

Disinvested

Episode 5: What Is a Basic Human Need?

Ralph Gagliardo: Hi, my name is Ralph. This is my story. I was the youngest of four children. My father died when we were all very young; I was two years old. My memories of him are very vague, to say the least. I had a fairly normal childhood. I went to South Windsor School System, which is a very good school system. I graduated from South Windsor High.

My three older siblings all went to college. I was kind of stubborn and head strong and wanted to do my own thing. I had a desire to start my own business. I figured that I would do something that I could use my hands. I was also interested in cars, so I pursued auto body work. I never went to school for it, but I slowly learned the trade. I got some customers and I found a great opportunity to take over a shop in East Hartford.

I was able to get into another building with an opportunity to buy the building. I was able to purchase a couple of tow trucks, I had a nice little car collection of my own with about 10 assorted cars in it. I ran the business for about 10 years and then we had a problem with the real estate. We had a balloon note due and I wasn't able to pay it. It went into foreclosure. The economy had pretty much tanked in Connecticut.

One day, I was on my way to the shop and an 18-wheeler took a wrong turn and smashed my little SUV in between the truck and a telephone pole and I sustained a back injury in two spots, so I was unable to work. I started to go to physical therapy and during that process I got addicted to pain medication.

One of my employees eventually showed me heroin, so I started doing that. I became a full-fledged addict and pretty much lost everything that I had and found myself living in a car with my girlfriend, who was also an addict at that time, in Hartford. The last time I relapsed, I had so much shame, so much guilt, and so much depression that I really wasn't sure how this story was going to end. At that point this story could have ended very differently than it did.

Background music...

Tyler Johnson: Welcome to DISINVESTED, a podcast about reimagining a city and building a stronger, more inclusive community. Created by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. I am Tyler Johnson.

This episode is about Basic Human Needs. You just heard from Ralph Gagliardo.

When we talk about basic human needs, most people think about access to food and housing. Our region is fortunate to have several organizations, such as food banks and shelters, helping our neediest residents. Yet even with their dedication, it is hard to keep up with the demand.

In past episodes, we've examined issues such as skills training and education. A person can't even begin to take on these challenges until their basic needs are met. We don't just want people to survive, we want them to thrive. These folks who lack basic needs are human beings with hopes and aspirations, like all of us. We need to help our most vulnerable populations get off the Basic Human Needs merry-go-round.

In this episode, we'll talk about immediate needs like food and shelter. We'll also talk about providing longer-term supports that can help people go on to successful lives.

Here's more from Ralph.

Ralph Gagliardo: On one of the coldest winters I remember, we were living in a Mercury Grand Marquis parked behind an abortion clinic for a while until they towed the car away. At some point I lived in a tent, and I stayed in shelters occasionally.

This period in my life was about 10 years of my life. Out of those 10 years, I spent about 3 and a half years in prison, mostly for possession. I would get out, I would get clean, sometimes I would get work and then inevitably I would relapse. So yeah, there was a turning point. I should have said earlier that I do have a daughter. My family took care of her while I was going through a lot of that stuff.

The last time I went to prison, this fentanyl started to hit the street and this was a new thing. So while I was in prison fighting my case, a lot of people that I used to run with – acquaintances and some friends – were out on the streets literally dying. I literally can't count on both hands the amount of people who have overdosed and died. One of those people is my daughter's mother.

I knew that the nature of the game had changed considerably. Whereas they used to tell you that relapse is part of recovery, it seemed to me that relapse had become something else, which was really rolling the dice with your life. I had already overdosed a couple of times. One time I was down to three heartbeats a minutes. It took six shots of Narcan to bring me back.

I knew that I could not relapse ever again because I did not want to leave my daughter in a similar situation that had happened to so many people that I had known.

Andrea Barton Reeves: The issue is need. So the need is always going to be greater...

Tyler Johnson: Here is Andrea Barton Reeves, executive director of HARC.

Andrea Barton Reeves: ...and there will be many more people who will have to access services through a human services agency than there would be any number of agencies. So you could literally have a thousand human services agencies doing exceptional work and there will be that

many more people who will need help and support, because people run into challenges in their lives at times that none of us could ever predict.

