said that we are going to defy that norm and we are going to start from the very beginning as disability access being an asset to the housing that we create, and that it will not just create accessible housing, it's going to create better and beautiful housing for all, and so a part of us doing that was going beyond the minimum requirements of accessibility, not just thinking about mobility and sensory access, so important. Those are codified in many of the laws that we have to follow, but thinking about the broad range of access needs that disabled people have and ranging from communication access to cognitive access.

And so after partnering with people with all different types of disabilities and architects with disabilities, we formed what is now called The Kelsey's Inclusive Design Standards, which are 300 elements that reflect design choices, building features, development strategies, operational policies that support cross disability access and inclusion and these standards are also prioritize resident services and support coordination. So I think about Amanda, you sharing your experience with your mom, and I really honor your mom today in thinking about how do we create housing that affirms the care networks both formal and informal that we all will need or currently need living in this country, and one of the really exciting developments from these inclusive design standards is what we've recently done, which is a plain language leasing project. So The Kelsey just launched a plain language leasing project, which is a collaboration between our organization, industry experts, and community stakeholders aimed at enhancing access and retention to affordable housing.

I don't know about you, I have much privilege with a college degree. I have a hard time reading my leases let alone if someone has a variety of maybe different disabilities that impact their reading or also folks who are English language learners, plain language is writing designed to ensure that the reader understands documents as quickly, easily, and completely as possible and it makes communication more accessible. So we've just launched this project in the state of California. We have housers beginning to use these plain language leasing documents that will benefit the end user, the disabled people and their families who are trying to access and retain housing, and we have architects and developers adopting the design standards and implementing them across the country.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Thank you Allie for sharing that. Dessa, please share your perspective on the kind of progress that you're seeing and I'm particularly interested in the point that Allie mentioned about thinking about disability justice often as a compliance issue versus really embracing it as trying to create an inclusive environment for everyone.

DESSA COSMA:

Sure. Yeah, you probably saw me nodding fervently during Allie's comments. This is Dessa speaking. Yeah, I'm so tired of everything about us being thought of through this very narrow tunnel of compliance. I mean not only is it fear-based, it also makes us a pain in the butt and we're not a pain in the butt. We're just trying to get our needs met like everybody else and frankly, to be called a pain in the butt for trying to exist in a world that was built to exclude you is pretty offensive.

So this compliance thing gets real annoying really fast, but shows up in housing all the time. So when there's this misunderstanding to put it generously that disability is bad, which it's not, it's normal and when there's this misunderstanding that there's only a few of us, so this is a lot of work to meet the code for a handful of people, that's where you get kind of in this spinning cycle of developers or politicians or other decision makers thinking of this as a pain in the butt as opposed to a real opportunity to create housing that's more flexible and usable by more people.

So not only are there 61 million disabled people in this country at a minimum, it's probably an under count. We all have a family. All of us are going to age. So with aging or in other points in life, we can become disabled and need housing even if we don't think we need accessible housing right now, and so it really just is a very logical decision to make housing more flexible and more user-friendly for the benefit of everyone, and so there's an attitude shift that needs to happen, a culture shift, and a resource shift that needs to happen.

And part of that is debunking some of this misunderstanding about how many of us there are and who we are and really kind of shifting away from a compliance mindset. I think one other thing in terms of what kind of progress we're making though is we are as a community of disabled folks inching towards being understood more as a constituency and that's really important. It's one of the things that drives the work of my organization a lot is we look at other movements and how they've built power, and it's by banding together as a community and saying, "We have common needs and common interests and we are going to organize based on that." And so I look at the Black power movement, I look at the LGBTQ movements and I say these folks with these lived experiences, these shared experiences, these identities have said, "We have a common interest, we're going to do something about it."

And I see the disability community doing that more and more, and kind of moving the cultural understanding of who we are away from this notion that we are individuals with individual health problems and therefore on our own and starting to better understand us as a constituency of people with shared needs, and when we are an organized force of people with shared demands, we can actually do something about housing in a way that we can't do if we're just trying to fend for ourselves as individuals and this requires organizing, and this requires a real intentionality around building power.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Thank you for sharing your perspective. Amanda, you talked about your organization and your work being primarily servicing the unhoused community. Could you share with us how you incorporate a disability lens into that work given the huge overlap between these two issues?

AMANDA ANDERE:

Yeah, I'm actually going to put in the chat our North star for housing justice that we developed last summer and also share our learning journey about how we could have been more inclusive. We come to our work as housing justice is racial justice knowing that the crux of injustice and housing started from racialized capitalism and from a lot of deep inequitable laws and policies, and the philanthropy community for a long time has been thinking about ending homelessness or ending housing insecurity in I would say a lot of ways that think about the system. I know you know very well, Miguel, working in LA and we obviously do a lot of work there. We have started to finally see this as not an individual problem but a structural problem. Whereas I think for a long time people put housing over here and put homelessness over here, and I've done a lot of convincing of philanthropy that if they're working on housing, they're working on homelessness because homelessness is a part of a structural issue. It's not an individual failure.

