

Cathy Mann: \*Introduction begins\* Welcome to It Doesn't Hurt to Ask! A podcast where we talk about fundraising. This season we'll be talking to shift disturbers in philanthropy, people who are shaking up traditional philanthropy practices. In this episode we're chatting philanthropy with Sharon Avery, CEO of Toronto Foundation, who's busy introducing new approaches to social change philanthropy. Not only is Sharon not afraid to ask for money, she's also not afraid to shake up long held traditions within philanthropy.

Cathy Mann: Sharon, welcome to It Doesn't Hurt to Ask! Podcast.

Sharon Avery: Thank you, Cathy.

Cathy Mann: What does that title mean to you? Does it hurt to ask, do you think?

Sharon Avery: Well, it's a funny. It's... no, it doesn't hurt to ask, ever! So let's just let me answer the short version first. I guess what's funny, what makes me laugh is like so many fundraisers of my vintage and it took me a long time to understand that I was a fundraiser and get really comfortable with asking and though it's funny for me to think of it now because it just comes so naturally to me. But, uh, you know, my background wasn't obviously... for most of us this age and stage wasn't fundraising. I wanted to be in broadcasting. To fall into the sector as so many of us do and it took me, I was at SickKids for many years and I remember talking to my good old boss Bonnie Be Good at SickKids and telling her oh, I'm not a fundraiser, don't call me a fundraiser. I'm not a fundraiser.

Cathy Mann: Isn't that interesting? So you had kind of some of the stigma that many do about fundraising.

Sharon Avery: Absolutely. And so I didn't come probably I was probably almost 30 before I really got comfortable with it. And then did you know, it's just been crazy ever since I just ask for everything now. But yeah, no, I hesitated. So I love the title is the short answer.

Cathy Mann: Well, so it's, it's interesting you say that you weren't, you didn't see yourself as a fundraiser because now I think of you as, in fact a shift disturber with an f in it. Someone who is a senior leader in the sector who is, um, you know, really senior fundraiser, but you're totally disturbing the sector right now. What do you, what do you say about that?

Sharon Avery: Well, thank you. I guess, I'm having a really good time. Um, and I think I've always questioned things that have been done the same way for a long time. And so I've really, I have a different, you know, you write your bio different stages of your career and I always called myself unconventional and I think that's fair. Anything I've ever done in my career in fundraising, I've challenged the status quo and it hasn't always been welcomed by my colleagues. I've been blessed by bosses who have welcomed it all through my career. You know, as much talent as I may or may not have. I have been blessed with great leaders

and that has made a big difference in my ability to try new things and do new things. But I've always liked to try doing things differently. Someone said to me the other day, you know, what drives you? Well, I've had so many times in my career where I've been told you can't do it that way or that's been tried and it didn't work. And that for me is like a red flag to a bull. I'm just like oh, well now I really want to try it. So you know, I moved from traditional fundraising as you know, as a Chief Development Officer to the CEO role at a community foundation, which is unconventional for a fundraiser. You don't see a lot of fundraisers at the tops of the big community foundations. And I love that the board was willing to take me on. I did all these psych tests when they gave me the job and it literally said, psychologist that debriefed with me, he's like, it's very clear you will always challenge the status quo and it says you'll do it in a friendly, cheerful way at a very high pace, but you are a change agent, clearly. And, and I thought that's great that they get to see that in writing from somebody other than me because I wanted them to know what they were getting in for because I knew I was entering a zone that was pretty traditional. Yeah. And so we're just trying to shake it up.

Cathy Mann: So tell us about shaking it up. I mean, I'm watching from a distance and really excited by what I'm seeing, but tell us about it.