So you might have a child that's doing well and they might go to a party, as an example, and they may experiment with an opioid and all of a sudden they're addicted. That isn't something that a parent would have ever anticipated. A person could be in a terrible car accident. They may have been walking fine that morning and they're a quadriplegic or paraplegic that afternoon.

Now you have another person who's in need of services from a human services organization. And then you have people who are aging and children who are born with special needs. That will continue to grow. So I think what we really need is to make sure that the human service agencies and the social service agencies in our Greater Hartford region are appropriately funded and staffed to meet the needs of the people as those needs evolve, because they do evolve very quickly.

Barbara Shaw: Barbara Shaw. I'm the executive director of Hands on Hartford. Now some of the underlying causes, you know, it's so interesting, because one could name a whole variety of ones, but the bottom line is insufficient income.

I suspect others have spoken to this. The United Way's ALICE Report (I think is absolutely, one might say fascinating, but also really disturbing) about the 40% of Connecticut residents struggle just having enough money to meet all the basics. You know, things like housing, food, transportation, and childcare. And then in Hartford it is even worse; almost 3 in 4 families are struggling meeting the basics.

Marilyn Rossetti: Hi my name is Marilyn Rossetti and I am the executive director at the Open Hearth. I use myself as an example. If something happens to me I have a mother, I have a sister, I have a brother, and I have an uncle all who have resources.

Oftentimes the men that we work with, nobody in their family has any resources. So something that might be a blip for us...God forbid one of us loses a job or your water heater breaks. Anyone is lucky enough, and I know I'm a lucky individual to have a family and support, and all the things out of anything that could happen would not be any type of big deal to you. But for someone else, it could be life changing. I think those are the things you need to think about.

Jason Jakubowski: Hi I'm Jason Jakubowski. I'm the President and CEO of Foodshare. We are the foodbank serving the Greater Hartford area. It's not just the major cities. Every town in our service area, whether it be an urban center, whether it be a rural town, whether it be an affluent suburb, has some food insecurity.

My first week on the job, I went to visit Gifts of Love in Avon, and they're one of our partners. They're a great partner of ours. We were with a group of people and there were a bunch of backpacks there. They run a backpack program in which they provide students at the school a

backpack filled with food on a Friday and somebody had said, “Oh what are those for school kids in Hartford,” and the response was, “No. They’re for school kids in Avon.”

There is absolutely a real need in the suburbs. You think of a lot of those municipalities as being very affluent. Hunger doesn’t care what town you’re from. We do a mobile [delivery truck] every two weeks in the town of Avon and I’d say there is more than 100, maybe 150 folks in line there. The same thing for West Hartford, same thing for Simsbury. This is a very diverse area economically.

Within Hartford and Tolland County, there is a tremendous amount of wealth. There is also a tremendous amount of poverty. Even if you look within the city of Hartford itself, you have mansions, you also have some of the poorest zip codes in the entire United States.

Now I do think that sometimes we fall into that stigma that, well we’re Connecticut, we are the richest state in the country. We don’t have to worry about things like poverty, or there’s so few people in poverty here compared to other states. You know you can look at that data and maybe comparatively that’s accurate, but it doesn’t change the fact that right here in our communities, every single day, there are people going without food. There’s people living in poverty, there’s people living below the poverty line.

Tyler Johnson: Here is Barbara Shaw, executive director of Hands On Hartford. Hands On Hartford is a social service nonprofit that works with Hartford’s neediest residents in the areas of food, housing, and health.

Barbara Shaw: We have to make sure that people know about the services that are available to them. That means making sure that we share updated information because things change rapidly. We need to pay attention to special groups that may be under reached, so seniors tend to be very food insecure, which kind of leads me to the other thing I think that we could do is help to reduce stigma.

If 40% or 4 in 10 of us are struggling to make ends meet, then this is really very much of a broad community issue and nothing that people need to feel stigmatized or embarrassed about. We all probably know people who are food insecure. We may have struggled ourselves with food insecurity, and then frankly, it’s hard not to mention funding and policy. We need to make sure that there is sufficient policy, the type of policy, and also the type of funding, that allows these kinds of very basic safety net services to be able to continue.

