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SUMMIT ON
VOLUNTEERISM
A Response to
Economic Crisis

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On behalf of United Way, I just first want to thank Knights of Columbus and Fairfield University for convening us on such an important topic and at a critical moment in history. United Way has long supported the idea and the practice of volunteerism. In fact, it really is interwoven in everything that we do. We consider ourselves a highly volunteer driven organization, from our board to our committees, to the people who are doing very grassroots work with our community-based organizations we support. And I'll tell you a little bit just briefly about our mission and why that volunteerism is so central to accomplishing that mission.

A few years ago we became much more refined and focused in the work that we do in local communities. And our practice is really to help low income working families access the basic building blocks for a better life, including access to a good education, quality healthcare, and income supports to help them meet needs month to month. And our goals are very ambitious. Nationally, we've come out with ten year goals where we want to be able to increase the graduation rate by 50%; we want to be able to decrease by a third families and individuals who are exhibiting unhealthy, unproductive behaviors, and also be able to increase by a third families who are achieving economic stability. And those are big, bold goals that we cannot achieve by ourselves, which is why we partner with local governments, many local nonprofits, and most importantly, the volunteers in our communities.

What I'd like to do is just spend a couple of moments on some of the trends that we are seeing with the partners we are in contact with each day, and also just give you a very brief snapshot of the types of volunteer opportunities we offer in New York City. I'd say that the first trend, and this really builds on what Laura and others have said as well, is that increasingly we are seeing people who have been laid off, and who want the spiritual, emotional and physical connection of being with other people, but also to really keep their skills refined. So we're seeing people who want just general opportunities, whether it might be serving in soup kitchens or food pantries, or whether it's more skill-based opportunities, where they can fine tune and keep fresh their professional skills.

We're also seeing on the corporate front, particularly where there have been massive layoffs and some morale issues, companies who come to us and say we want some team building exercises for our employees. They bring together cross functional teams, they bring together teams between companies, so there have been recent mergers, to really just have a day of caring where they feel good about the work that they're doing, but then also walk away feeling good about each other and good about their company. We're hearing both anecdotally and through some of the research that those kind of opportunities help substantially with retention. So one could argue within the corporate environment there's a strong business case to be made for really advocating volunteerism in the workplace and in the communities where those companies live and work.

I would also say that another trend is that on the topic of skill-based volunteerism, we see both companies who say they want that for leadership development purposes, but also employees who are



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presently working who say, you know what? I want to do something with my skills that I've developed in the workplace, but I want to be able to apply them in a different environment. Most importantly, I want to be able to use what I've learned on the job to be able to help people, but also maybe to be able to tweak it a little bit because it might help my prospects, either for advancement or if I do lose my job I've got something else I can talk about. And just kind of an interesting example of where we've seen that play out, particularly relevant now, with tax season upon us, we've got a program at United Way where we work with a number of local VITA sites, volunteer income tax assistance centers, where we have low income families, working families, who qualify for earned income tax credits who don't know they qualify for that tax credit and don't know that they qualify for free tax preparation. So we can use volunteers for the outreach to let people know that those services exist, but then also financial professionals who will go through the process with them, and I admire them greatly because they dedicate two weekend days to be trained on how to be both tax preparers, as well as financial coaches for these families, and just in last year alone we helped about 1,500 families file 1,900 tax returns.

And you might say well, you filed more tax returns than you had families, but some of these families needed to go back a couple of years. And what that represents is about \$2 million to the local communities in EITC tax refunds that then circulate in that local economy. So it benefits the family because it's a large cash infusion oftentimes for people who are making minimum wage. But it's also good for that local economy. So it's one of the programs that we really like to hold up as a great example of where skill-based volunteerism could be incredibly personally satisfying for the individual doing the volunteerism, but just provides a tremendously helpful service to the families who really need those services the most.

I would also say another trend we're seeing increasingly is people who want volunteer opportunities for their families. It's not just about their own individual fulfillment, but really trying to teach the values of giving back, not just through saving the weekly allowance of a child or their birthday money, but getting them into neighborhoods that they might not normally interact with on a day to day basis. And particularly in Manhattan where there's just such a juxtaposition of extreme wealth and extreme poverty. We see a number of families who say I need my child to understand the privilege they have and that not everybody has that privilege, and that they have a responsibility to return some of the good luck that's been afforded to them.