Sharon Avery: Well, I think that often you get your most innovative when you face an external forces driving you. And so, I knew that, you know, Toronto Foundation is one of the younger community foundations in the family of community foundations in Canada. Winnipeg's our old, sort of senior leader at approaching 100 years old and Toronto Foundation - we're just middle aged were 38 and as you know, in endowments, age matters. And so when I was brought on by the board, they really wanted someone to bring a growth agenda and they, they really jealous of the fact that Vancouver had over a billion in assets and at 75 years old, let's be clear, senior citizen and us you know, at 38 years old, with a half a billion in assets. And so I knew that I was going to be able to flex some fundraising muscles, but once I got into the family of community foundations, and let me be clear, I have some fantastic peers across the country. But you know, when you're 100 years old and you're sitting on your assets and you have a lot of discretionary money to give away your framework is that "I'm a funder first." But when you're me with very little discretionary money with a lot of money that isn't permanently endowed in the organization and a mandate to double in, you have to have a growth mentality and fundraisers mentality. But that is not a common. It's not common in the family. And so, you know, I came in thinking, you know, how could we more aggressively get fund holders to join, and set up donor advised funds. I mean, what more boring product could you imagine than a donor advised fund? And yet I find it totally exciting at this time in the history of the world where - God help us - populism reigns and greed seems to be a key driver of many people and accumulation of things. And, and yet, you know, increasingly you're hearing from key target audiences like women and like Next-genners is a real desire to have more meaning in their lives.

Sharon Avery: And philanthropy can play that role. But we have professionalized fundraising to such an extent if at least at the big institutions that they really.... I see now, and I've worked at some of those big institutions... a real inequity in the sector in fundraising. And what I mean by that is the stat that really keeps me awake at night is that 60 percent of all donations in Canada go to only one percent of the charities in this country. And well those are worthy charities. I'm not challenging for a moment that SickKids is worth giving money to and they will steward it well. What about the other 80,000 charities that are working on the intractable problems in this country? And problems that as a community foundation, I'm reporting on every year in Vital Signs. And so I think I entered the job saying, so what is the new modern role of a community foundation?

Sharon Avery: And I think it's a couple of things. I think that it is there to disrupt giving patterns of donors after many years of very traditional giving that's very cost driven and I want to start talking about issues, not institutions. How do I get people talking about gender or about resilience or about racialized youth at risk or, or indigenous issues and thinking of their philanthropy as a portfolio as opposed to a one cause relationship. And then secondly, in order for them to understand these issues, I think as a community foundation, we need to be a donor education organization that if we're going to do all their research, through our Vital Signs work and we have all these amazing relationships with the small, medium, high impact organizations in the city and beyond; how can we take all the learning we have and share it with our philanthropists and how can we create communities of philanthropy where we pick apart the issues, donors learn about the issues and say, "okay, if I'm going to tackle poverty, it's not just one institution that's going to solve that problem. It's probably five different interventions and you know, a really rich portfolio of organizations that I could support depending on what I'm interested in terms of my experience."

Sharon Avery: And so I think a community foundation should be the broker between all of those relationships. And that's what I'm trying to do.

Cathy Mann: Awesome. And I'm actually fascinated to watch what you're doing because I see you introducing this notion of social change philanthropy with philanthropists who are accustomed to traditional philanthropy.

Sharon Avery: Yes. You know, it's interesting, we've just been preparing for our annual general meeting and, and really looking back on my first 18, 19 months in the organization with my team and they're doing the analysis on where we moved our fund holders. You know, when I joined we had about 450 fund holders. That's our constituency of philanthropists and their families and individuals and, and um, and, and, and so we spent a lot of time reorganizing the organization to be very fun to hold or centric. We doubled the size of the team. We've created, you know, bus tours of the city and we've done some of, I'll absolutely! They're fabulous! I come out of UNICEF, we used to travel with donors all the time and you would go see four or five programs in a day. And so I said to the team, why can't we do that in Toronto? You know, why don't we do Scarborough? In fact, next week we're doing a bus tour out to Rexdale. We're seeing five

organizations all in one day in Rexdale and we're taking a group of fund holders with us on that journey. And so, but we're doing all kinds of... We've done a good to give guide where we've actually published a catalog of every organization we've granted to in the last three years to say if you want to shake it up, we've done the due diligence because a lot of times donors will say, I don't know who to give and then when, you know, if I haven't heard of them, how can I trust them?

Sharon Avery: And so we're trying to sort of say, well, you can trust us that you've trusted us with your, your endowment. Now maybe you could trust us to make some recommendations. And so those are the things we're doing with our fund holders. But you talk about shaking it up. I think the more shake up we've been doing is how we're starting to attract new fund holders. Okay. And so if I can tell you about our Next Gen, a campaign that we just did, we called it vision 20 slash 20, not the most original title in the world, but it's really looking ahead two years from now and hoping to graduate a group of first time philanthropists. And so we said, you know, I love Next-genners for many reasons. We all do love the millennials. We complain a lot of them millennials.