Jason Jakubowski: When somebody is experiencing hunger, when they’re experiencing food insecurity, it’s life changing.

Tyler Johnson: Jason Jakubowski, executive director of Foodshare.

Jason Jakubowski: It really is, and you see whether it be the emotion on their face or the heartfelt tenderness of their stories, it’s amazing and it’s something that changes people, I think

in some ways, forever. We take for granted in modern society that there is enough food out there to feed everybody and that everybody has equal access to food.

When I started this position a couple of years ago, it was a cool thing to say we'd love to put ourselves out of business, and people who are in charge of foodbanks say that all time. One of our slogans for years was, "When hunger stops, so will we."

I think I have a little more of a realistic view of that. I mean, hunger and food insecurity has been around going back to the Old Testament. It's been around for thousands and thousands of years, so I look at the problem as probably something that will not be "solved," anytime in my lifetime. And by the way, if I'm wrong, I'll be perfectly happy with that, but I look at it practically like what can we do to help these people out in the short term.

Tyler Johnson: Here's Adria Giordano, director of development for Chrysalis Center. Chrysalis Center provides supportive services to assist people in need to transform their lives.

Adria Giordano: I think when you think of someone's basic human needs, you think of having shelter. First you have a roof over your head and food in your stomach. The population that we serve really are struggling with both of those. Having a safe place to put your head down at night allows you to work on your other basic needs such as getting a job to provide an income.

We know that generational poverty is so strong in our communities, particularly in Greater Hartford, and people are not going to get out of poverty by giving them food. So what we work on is creating individualized goal plans that allow them to reach their basic needs, as you might say, to reach their success and what does success look like to them.

So our motto there is not a hand out, but a hand up. We try to get to the root cause of hunger. So they're coming to us because they're hungry and we need to help them feed their families, but they're working on goals to get them out of this predicament that they're in, these challenges that they're facing. So we provide employment opportunities, college classes; it might be daycare. We help them get out of debt.

We also built on our own campus a culinary training kitchen so clients can come through and they are trained by a 5-star chef and after two weeks, they get their Serve Safe [certificate]. They can work not just at McDonalds, they can work at really high-end restaurants, and if they stay for seven or eight weeks, they can get a managerial certificate. We are literally giving them skills that they can take with them. So those are just a couple of ways that we help build employable skills.

Tyler Johnson: When a person is not sure where they will lay their head for the night, it affects everything in their lives. It's difficult for someone to succeed at work or at school when their lives are filled with so much uncertainty. That's why stable housing is so important.

Marilyn Rossetti is the executive director of the Open Hearth, a social service nonprofit helping men regain lives lost to homelessness and addiction.

Marilyn Rossetti: Well, first of all, I always tell people: figure if you did not have a place where you could lay your head every day, if you knew where the next meal was going to come from, if you knew where you were going to launder your clothes, if you knew where you would be able to put your possessions during the day.

Anytime you remove a barrier, you're freer to live your life. So certainly it is about being housed. But we also say it's about learning to understand why you got there in the first place. So I think it's a twofold answer.

ureTyler Johnson: Susan Campbell is a freelance writer and author who teaches journalism at the University of New Haven. For years, she has covered homelessness and housing issues.

Susan Campbell: What are we missing out by not having these people be members of society? If you get someone housed and you get that person services, then they can get a job, then they're contributing taxes. Again, I don't want to boil it all down to cost efficiency, but I've had this argument, and you can quote Biblical scriptures until your teeth fall out and it doesn't mean something to everyone. That means absolutely nothing. But to think that because a person is homeless that they have nothing to contribute is just ranked gross.

Connecticut is embracing something called Housing First where the old model was, I get picked up off the street, I have substance abuse issues, I drink. First they would want me to fix that. That's good and that should happen; however, if you want for me to do that before you give me a house, I have no stability and I'm probably going to fall back into my addictions and be lost to you. But if we provide housing first and then as many services as a person needs, that sounds expensive but it's still cheaper than having people on the street. It is incredibly expensive to have people who are on the street. Beyond the morality of it, it just makes good sense to do housing first and get them housed. The cure for hunger is food. The cure for homelessness is a home.