At the same time when we see homelessness so visible and sometimes invisible in a lot of places, the solution to homelessness becomes political and it's about ending what we see rather than addressing the root causes. So for us, we see progress and people understanding two things, the structural issue of homelessness, and that if we're thinking about real housing justice, we can't just end someone's homelessness. We have to give people agency and power of where and how they live and so that, as I said in the beginning, that doesn't mean that we move people to the next most affordable place, especially if that place is void of community and the supports and the structure that would make it inclusive for a person's need, but that's been how we've addressed homelessness because of our housing crisis. So for us, housing justice means going upstream and preventing homelessness and housing insecurity in the first place as well as thinking about as we end people's homelessness and housing insecurity, where do they have agency and power over where and how they live?

And for philanthropy, that has meant as Dessa said so eloquently and really just you had me snapping is creating a movement where we're not just thinking about housing justice, we're thinking about what are the many intersections that will get us to housing justice? And that means being inclusive in our activism and not putting housing or one issue over there that it's the center of our work, but that's not how we fund often, right? We as funders, we ask people to not work in silos, but we fund in silos and so we've been really organizing philanthropy to be thinking about housing justice from a standpoint of being inclusive, being an organizing tool and to funding organizing and advocacy in order to think about a values-based proposition with housing rather than this transactional and decommodifying housing and decoupling it from markets, but saying, "What do we need in our community to house everyone but particularly marginalized communities?"

I see that progress in that I think intellectually people are getting there. We saw during the pandemic that the ongoing pandemic that we had more specificity in identifying the problem. The problem being that a lot of mainstream housing groups have resources are gatekeepers to resources but don't work with the buy and for groups on the ground who are often the first to understand a community's housing crisis and flipping that rather than funding the mainstream groups, how do we resource groups who uniquely understand the needs of their communities to be able to access those resources that are largely being gate kept at a government level or a larger nonprofit level, and we saw that movement during the pandemic and philanthropy understanding their role and resourcing in a different way to get better inclusiveness and access.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Great, thank you so much for sharing that. I want to encourage everyone listening or watching to ask your questions in the Q&A function that we have here. I will be getting to those questions in about five minutes or so. There's already some asking for whether any of the standards are publicly available and I'm sure Allie will post those as well as the plain language lease documents that were referenced earlier by you, Allie. I really want to get more into this idea that you talked about, Allie, about moving away from a fear-based approach and compliance and really making it part of the day-to-day and normalizing disability justice and all issues. From my perspective, one way of doing that is ensuring that people who are in positions of authority, decision-making positions understand this issue through their own lived experience and who are constantly being informed and educated on how the intersectionality of the issue impacts their work. In what other ways do you think we could make progress to fully integrate disability justice issues and all issues particularly in the housing space?

ALLIE CANNINGTON:

Big question. So you just want to absolutely validate the need for disabled leadership in all areas of the housing field, and also I think I really appreciate The Kelsey's co-leadership model because the reality is that as we need to explicitly prioritize disabled led organizations in the public sector and private sector, there's always ideally going to be people with and without disabilities at the table, and so how do we share power and how do we also center those and prioritize shifting power to people particularly Black and Brown disabled people who know the solutions most intimately and who we can always take lead from, and so in addition to that, my colleagues and I spend a fair amount of time advocating with Congress and with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and other key federal agencies about more effectively meeting the housing needs of people with disabilities, and what I will tell you is that the systems love to create barriers that are really unnecessary in a lot of ways.

And we've seen the effectiveness of when programs are created, like the Emergency Rental Assistance program, it was an imperfect program and there weren't as many steps as there are for some of the programs that are explicitly there to meet the needs of disabled people and so as we create policy and as we create programs to make those policies come to life, how can we as advocates, as policymakers, as funders really take a second and third and fourth look at what are the requirements that we are creating and are those needed or which ones are the most crucial? Maybe choose one because the reality is that as disabled and deaf folks are trying to access housing, the amount of barriers are just never ending, and so we have the opportunity to create even the slightest more ease because everything else is so challenging. So that's one of the ways I think is eliminating or decreasing the administrative barriers within our current federal state and local housing assistance programs.