Sharon Avery: I'm here to say they're amazing and they have so much hope and there are so idealistic and they're super keen to get involved and they're prepared to sacrifice things, you know, we see it in the work environment where they're interested in a little balance and, and they're interested in, in, you know, making sure fair and equitable in, in the workspace, in philanthropy. It's the same principles and those same values come through. And it's a beautiful thing. And so we put a call out, we decided, I, I told you I'm big on donor education. And so we said, what would a learning journey look like for a 25 or 30 year old fund holder? Um, and so we said, let's take two years of their life and let's engage them in a journey around philanthropy and urban resilience. And the reason we chose urban resilience because Toronto had just been named one of the 100 resilient cities by Rockefeller Foundation.

Sharon Avery: It's a global movement focused on climate change, urbanization and globalization. Three things millennials and Gen Xers deeply care about and think are relevant to what's going on, positive and negative in this world right now. And so we said, okay, how many new funds do we think we can get now? We had an average of 30 new funds a year, 32 new funds a year at Toronto Foundation. So a couple of month we're getting as a fundraiser, I'll just say I thought that was low. Now we didn't have that many staff working on this. And we certainly, we were taking referrals. We weren't being terribly proactive. And so I said to my team: what if we could get 50 new permanent endowments in three months?

Sharon Avery: What is this podcast called? And so the team is, you can imagine were like, are you crazy? Like, first of all, let's break this apart. A permanent endowment to a 30 year old has got to be the least sexy idea ever. And we lowered our threshold. Normally if a donor advised fund at Toronto Foundation is \$25,000, we lowered it to \$10K and we said you can do it over two years, however we'd

like to teach you about philanthropy. And the first two lessons are collaboration, so work together. So that's why we want 50 of you all at once to go on a journey together. And leverage. And so we put aside half a million of our own discretionary money as potential matching money. And we said if you can come in with \$20K get a second... get a match from your grandparents, get it from your workplace, whatever, raise it.

Sharon Avery: Yeah, we'll put another 10 in the mix. Oh, and you guys can grant it out together. So you'll start your journey with a \$20,000 endowment and you'll enable another attend to go into a pool that together you 50 fund holders will grant. Very cool. Anyway, I should skip to the end of the story, which is how do we do? And so by, you know, we launched this on Labor Day weekend last fall and by December 30, first we had 50 as of today, we finally cut it off at 70. Oh congratulations. And in fact we got 70 by the end of January and they were all couples and individuals. And then surprising: siblings.

Cathy Mann: Oh, interesting.

Sharon Avery: Because of course, when you're 29 it's actually kind of a fun thing to do with your big brother, your big sister. And so we have seven in the group who are actually brother and sister, sister and sister, brother and brother combinations doing this as their thing to do with their sibling.

Cathy Mann: And is it the entire group of 70 fund holders?

Sharon Avery: 115 people.

New Speaker: Wow. And they're all going to be working together to determine where the funds get allocated?

Sharon Avery: Yes. So they .. it's a permanent endowment. Right. So there are, they've got their own named and download, then bill and Melinda Gates, right. They've got, you know, one of them is the, I love the names they've chosen for their foundations, right? One is this, um, I'll make up a name of the Smith Family Social Justice Fund, right? So they, they've named them whatever they want and they are there forever. They have started their philanthropic journey with us in perpetuity. The pool of 500,000, they will grant together and it is our hope to actually double that again with another donor. So we want to, we got two years, I've given myself some time, I've taken a break, moving onto my next campaign that Cathy, you know about, with women.

Sharon Avery: And so, you know, that's, that's where we are. They'll spend, they're in fact doing that, granting this fall through through the spring. We've invited them to tables in 10 vulnerable neighborhoods around the city to learn about urban resilience, not from "experts" but from voices of lived experience. So the whole journey for them. We were doing a lot of workshopping around privilege, values. Oh, risk, right? And, you know, the exploring the ways they are going to

be comfortable giving. So that's their philanthropic journey and then their resilience journey is at the neighborhood level with lived experience,

Cathy Mann: You know, this is like music to my ears, that kind of stuff that you're talking about, you know, in the sector that I've worked in social justice, social service sector, those are exactly the pain points that everybody always talks about, right? Is that donors don't understand, don't take the time or don't have an opportunity to understand lived experience and therefore make these decisions based on their privilege.