Ralph Gagliardo: The thing you find when you become homeless is that homeless people come in all shapes, sizes, and varieties.

Tyler Johnson: Once again, Ralph Gagliardo.

Ralph Gagliardo: My issue was addiction, but I met so many other people from so many different walks of life and a lot of times the younger ones would be runaways or people escaping from bad family situations. You'd see the same faces over and over and over. It just tells you how difficult it is to get out once you're in.

One thing is people say, well, some people have got to hit bottom. Well, my family used to say I had no bottom because I could always find a way to get by. I was very resourceful and that resourcefulness was actually my enemy.

When you're on the street and you're running around trying to survive, if you know you can go somewhere and get a sandwich every Tuesday, that makes a difference. People handing out socks – all those things are just so important.

People lose their humanity when they become homeless and they become invisible. A lot of service providers get burnout because the failure rate is so high when it comes to addiction. People hear my story and it gives some people hope, I've found. Even service providers are like, "I'm so glad that you told me your story because so many people just don't make it."

That's what it really comes down to, is sometimes you just have to keep people alive long enough until the formula either presents itself, they figure it out on their own, or they accept enough help to get better.

Barbara Shaw: Education and also time for people to connect is really what changes our world.

Tyler Johnson: Barbara Shaw, executive director of Hands On Hartford.

Barbara Shaw: Folks can't see me, but I'm smiling broadly and looking into the horizon because our Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau, that's been in place for about 6 and a half years now, is just extraordinary. The folks who speak, who really go out there to share their stories in ways that really sometimes can make them feel vulnerable, and it's just amazing.

Looking to breakdown the misconceptions that people have about folks who are homeless, we have to make sure that people know. It's individuals, it's also families. So when our speakers go out they are literally putting a face on that and it's wonderful because we do have a diverse group of speakers with individual and powerful stories.

Tyler Johnson: Ralph Gagliardo, whose story you heard earlier, is a member of the Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau. Once again, here's Ralph.

Ralph Gagliardo: The last time I got out of jail I was on parole. Hands On Hartford had an event call a Day of Sharing and Caring where they actually fed the homeless community with a nice sit down meal. It was the first one they had every put together. Well, at the event they had an open mic, and at the open mic I performed a poem that I had written for my daughter while I was in jail. One of the people from Hands On Hartford took notice and said, "Oh, you should come write for this newspaper," which is a street newspaper called *Beat of the Street*.

I was happy because in jail I used to write for everybody; that was how I survived. Then I found out through the same program they had a school. It was called the Bot School of Creative

Learning. That school is designed for people who are basically on the street, and I just took it to stay out of trouble. My main goal is just don't go backwards because going backwards could be a death sentence.

Then they told me I was eligible to go to school at Goodwin College, so I said sure. I was always good at school, I just wasn't motivated. So I got my associates degree, and after a couple of years I got my bachelor's degree at a 3.7 GPA. Then they asked me to do the commencement address at Goodwin, which was like 3,000 people.

The story I decided to tell was the last place I was before my life started to get better, which was actually detoxing in a local county jail where I had actually considered trying to commit suicide at the time. It was like an all-time low. So that was the story I told to about 3,000 people.

Background music...

After all this journey and having defended myself multiple times in court, the next thing I want to do is go to law school.

Tyler Johnson: Addressing immediate needs like housing and food insecurity are essential for people to live. However, the definition of a basic human need is expanding.

For individuals to really thrive, other long-term supports are often needed. For some, transportation is a significant barrier. The ability to get around is easily overlooked. A child who doesn't live within walking distance of a bus line for their school still needs to get there. People with disabilities or ongoing illnesses need reliable transportation to access vital healthcare services.

If you remember back to episode three, we talked about workforce development and skill attainment. People need jobs – it's the only way to lift themselves out of poverty. If a person's only way of getting to work is by walking, the radius in which they can get a job is tiny – maybe only a mile or two from their home. Give them a bike, and that radius might expand to 10 miles. Great public transit? Now they can get a job 30 miles away. This is why the Hartford Foundation supports transit-related initiatives.