And then I also think that disability and access at The Kelsey, we love to talk about the importance of both, we need strong requirements, but we also need incentives and I have to say we're talking about disability justice, which is great and there is a tenant of disability justice that is anti-capitalist. The Kelsey works in the capitalist world and so we cannot ever fully create a fully disability justice housing because we rely on a system that is capitalist, and so for example, we need incentives. We need market incentives for housing to be created that is disability forward, and that is a strategy that is essential to ensure that we are creating a market where you are more competitive as a housing developer if you are more disability forward and although I wish we didn't need those, that is the current world that we live in, and so we are working on advancing some of those incentives which are going to be critical to making sure disability forward housing can be found anywhere across the country.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Thank you for that. I think that's a very innovative to use market driven approaches to get to an outcome. Dessa, in your experience, what are your thoughts about advancing this idea of incorporating disability justice in the housing space, but in other areas? Where are the opportunities to do that? What are some of the challenges?

DESSA COSMA:

Well, I guess I want to turn it specifically to funders at this point in the conversation to Amanda's point, there's a lot of talk about de-siloing and then the funding happens in these silos, and so really changing that piece is huge, and specifically of course, we want to fund organizations led by disabled people and I think specifically folks who are doing organizing work like I kind of alluded to earlier, we often as disabled people kind of get pigeonholed into this idea of charity or direct service, neither of which is bad, but neither of which is the only thing we need. Like any other marginalized group, we need to build power for our liberation and so direct service is important, but without the power building and organizing piece also being funded, we are never going to get out of the cycle that we are currently in, and so disabled people who have the lived experience of the housing crisis due to disability, race, class, etc., are exactly the people who need the funding to build the power to put forward the solutions that will actually change things.

And so that has to go beyond direct service and this goes back to what I was saying earlier about really understanding us as a constituency rather than random individuals with quote unquote health problems, which is how a lot of people see us. I also think that accessible disability forward housing like Allie said is not something that just disabled people should be prioritizing. It should be the priority of anyone doing housing work, and so when funders are funding someone that's not disability led and organizations that's not disability led to do housing work, how are they making sure that that housing work is accessible and prioritizing disabled folks too? So there should be requirements that all grantees are learning about disability ableism, that they're building relationships with disability organizations, that they're integrating a disability justice approach into their work if they want to keep getting funding. It has to be that direct if it's going to work.

I mean I know when I fill out copious grant reports, it asks me how many women are on my board, how many people of color are in top leadership of my organization? Those are important metrics to show that it's a priority of that funder. We should be doing the same thing around disability. If funders are not actually saying this is a priority, then it's going to continue to sift down to the bottom, which is not ultimately going to achieve the intersectional approach that's absolutely required for the systems change that we've been talking about this whole time.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Thank you. No, I think that's exactly right. If philanthropy establishes as a threshold set of questions in their analysis of determining who to support, then it changes behavior. We see that in other areas. Amanda, I'm curious from your perspective given that you're so involved in systems change and trying to make government much more responsive, in what ways do you see parallels in the work that you're doing in advancing solutions for the unhoused and incorporating those same approaches and strategies of accountability around disability justice?

AMANDA ANDERE:

Well, I think in our learning journey around housing justice and being inclusive, we can't have housing justice with having an explicit disability framework, and so that means understanding how power and decisions are made and right now when we think about not just the unhoused, but people who are unhoused, people who are housing insecure, a lot of those decisions are being made with people who don't have lived experience of many things, right? They don't have lived experience of being unhoused.

They don't have lived experience of disabilities, they don't have lived experience of oppression and racism and we are making a lot of big policy and practice decisions at tables that are not inclusive, and so a lot of our work has been not only thinking about how philanthropy can resource a movement to transform and reimagine systems, but as Dessa was talking about how are people working with their nonprofit and grantee partners to ensure that we're resourcing and I even hate to say the word tables, that we're resourcing circles, tables, communities that really think about how we bring people and what decisions and power are they making in the process to decide about homelessness and housing policy.

And so I think we don't see it as separate. We see it as intersectional, but we know that we need to be explicit until that becomes part of our culture and defining what we mean by lived experience and lived expertise, and what does that mean when we're talking about from the formation of your shelter policy to thinking about how rental assistance and other assistance is distributed in community? A lot of those decisions during the pandemic and even now were made absent of people with lived experience because we are not resourcing communities to think about how people with lived experience can be really at the table in a meaningful way.

And we know that government is going to be slow to change, and if we start to think about moving the decision-making power just from government, but community tables where government and nonprofits and people with lived experience are coming with the same power, that's how we get to better housing policy. We think that better housing policy is just more money and I always say that's just contributing to the layer cake of racism and oppression where we put seemingly good policies and resources on top of really bad cake, and so the goal for us is while more money is going to be important, right?