Sharon Avery: And you know, what's so interesting is I, you know, after 25 years of fundraising for causes, which has been a very satisfying career, what is amazing for me about this shift is that now I have this wonderful gift of my own privilege. I now working in an organization where all the salaries are paid for by the investment income we gain. So I don't have to fundraise, but I. So I have the freedom to fundraise without the pressure of that target every single year, even though I'm now driven even harder. Secondly, I am technically cause agnostic, so I'm the Switzerland of charity, which means I can work with any organization which is so satisfying. I don't have to, you know, is no comp competitors. Right? I can force collaboration. Um, and then I just love though that I can have an agenda as well and my agenda is clear.

Sharon Avery: I told you I want to disrupt giving patterns, but I also want to create more educated donors. For instance, I spent, you know, as you have our career sitting across from donors negotiating things that they know, they really don't understand a lot of the complexity of the issues that are out there or they, they think that they have to make all these demands and of an organization in terms of their, the hoops they make people jump through. There's all these demands for innovative new ideas when, what most of these orgs really just desperately need is to pay to keep the lights on and pay their staff. And when you're in a small org like staff equals programming. Yeah, it equals impact. And, but when you get all this discussion of no money for him, administration, like I, I'm, I, I'm so excited to be in a place where I can actually advise in a different way and say things to donors that I wouldn't be able to as a cause.

Sharon Avery: And so I, I like to think I'm like, I'm a secret weapon on both sides. I'm a secret weapon for the donor too, 'cause a lot of donors will come to us to sort of keep them buffered from, from fundraising. But I can also be a secret weapon for the organizations. And, and so I want to add. And lastly, if these weren't enough wonderful things to have, I can play the long game so I can actually work with audiences like Next-genners, like millennials who people tend to just throw parties for. They think they want to drink and, and social and they do like those things. But they are, this group that certainly we're working with, is so thrilled that there is such substance and that it's not a single cause focused. It's looking at many, many organizations and many different issues so that I just feel so lucky.

Cathy Mann: So I'm really interested about how you are, you know, educating and supporting donors. Have you been at this long enough yet to be able to identify what the impact is for the organizations that are or will be recipients of some of these funds?

Sharon Avery: It's so interesting you ask because literally just this morning we were going through, I'm trying to look at how our first version of our Good to Give catalogue is starting to show some response. We got lots of anecdotes, you know, the first city tour, city bus tour we did, a couple came on this tour and at the end of it the gentleman said "Oh my God! You have made me reevaluate my entire giving strategy by just exposing me to these great organizations today." And he made gifts to all, the couple made gifts to all of the orgs. And then when we went through our granting cycle, um, one of my staff brought me his granting sheet and he'd highlighted all the organizations he'd chosen this year out of our Good to Give Guide.

Sharon Avery: So we're starting to see that. But what's interesting that we were reflecting on today is our fund holders are traditional fund holders, the ones that have, we've accumulated over the last 30 years, they are less responsive than our new group. So what's interesting about our Next Gen, I told you 115 people when we hold it, you know, we've held probably for events for them to date and we get like 80 percent showing up. And these are events where they're, they're learning something, there's a dedicated agenda and they're the, they're very interactive. They, these guys want to learn from each other as much as they want to learn from us. And but like you don't usually have donor events like a donor group like that that you could expect maybe 30 to 40 percent showing up. These guys have consistently this year, shown up at about 80 percent. We have to have a lot of food and a lot of space to host them all, but they've been fully engaged and so I think, you know, we were asking ourselves is this other group of more older donors who have been with the foundation for years and we're kind of, they're kind of not expecting to hear from us the way they have been over the last 18 months. They're going to be slower to, to engage. But those that are engaging or really it's, you're seeing a change in their patterns. Yes.

Cathy Mann: That's great. Are you in a position or have you...are you able to do anything with the charities around helping them understand the fundraising process a little bit differently?