Here is Erin Kemple, executive director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

Erin Kemple: One of the things that we know, for instance, is that a lot of jobs are moving to the suburbs. So for instance, UConn Health has put up a lot of its new medical offices in Farmington, and that needs a variety of workers from doctors and nurses to receptionists and other people, and yet the people who are not skilled or who are not as skilled as doctors can't afford to live in Farmington. As a result of that, they are either commuting or they're not getting those jobs.

Gannon Long: Being able to get to school every day. In the school system in Hartford, we have a big challenge of absenteeism and sometimes that literally might be a transportation issue.

Tyler Johnson: That's Gannon Long. Gannon is the assistant coordinator for Transport Hartford at the Center for Latino Progress.

Gannon Long: The same thing for a job. Being able to get somewhere reliably is one of the first things that employers ask about and it's something that employees obviously have to take into account.

Those are some basic things and I think that we shouldn't expect people to scream and cry and beg to have access to basic things so that they're able to live their lives. School and jobs should be pretty fundamental for folks and we should all understand that. But it's about making people feel welcome in spaces and breaking down those barriers.

In Hartford over 30% of households don't own a car. It's not that I don't have a car and my partner or somebody in the house does; no one in the house does. That means people are not getting around that way, so you have to have streets that people can walk on, bike lanes that people can travel on, and you also want to be able to have good access to public transportation.

Chion Wolf: One-hundred percent transportation is absolutely a basic human need.

Tyler Johnson: Here's Chion Wolf, WNPR personality, Hartford resident, and transportation advocate.

Chion Wolf: It's funny, because when I got the job at Connecticut Public Radio, at the time I was living in Plainville and I knew as soon as I got the job that I wanted to move as close as possible to the radio station, which is in Asylum Hill. So I found a spot that was a five minute walk away. Then when it came time for me to buy a house, which I did last year, it is now a 10 minute walk.

So that's the only thing is that I got this great house, but it's doubled my commute from a five minute walk to a 10 minute walk. I'm still coming to terms with that, but I think what a lot of people don't realize is that there's a lot of human beings who need a bike to get around. There's a lot of human beings who can't even ride a bike to get around, so when you have limited means of transportation or transportation that's not affordable, or transportation that doesn't accommodate how your body works, you're already limited from the get go. That's not fair. That's not how this country is supposed to run, right, at least ideally.

What's interesting is Hartford used to be a manufacturing capital for bicycles. Pope Manufacturing. We don't need an excuse to make better roads for cyclists and pedestrians, but if you want like a tourism idea you can point to our history, because we love talking about

Connecticut history. We can look at our history and say, look, we have a history of being accommodating and excited about bicycles, and if we can start in the center of the city and work our way out or start at the end of the city and work our way in, as long as we start.

Because I was hit by a car in the West End of Hartford a couple of years ago. I've got a plate and eight screws in my collar bone and six weeks out of work for it. If the bike lanes were separated from the road, which is really the start of what we want, then this wouldn't have happened. I'm so lucky that I survived it and so I feel like I'm trying to make up for some lost time and to use whatever influence I have to maybe get some sway in this issue. But there are definitely some people who are doing a lot of work to make some real change happen.

I think that because we are entitled – and that's a scary word, like I wouldn't use that word if I didn't truly believe it – but we are entitled to access to these roads. We are entitled to move around on these machines and human beings are entitled to move around on their feet, in their wheelchairs, or in their motorized vehicles. So if we are entitled to these ways of getting around, then there has to be protection and safety.

Tyler Johnson: For someone with a physical or intellectual disability, the definition of a basic human need is different. What a person without disabilities takes for granted can be a real barrier to someone with a disability.

Once again, Andrea Barton Reeves.

Andrea Barton Reeves: We're unique in that we offer services to families throughout their life spans. We were founded in 1951, really by families who were tired of being told that there were only two options for your loved ones, which is either to institutionalize them or take them home with you and essentially have them grow up in isolation.

I think the way that the community can be more inclusive is to set aside, at least even for a moment, whatever preconceived notions they may have about the abilities of people who are intellectually disabled or otherwise disabled. We like to think of ourselves as fully capable of doing virtually anything and we're insulted if someone says to us, well, because of some immutable trait that you have – if you're a brown eyed person then you're not capable of achieving a certain quality of life.