When we think about things like direct cash transfers and guaranteed basic income and those forcible policies, right? We're embedding them in a system that fundamentally doesn't trust poor people, doesn't trust poor Black people, and certainly doesn't want to meet the needs of the disability community and so we can't just change the dynamic of our relationship to government or change the resources. We actually have to fundamentally change the structure and how decisions are made, and that's a lot harder work than just resourcing your grantee partners to do advocacy to get more money, right? It's really bringing people to table to think about it in a different way. It's the policy in the practice.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Thank you. No, that is so true. I think that oftentimes we don't think about it that way and it's very clear. Let's spend the last few minutes really focusing on the role of philanthropy and all of you are advocates holding government accountable, lifting up the voices of those with lived experience, ensuring that disability justice is incorporated on all issues that government manages. Do you find that philanthropy supports that work or do you feel that there's still work to be done in our philanthropic community to support the level of advocacy that it takes, the power building that it takes to really make systemic change? So I'll open it up, whoever feels you want to jump in first to answer that question. I welcome that. We have about five minutes left before we have to transition back to Emily so if you could keep your responses brief. Who'd like to jump in? Okay, I'm going to call out then. Go ahead, Amanda.

AMANDA ANDERE:

I'll jump in. As the leader of funders together to end homelessness, a network of philanthropy, we don't do any funding directly, but our goal is to mobilize philanthropy. I feel like the biggest shift we're seeing in philanthropy is not only the trust base philanthropy, but really turning over the decision power of grant making to people with lived experience, and when we do that, we see more inclusive grants and what I mean from start to finish not here's our grant making strategy, will you weigh in on these applications? Like no, the folks are deciding the strategy, deciding the outreach, and deciding the outcome, and so we're seeing better grants happen that way as well as when funders, we always say everyone is a housing funder. So if you care about education, if you care about the environment, care about disabilities, you're a housing funder and setting the table so we're all working together with those different intersections of philanthropy. We're starting to see a difference in community, particularly in local community organizing.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

And Dessa?

DESSA COSMA:

I spoke to this earlier, but I guess one thing I would add is my organization, we hustle for money all the time and it's very obvious which kind of funders trust us and which are based in an older model, and the ones who are based in an older model have copious reporting requirements with a one-week turnaround for very little money with a lot of restrictions. That is not accessible. It's not accessible from a disability perspective in terms of the pace and the quantity of work required for what is essentially a very small sum, but it also doesn't really give us the freedom to do what we know we need to do with the funds and it feels more about their own reporting and being able to tell the story they're trying to tell as opposed to us being allowed to do the work that we actually need to do.

And knock on wood, we have been successful at fundraising, but there's been a diversity of funders enough to the point where I can honestly say this funder trusts and values our work and this funder does enough to give us some money, but they're not that serious about it because they're making it so hard to accept their money, and so there's a culture there that this is what Amanda I think is partly talking about, this culture of trust and in all things related to disability in my opinion, more flexibility is better, and whether that's in how, where and when we are able to vote, how and where we're able to live, how we're able to earn a living, how we're able to get a grant and report on it, flexibility makes things more accessible. Options make things more accessible and so in the practice of disability justice if that's what we're interested in, which I am, flexibility and options are just kind of a North star to guide us to being more inclusive.

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MIGUEL SANTANA:

And as you pointed out earlier, it serves everyone right, the curb cut effect. Allie, what is the one thing that you wish funders did to better understand the importance of prioritizing disability justice in their work? You're on mute.

ALLIE CANNINGTON:

In the context of housing, one thing I just want to drive home is that nonprofits and funders working alongside and taking lead from disabled advocates need to fund and resource housing models that ensure disabled people can live their full lives on their own terms in communities that are truly inclusive meaning that there are people with and without disabilities, that there is access to transit, food education. Still, we have funders resourcing segregated communities that are unaffordable and then some. We really need to shift where we're resourcing and ensure that disabled leaders, particularly multiply marginalized disabled leaders are making those key decisions in where these inclusive communities are.

MIGUEL SANTANA:

Well, with that, you get the final word. Thank you so much to all of you, Amanda, Dessa, Allie, for your insights for the incredible work that you do every day and thank you all for listening and hopefully taking these insights and finding ways to incorporate it in your own work and your own foundations. So with that, I'll turn it back to Emily.

EMILY HARRIS:

Thank you so much Miguel, Amanda, Allie, Dessa. This has been incredibly rich, and was so rich in fact, we couldn't address all the questions that were coming in, but rest assured they will inform our programs or resources, even an upcoming panel at the CHANGE Unity Summit. Please help us learn from your experience by taking a few minutes to fill out our short survey. A link is available in the chat and we hope that you'll join us for our next webinar on December 7th, which centers on disability and long COVID in collaboration with the New York Women's Foundation. Again, thank you so much. You've given philanthropy a challenge and a lot to think about as we try to apply disability lens to all programs including housing justice. Thank you again.