Sharon Avery: Well, it's interesting. So the first hire I made was a woman I worked with for years at SickKids and then she was at Plan and then UHN and Lisa Grislis is my new Director of Fund Holder Engagement and she comes with such a seasoned major gift philosophy and she's also feeling feeling very freed after years of fundraising. And now she said, you know, when she goes on site visits, because we often organize site visits for our fund holders to their favorite charities is, she's often coaching, you know, and so, but it's wonderful. She's like, it's so great to be in the spot where I can help the less experienced fundraiser really do a great job with a fund holder because I know them deeply and I know what needs to be done. I know, you know, I, I'll take a look at their materials in

advance. I'm looking at their proposals and advance and I feel I'm adding a lot of value. So that's a, that's a small example of how things are changing for us.

Sharon Avery: But I think probably our next campaigns going to be one that I'm hoping really builds capacity, with a group of some of our favorite organizations in the sector. And that's our Trust Collective.

Cathy Mann: Tell us about that.

Sharon Avery: So now that, you know, anyone listening has sort of a sense of the model of our Vision 20 slash 20, you know, setting a goal of a certain number new fund holders who are kind of similarly minded, likeminded people going on a journey together, learning journey of over a space of time. And so that works really well for our Next-genners, for women. We want to do the same thing, but we want to up to up our game and up their game, you know, we know well that women like to collaborate. We know that they really like organizations to collaborate. We also know that they care deeply about a grassroots activities and work and especially with women and children and we also know that they're double inheritors. So they're really important. New audience of philanthropy that often gets overlooked because they're not seen as being, as I'm financially able to participate as men, you know, Canada's playing such a big role with the g seven and uh, talking about a gendered agenda. And I'm a big conferences coming to Canada next June in Vancouver. The Women Deliver conference and so when I, as soon as I knew that was coming, I thought, oh, wouldn't that be a great place to start my next learning journey with a group of donors and what could we do in a year leading up to that to gather a group of likeminded women to attend that conference and start a journey perhaps around giving with a gender lens or issues around women and children.

Sharon Avery: I wasn't 100 percent clear to me at the beginning and so, but, and so I wanted to sort of replicate the Next Gen model but maybe make it bigger and so we've set a goal with trust collective to try and get 100 women to start their journey around the issues of women and children in Toronto and beyond and set up their first permanent endowments. But also I wanted to add a twist to this campaign. And so I'll, I'll talk to the learning journey and I'll tell you what the twist is. So the learning journey, we are envisioning three years. We've brought the Coady Institute onboard from Nova Scotia who do community development, women's leadership, and they're going to actually do a curriculum for three years for these women. But the real twist I think is we wanted to, I wanted to try collective fundraising. I thought, you know, you now kind of get my perspective on leading a community foundation. We're cause agnostic. We're all paid for and um, and you know, we could invest as a backbone organization for some kind of campaign where the organizations that are traditionally just grantees could actually enter the experience from the very beginning and actually be recruiters. And so, and I also thought it's, it's women. It's now we've just been through Harvey Weinstein and #MeToo, and all this crap with Trump. And so I thought the time is now, like we don't want this to be small. It's not just 50 women. I would want, how could I get 100 women and I, well, if I could get

an army of a fundraisers working together, maybe we could get 100 in a year. Like they know it's a little crazy. Um, and it will talk more if we have time about my interest in disrupting the 18 to 24 month major gift close pattern, which I can't stand that, that was, that's what got me into this whole model of, of this type of model in the first place because I was like, that's ridiculous it would take 24 months to close a gift and you know, it's clearly there's a problem that we're offering either too much choice or too much negotiating. Like the problems we're dealing with are so urgent. We got to close these gifts faster. And, and I believe if you offer the right thing, donors will say yes more quickly. And so that's what we're hoping with this model. So we have actually convinced 18 Toronto-based women led organizations whose primary audience is either entirely women or predominantly women and children to work together to fundraise. And what we have, if you, if I'm going to use an airplane analogy because it's easiest to understand. We have an airplane that's leaving for Vancouver next June and it has 100 seats on it. And Toronto Foundation, my team is going to fill the back 50 seats of that plane and we've offered to these 18 organizations to reserve as many seats as they think they could handle in terms of recruitment and that for every woman they bring onto the plane, they get \$90,000 back of their \$100,000 ask.