When I use that example people are like, what are you talking about? How is that even possible? You don't even know me. People just get indignant just from that small example, so you can imagine how a person with a disability must feel if you're saying to them, because you have a disability, I've already determined that you aren't capable of achieving a certain goal in your life.

I think the biggest thing that our community can do is to really be more open minded about what's possible. And I think the second is to, especially, I say this particularly to our corporate partners, that where you can make a way, where you might not have thought of before, to

really continue to think creatively about providing opportunities for people, particularly with intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities, so that there can be real viable employment and community engagement.

Diane Weaver Dunn: We all initially think about food and shelter as a basic need, and it is.

Tyler Johnson: Diane Weaver Dunn, executive director of CRIS Radio. CRIS Radio is Connecticut's only radio reading service serving the blind and the print disabled.

Diane Weaver Dunn: However, information allows you to be engaged. and without information. what our listeners will tell us is that they're very isolated and that they're actually very lonely. The lack of information prevents them from engaging. So you can consider a kid in school who is not able to read the chapter on Betsy Ross, for example. They aren't able to raise their hand when the teacher asks a question, or if a family gathering is together and they're all discussing – oh God forbid, politics – they are not able to really offer an opinion.

A lot of folks will tell us that CRIS Radio helped them not be depressed because they were able to be engaged and feel like they are a part of a community. I think it's really important for all people of all abilities to have access to the same information, because it really does speak to equality and equity. And for folks who are denied that access, it just really creates such a challenging and struggling life for them.

Tyler Johnson: Jeffrey Bravin is the executive director for the American School for the Deaf. He is also deaf and spoke with us through his interpreter.

Jeffrey Bravin: The American School for the Deaf was founded actually 202 years ago in 1870 and they were established as the first special education school in the Western hemisphere.

We want to ensure that every child is provided with the appropriate education or supports so that they can grow here and then thrive out in the real world. Regardless if the student is deaf or hearing, any child, if they do not have a good quality education, is going to have a very hard time in life. So for that reason, we want to ensure that we provide the appropriate language foundation and communication access so that they're able to acquire language so when they leave ASD, they're able to go out and go to college, find jobs, or pursue different paths in their lives. Because without those kinds of foundations, their lives will be very difficult.

Jes Vance: For our typical special needs population, we work with kids that are 8-18.

Tyler Johnson: Jes Vance is the director of development at Channel 3 Kids Camp.

Jes Vance: Obviously, kids get older as time goes by, so when they hit those 19 and young 20's, they're still looking for a lot of positive engagement with their peers. But they find as they reach young adulthood, there's not as many programs available for them to be able to

make those connections. We work really hard amongst our programs to make changes and adaptations for kids to be able to access programming.

Some of those things have to do with the ratios for kids to be able to be successful in programming. Sometimes they just need a little bit of attention, some extra adults around to make them successful. But sometimes it's a physical adaptation to the program, so it could be providing different materials so that they can access. It could be using things such as balls that have beepers in them, so if you have a visual impairment you can get involved in a sports game, or even just changing the facility up so that kids can get to more places.

We work really hard to accommodate as many kids here at camp based on their level of need. A lot of times we find that our typically developing kids and our special needs kids are interested in the same things, but a lot of times our typically developing kids don't have the language to access the relationship. So we work really hard on having the conversations to provide them a level of language and comfort so they can open the conversation and start to learn more. We find that the more educated all of our campers and staff are, it inherently and naturally becomes more inclusive.

Diane Weaver Dunn: Having been in the field of communication and words and language, words really can make a difference.

Tyler Johnson: Diane Weaver Dunn of CRIS Radio.

Diane Weaver Dunn: The words that we choose can make people feel better. They can make people feel worse. One thing I have realized also just from a personal experience, I have a granddaughter who has cerebral palsy. She's six year old. People will often come up to us and they will speak about her as if she's not in the room. It is shocking how, I hate to say it, but ignorant people are when they're addressing people who are different from them. It is very hurtful, actually, to have people talk about somebody with a disability as if they're vacant, as if they don't have intelligence.

