

Transcript for NFOA Bridge Community Partner Tawny Stottlemire with Community Action

Bumper music lead in...

KB: Welcome to this 10-minute episode of the NFOA Bridge mini bodcast. N-F-O-A is the acronym for Not for Ourselves Alone, Washburn's motto. And the virtual bridge is located right here on Teaching Tuesdays, connecting Washburn with the Topeka community and beyond through community-engaged learning also known as CEL.

I'm Karen Barron, Community-Engaged Learning Coordinator for the Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning and host of this series. Today, our featured guest is Director of Community Action, Tawny Stottlemire. Welcome Tawny.

TS: Thank you, Karen. It's always a pleasure to be with you and our Washburn friends.

KB: Well, it is a pleasure to have you here, and I'm glad to talk with you today. So, first, please give us a brief overview of what Community Action does. The services that you provide for the Topeka and surrounding community.

TS: Sure; thanks. So, we are a private non-profit organization, and Community Action fights poverty. Our mission is helping people and families to move from poverty toward prosperity, so we do that in a variety of ways because as we all know poverty comes from a variety of different causes and conditions. So, at Community Action, we do some direct service work, we provide affordable housing, we do rent and utility assistance, we have a diaper depot, we help make the homes of lower income people more energy efficient, and we also operate a large early childhood center that is a federally funded Head Start and early Head Start center, so we are serving about 140 kids each day through that process as well. So, it's a large agency with a lot going on.

KB: Yes, yes. I am familiar with it, and I think that that foundation of just fighting poverty and then everything else springs from that is just really powerful and you know just so important to everybody, really. So, I know that you've partnered with several faculty members over the years, myself included, but I'm just wondering in this particular pandemic time we're emerging from, what is your vision for future partnerships with Washburn faculty and staff? Can you tell me what you hope this will look like?

TS: Yeah, well, you know I think we all hope the pandemic becomes a thing of the past, something we remember rather than something we get used to living with. So, I'm sort of thinking of my frame in those terms, where we do come out of this pandemic changed no doubt and maybe doing things a little bit differently, but you know since our inception as Community Action, part of the war on poverty that was initiated in 64. Community Action agencies have always been learning labs, a place for people who are interested in social and economic justice, to really get their boots on the ground and get that experience but not just in direct service provision. And so when I think about that future, I love to have students come in and learn from what's actually happening throughout the agency, so social workers, early childhood professionals, this is a really great place to learn what you're studying in school. But we're also

engaged in political and social advocacy, which can be pretty exciting and motivating. Right now, we have a student, she's actually been with us for I think a little over a year now, who is working on a state-wide campaign to get filtered water bottles stations in public schools, and has made great inroads, so she's going to be able to walk away from her internship saying you know I did this advocacy campaign with Community Action and their partners, and we actually made a difference. We actually increased the availability of filtered water in public school systems.

We also do research, so folks that are interested in that kind of studying about what's happening in our communities with regard to poverty and poverty-related issues, all of that is important to us. Right now, we are undertaking an Oakland feasibility study for the neighborhood of Oakland in Topeka and really looking at that, doing some focus groups over there, taking an environmental scan of the area to see if it makes sense for us or other non-profits to offer more services in that part of Topeka.

We also have corporate functions. You know, behind all of the service delivery and all of the advocacy is an HR office, and a physical finance office, and the management that goes into learning about how to do those things not only in, you know, a corporation that's employing close to 100 people but in a non-profit setting, and those are pretty specialized skills and something really helpful for folks to learn as, you know, they're, they're looking to getting a degree at Washburn. So, I see that future as hopefully us continuing to be a learning lab for students and us working together to actually make change. What do you think of that?

KB: Well, yes, I was just going to say, when you were talking, I was thinking about all the different areas across campus, all the different departments and schools that that you touched on: education, and sociology, and political science, and you know it seems like it just covers, business even.

TS: Business administration, yeah.

KB: Right, right. So, it makes me think, it just reminds me of the term community-engaged learning because it is such a learning situation, and I think, you know, your agency just opens up a lot of opportunities for individual students, but I also think classrooms as well. Would you, would you agree with that?

TS: I would; I would. You know we've had classrooms do projects with us in the past, yours being one of them, and you know I'm just so excited about helping students and young adults who are coming into the world know more about non-profit organizations and know more about people who are living in need, that working with classrooms is also an exciting thing to do because those assignments are just built in with what you're doing right there in the classroom and teaching. It takes a little coordination, but I'm totally willing to work with professors and instructors to make that happen.

KB: Well, that's great, and, yeah, that's the whole key to community engaged learning is the reciprocity between, you know, what they're learning academically on campus and what, you know, what we all do and what we already do is living in our communities and, you know, thriving in our communities and making our communities healthy and thriving as well, so, yeah,

I think that CommunityAction offers up so many opportunities to our students, faculty, and staff the community, of course, and so I really thank you so much, Tawny for sharing your vision of potential partnerships with Community Action and Washburn faculty, and staff, and students. It's been a pleasure talking with you and we look forward to partnering with you.

TS: Thank you, Karen, me too, and please, stay safe.

KB: Okay. You too, you too, and keep in touch. You have any ideas, send them our way, and we will do the same. Okay. Yes.

For more information on this bodcast, or how you can get involved with Community-Engaged Learning at Washburn, please see the CEL Pillar on the Center for Teaching Excellence webpage, and contact me, Karen Barron, Coordinator of CEL for CTEL.

To Tom Morgan for composing our bumper music and the Washburn jazz band for recording it, featuring Craig Treinen on sax. Thanks! See you next week on the NFOA bridge!

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