Cathy Mann: Nice. So these are organizations that ordinarily could probably never conceive of asking a donor for \$100,000. Almost none of them have ever received \$100,000 gift before. A couple of that, we have a couple of big guys like the YW Toronto, which I couldn't imagine doing it without them, but even they don't have a huge pool of \$100,000 donors in their midst. They're, they are thinking maybe four or five seats on this plane. But then I got my little guys like Dress for Success or Macauley Children's centre who are going to reserve one or two seats. And. But for them it will be a new threshold. We know that when you make that big ask to \$100,000 pledge and it will be a pledge that we over time for most of the women, but it sets a whole new standard for your organization. And so that's what excites me about the capacity building and you know, for us, I went out to about 55 organizations to ask would you be interested and these are the 18 that put their hands up and because we knew this won't be easy, like fundraisers are not notoriously good collaborators. Right?

Cathy Mann: Well, we have never been given, um, a model or a paradigm that allows us to collaborate.

Sharon Avery: That's right. Yeah.

Cathy Mann: And so that's why I was so excited when I heard about this model because in fact, why would you say no to that?

Sharon Avery: Yes. Well, and we're finding women even before we finalize the case for support are very interested. You know, the reactions are all very different. A like you know, if, if, if the small your favorite small or comes to you and says, I have two seats on this plane, I would sure love you to take one of them and look at this

learning journey you'll go on, because the deal is that they're going to go to the women deliver conference.

Sharon Avery: They have to pay all their own travel. Let's just be clear about that upfront. Coady, we're going to go out to antigonish Nova Scotia, the following, right? So we're just two ends of the country. It's the Toronto Foundation. Like how disruptive is that idea? They go from Toronto to Vancouver to antigonish and then in between each organization, no matter how many seats they reserved on the plane, they host the whole group once. So now you know I'm disrupting patterns. So I want these hundred women to be exposed to 18 great organizations in the city doing amazing work right up close. And so the orgs, if they've only brought one moment to the table, they're meeting 99 other philanthropists. Right? And so I think that's a great win in all of this.

Cathy Mann: Yeah. From my perspective, it's so exciting that this model that you're developing is not only taking donors on a learning journey, but it's also taking those organizations and building capacity in a sector that so needs capacity built and that frankly should have those huge donations being directed towards it because they're dealing with intractable social issues.

Sharon Avery: Well, and I didn't say the best part, which is the donations will be all unrestricted. Oh yeah, that's right. So that's the trust part of the collective is that the women are signing up, making their gift and their, these organizations are going to get that \$90,000 back unrestricted. And so we're teaching the donor something about trust. We're teaching the orgs about how you handle that trust and reporting back in you know, still inappropriate way. And so I'm really excited about that. I mentioned the 18 to 24 months, so I, you know, with only a year to get 100, obviously that's shorter. You know, we had a woman sign up last week in 15 minutes.

Cathy Mann: Ah!

Sharon Avery: So like, I'm not saying that's the average, you know, but we found with our next gen is they were signing up within a couple of days. It was, it was because it's a pretty straightforward APP.

Cathy Mann: Yeah. Well this is the thing. That's what I love about it because it is so clear cut and like you're either like, yeah, that's kind of cool and that's in, that's gonna be of interest to me. or, or no.

Sharon Avery: It's totally binary and women will glaze over. Like this isn't for everyone. Women will, will say why would I want to do that? But we're finding that more than likely they're going, okay, check, I can do the money. The money 100 is doable for me. Um, I like the concept. I love the 18 organizations are working together and it's really 20 because it's awesome, cody as well. And um, and so all I really need to do is think about is the timing right? And do I have the time to put into it? What I would want to let me go away and talk to my family or let me go and

think about it. It's usually within a week there are kind of inner out. So what I love about it from a very practical standpoint is it's very efficient and a no negotiations, no, you know, no choice. One price, one experience. And uh, they can solid borrowed if they want. They don't have to come to everything, but they definitely, there's not a lot of wiggle room. And so I think for the orgs to who don't have a lot of time. Yeah. Um, you know, when you're the Ed of a women's shelter and you're also the lead fundraiser and head of HR and head of government relations, you know, do you want an efficient ask as well.

Cathy Mann: The other thing that I really love that I see the Toronto Foundation being able to play a role in now is convening. I mean, you are in such a great position now to be able to play a role where you can bring people in and have conversations. Um, can you talk a little bit about some of the convening that you've done or some of the partnerships that you've either helped facilitate or that you're in the process of discussing right now?