When I came to CRIS Radio, I think it dawned on me that people with disabilities really are a minority. They are not given the type of acknowledgement that they truly are minorities. They have a very low employment rate. When we're talking about reaching out and helping everybody within a community, people with disabilities should have a fair shot. We really need to consider their desire to be typical. They don't want extra help, they just want to be typical and have a fair shot.

Jeffrey Bravin: I have always believed that any school, especially for young students, needs to have collaborations with other schools and other programs...

Tyler Johnson: That's Jeffrey Bravin, speaking through his interpreter.

Jeffrey Bravin: ...and the reason for that is that it gives us a window into what they do. It also gives them the opportunity to understand what we do and those social interactions that result are wonderful. A lot of times, hearing people say, I've never met a deaf person before, because we've been isolated, almost in silos. I don't believe in that. What I believe in is collaborations, working together on different projects.

For instance, we just had our students work with the Hartford Academy for Greater Arts and we did a poetry collaboration together at the New Britain Museum of Art. That is where our students signed their poem and then the Hartford Academy students said their poems and spoke in English. Then we had a final performance where our students signed and their students spoke the poems and they worked together. I really believe that those collaborations help us to understand how to work with hearing people and help hearing people to understand what the deaf community is all about rather than looking at us as if we're strangers. We're all human beings at the end.

Background music...

Marilyn Rossetti: And the stories I read, because they often tell the case managers...

Tyler Johnson: Once again, Marilyn Rossetti.

Marilyn Rossetti: ...my mother was murdered, my sister died. I don't even know how some days people get up, you know the tragedy...

So then you're trying to live your life and go forward, and so many crappy things have happened to you, why wouldn't you be even more bitter? I watch men who are with all of these adversities, so resilient, or so determined to achieve where I know people where it's like, "Uh, I can't go to Starbucks, I've got a terrible day." It's like f*n snap out of it," – excuse my language.

Andrea Barton Reeves: I think that our community already is extraordinarily generous...

Tyler Johnson: Here is Andrea Barton Reeves.

Andrea Barton Reeves: ...and I'd like to commend those that are not just generous with their financial resources but everyone who shares their talent and their ability in some way. So every time we move out of our place of comfort to meet a need for someone else, it's always I think a miraculous opportunity and it's wonderful to watch it. So if we can do that one person at a time, one community at a time, one organization at a time, it would really be wonderful. I think we'd see the needs in our community be met in ways that we never imagined.

Tyler Johnson: For the average person, having food in their belly, a roof over their head, and a way to get to work is probably something they never think about. But for the most

vulnerable, those experiencing the food insecurity and homelessness, the physically and intellectually disabled in our region, it is something that they think about every day.

We all must recognize that the definition of basic human needs is expanding. It's not as straightforward as providing short-term food and housing options. People are unique and need different types of supports, depending on life circumstances.

We need to approach people as individuals and find out how best to serve their unique needs, so they can reach their full potential and become fully contributing members of society, just like Ralph Gagliardo.

Ralph Gagliardo: In some ways, what we go through makes us who we are. Part of me says acceptance and forgiveness. We're all human, we all go through stuff. I think I'm at the point of having accepted a lot of my misdeeds and faults and just trying to become a better person.

So I graduated from Goodwin College with a bachelor's degree in Human Services. I always thought about being an attorney, so I figured I've gone this far. So I'm studying for the LSAT now. I just loved going to school. I really thrived in school. I felt like my experience actually brought something to the other students. Not all of them had experiences like mine. I felt like I was doing more than just learning, I was actually teaching, too.

So my plans now, I'm basically starting my life over. While most people are going into retirement, I'll just be entering the workforce, which is kind of funny. But I'll be doing it on my terms, at least as far as picking an occupation that I want to be in. If I become an attorney, I'd like to be a public defender and defend the Constitutional rights of people who are accused. It's a noble cause.

Background music...

Something I can feel good about. There's really no limit what could happen now. I foresee a time where I could be an attorney, do speaking engagements, and have a pretty good life.

Tyler Johnson: Thanks for listening to DISINVESTED. I'm Tyler Johnson. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe and share with your friends.

In our next episode, we'll look at Arts and Culture. Creating an inclusive economy, jobs, and affordable places to live doesn't mean much if there is nothing fun to do. Next time, on *Disinvested*.

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