Sharon Avery: So, um, I'll give you a little example that kind of sums it up. I think because I'm always saying to my staff, our goal is to broker a relationship and get out of the way. Like we shouldn't be in the way if it needs us to keep being involved, that's great. But we're starting to get calls from professional advisors who are working with their clients and saying, I, they've asked me about this topic and I don't know where to go. And so the one recently was really interesting was uh, a professional advisor who's like, I have a family wants to make a very significant gift for peace and security in the Middle East. Wow. Where do I begin?

Cathy Mann: Holy

Sharon Avery: Ha, Holy is right. I mean, we won't go through how fraught that that is, but you know, I was able to get on the phone with them and say like, let's just have a chat about this first because there's a whole lot of minds we could step in literally in this space. And I need to know before I convene a group of, organizations or leaders who I can say to them: this is not an ask. You are not soliciting in this meeting. But I'm giving you audience to show that your organization has really interesting things going on, but I would never just bring one Oregon, right? Because I don't believe in that. I would probably bring five or six and I would bring them in for various reasons and I, we would have done our due diligence on them in advance. So there's a small example of where we're starting to find ourselves convening. And then on a bigger scale, we're increasingly trying to be a good partner with the city. Um, I think, you know, community foundations are mixed on the, their relationship with the city. Some feel they have to really stay away. They don't want to be seen as the charity of the city, which we certainly are not, but um, you know, after years of working in the UN system where government is the scalable resource, right?

Sharon Avery: This is the or the, you know, if you can actually work well with government, you can take things to scale in a way you can't in any other way. And so I think it's interesting that, um, you know, we worked on the Toronto Strong campaign, with the city, which has not been easy.

Cathy Mann: For anybody who might not know what the Toronto Strong fund is, you want to just describe that a little bit?

Sharon Avery: Yes, this is a result of the tragedy in North York with the van driving up on the sidewalk and, and killing and injuring a whole lot of people. A young man who had serious autism. Let's be clear, this has other implications. You know, there's a mental health piece here. There's an misogyny piece, but, but most people don't know that, you know, he had had very close counseling all through school and timed out, aged out, right?

Sharon Avery: How many of us are dealing in that space of mental health and, and the lack of support systems for kids over 18, and he was a totally ripe to be picked up by an incel group and, and brought into it. None of which of course forgives the situation, but it provides context and it's been a very complex project, more way more complex than I would've ever expected because you're dealing with, you know, 25 victims families as your first stakeholders. And you can't convene them, but you're convening a lot of people behind the scenes to make sure that things are being done appropriately. Privacy is respected, people are being treated equally because you can't use needs based assessments in these environments. So that's been a challenge in convening.

Cathy Mann: So has that been something that you have done or the city has done or collaboratively?

Sharon Avery: This one we figured out together. Um, and in real time, like it's not something you couldn't plan for the van incident. So as a community foundation, when I knew this had happened after eight years of emergency fundraising at UNICEF, I immediately wanted to jump into action and the team wasn't sure, should we be involved? Is this the role of a community foundation? You know, we have all the infrastructure we're the back end of a lot of people's charities, we're not a fundraising machine, you know, we're not the Red Cross, but the Red Cross wasn't stepping in united way. I called them and said, if you step in, we'll back you. They said, no, it doesn't feel like our place. And so, you know, went out and got some consensus in the sector. MLSC foundation that Jays care. All those sporting events were happening that week. I reached out to Sev at Civic Action just in case like - should we step in?

Sharon Avery: And so we waited 12 hours and then I finally sent a note to the mayor not to the mayor's office to the partnership division is who we typically work with and our Resilience Officer and said, we're here if you need us. We think probably people are going to wake up Tuesday morning wanting to do something and uh, at the very least, and this is no slag against Gofund me, I think they're disruptive and innovative, but corporate Canada is not going to want to go to a go fund me page and the mayor is going to have challenge and how can we solve that problem for him? So that's how it came about. But it's been, it's been hard. And my unicef world, our, our, our mantra was always get money flowing in the first seven to 10 days because that's the donor expectation, of course.

Sharon Avery: And so we needed to know the day we were launching, the moment we're launching, where are we going to send this money? Right? So we chose Victim Services who works very closely with the police, but they'd never dealt with a disaster like this, at this scale. They deal with a high volume of victims, but all individually never involving payouts mean certainly in small small situations but never with a fund behind it. And so that has been a very complex thing to manage and to make sure we didn't drown them. Like in the end we realized that we put it off a lot of pressure on them from day one they put, we put a lot of media scrutiny on them from the day one. And so it's been a lot of learning. And so I think again, as a community foundation working with the city, we've both taken away tons of lessons about how we would do this again.

Sharon Avery: And we've gotten great advice from Boston and Manchester. Um, and so again, from a convenience standpoint, we're in a great position to bring those people to, to bear and we've been using global experiences to help drive us. And, and it's fascinating.

Cathy Mann: Well, this has been an incredible conversation. I have one last question for you because you really are promoting social change philanthropy on a big scale and on a scale that we haven't really seen in this country. Maybe, maybe anywhere. I don't know what, what do you think, what do you think the longterm impact of, of what you're doing now will be on our sector?

Sharon Avery: Well, I sure hope it does a couple of things, you know, the next, the next thing we want to do at Toronto Foundation is really inspire a movement of radical generosity.

New Speaker: Love it!

Sharon Avery: And you know, and we're trying to figure out what, what would that look like? But I think it's going to look something like the things we've been experimenting with in the last 18 months, but just maybe more of it because I think what the, uh, you know, I'm talking about the data points that keep me awake at night. The 60 to one really keeps me awake. The other one is just the fact that fewer donors in this country. They're still generous. Those that are still giving are generous, but I feel we're losing a commitment to a percentage of our household income. And, you know, in Vital Signs we report on the fact that the gap in this city, you know, the top one percent or household incomes of 250k or more and the bottom 35 percent of this city are living off 20,000 or less. Right? And so what I'm hoping through radical generosity is to inspire people to be really purposeful in their social change philanthropy and do but purposeful in their goal setting. You know, and this is kind of why starting with Next Gen makes a lot of sense because, you know, as young people, I remember my parents pounding into me, RRSPs! RRSPs! Make it a habit! Make it a habit! And you, you know, you put aside an amount every year and you'd put it in. And, and why aren't we doing that with philanthropy anymore? And, and why can't philanthropy be fun and engaging and why can't it be a learning journey? And why can't you enjoy the process well beyond, you know, a lot of recognition or a

lot of cocktail events and special galas and things. Not that there's anything wrong with any of that, but, but I think there's room in the market. I think there's room for people who are just dying to be intellectually engaged in it and I think that's what social change philanthropy offers

Cathy Mann: You have come along at the right time at the Toronto Foundation. I mean, I actually think the programs that you're running speak to people in a way that a lot of traditional philanthropy programs don't necessarily speak to people, so way to go!

Sharon Avery: I think you were, as I said, we're just having fun every day and, and feeling really excited about the potential. Like the hardest thing I have to deal with in this job is there's so much opportunity. Who gets to say that? Right? And so I feel that really embracing an abundance mentality is if I feel free to do that in this job in a way I probably haven't ever and I, and it makes me excited about how we can inspire more people to do more for all the causes that we all care about. Thank you so much for chatting philanthropy with me today. Thanks, Cathy.

Cathy Mann: \*Background music starts\*

New Speaker: Hey there. Thanks for listening. I just love how much shift Sharon is disturbing in our sector in such a positive way. Sharon's conversation today is a clear reminder, not only that, it doesn't hurt to ask, but that it can be fun to ask. Regardless of what you think about asking, If you like this episode and want to hear more, be sure to head over to itunes or wherever you get your podcasts and subscribe. And really, please do subscribe! We get a dopamine rush every time we see a new subscriber. Humour us. If you have questions, kudos or concerns you'd like to share, check us out at [www.itdoesnthurttoaskpodcast.com](http://www.itdoesnthurttoaskpodcast.com). My thanks to Anne LeMesurier for making this podcast a reality and generally being so great to work with. I mean it quite literally when I say I couldn't do it without Anne. Like my mom always said It Doesn't Hurt to Ask! The great music you're hearing on this podcast is dog days by Isaac Joel. This podcast is produced by Poodle Party Productions \*dog barks\* good girl brandy and Cathy Mann & Associates.