Lastly, just on a few thoughts around some of United Way's work in volunteerism, some of what we're trying to do better, some of where we've had some successes, in addition to the skill-based volunteerism program, like MoneyUP, we've seen a very interesting trend of what we call affinity groups emerging. So for example we've got a network of professional women who have really enjoyed the collegiality, the networking of coming together around a particular issue, but again, coming from different industries, doing it on weekends and evenings, and picking an issue that they really want to get behind and support. Our, what we call, Women United in Philanthropy has said early education is a big issue for us. And these are women, many of whom run HR departments for their companies or who have financial expertise or marketing expertise. They've been able to help publicly subsidize daycare centers, qualify and become accredited.



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These publicly subsidized daycare centers are not just licensed, but really go through a national accreditation where their curriculum improves, their facilities improve, and most importantly, the professional development of the executive director and the teachers improves. And there was this one story I loved, a couple of years ago, one of our executive directors was just shy of getting the accreditation, but she needed to have an HR manual. And she said this is going to take me months to prepare. I don't know how to do this. And one of our women and United member said, look, I'm an HR professional, let me spend a weekend with you and we'll get it done. And that's what happened. The daycare was accredited and there were a lot of benefits that came from that, both for the center, as well as for the kids.

We have a partnership with the mayor's office around a site called VolunteerNYC.org. And I want to mention this because it's available, it's accessible to anybody. Right now it has roughly 1,000 volunteer opportunities, about 10,000 registered users. Anybody, any 501(c)3 nonprofit can go and log in any volunteer opportunity where you might need somebody to help you out. And so it's a free service and it's highly trafficked. You'll see some greater promotion of that service. But the benefit of VolunteerNYC.org versus some of the other online matching services, at least for New Yorkers, is that you can constrain the geography to just a few blocks, so that if you're in lower Manhattan, you can find within your zip code volunteer opportunities that meet both your geographical preferences, as well as your interests and skills. So that's a service I would encourage you to check out if you need volunteers.

And then just lastly, I'll end on something else that we see as a trend, and frankly we struggle with. And that's how do you measure the impact of volunteerism? We think about the funding community and how I think many of us in the nonprofit sector are constantly asked to measure the impact of our work, letting many of us become better at some of the very tangible concrete efforts that rise beyond outputs to the real outcomes. But it's much more challenging in the area of volunteerism. And so I would welcome any really great ideas anybody out there has, and successful models on long term measurements for volunteerism. So thank you, thank you for the opportunity today.

RYSCAVAGE: Our second panel this morning is going to address the very important question of how can we develop better collaboration in the area of volunteer service. This is an extremely important question because I think in terms of leveraging a partnership in terms of trying to meet the kind of questions we were raising earlier today, I think this is a very important and in some ways it's essential for moving forward on this issue. So, we've assembled a very interesting panel. I'm going to do as I did before, introduce them from the audience's left and move to the right and then we'll ask each of them to speak for a few minutes and then open it up to questions and answers.

First I'd like to introduce the president of the National Fraternal Congress of America, Joseph Annotti. He has an extensive background in public policy, media relations, and public affairs. The National Fraternal Congress is a kind of coalition that unites 74 non-profit organizations in a cooperative network. So, it in itself is a kind of collaboration, so from that point of view of experience it will be interesting.



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Paul Bueker is executive director of General Electric Volunteers and he's also the controller and secretary for the G.E. Foundation, a very important player in the area of community services and an important contributor to building the common good in many communities.

Next we have Rev. Mark Farr, who is senior director of the Interfaith Initiatives at the Points of Light Foundation. The Points of Light Foundation helps people who run volunteer services, so it's kind of a support service in a sense for volunteer organizations.

Alex Knopp is executive director of Dwight Hall at Yale University. Dwight Hall is a 501(3)(c) charity and is the only student run college based umbrella center for public service and social justice in the United States. It engages about 3500 student volunteers and it's an important center particularly for undergraduate involvement and graduate student involvement in volunteer services.

Next we have Fr. Larry Schneider, who is president of Catholic Charities U.S.A. That's the national office for over 1600 or more local Catholic charities throughout the United States. Catholic Charities is one of the great social service providers in America, providing services for nearly 8 million people a year at the local level across the country.

And finally, Mei Cobb is vice president for volunteer activities at the United Way. We've already had a person speaking from the United Way. I think you understand what an important player the United Way is in the local communities across the United States due to its particular focus on volunteer activities.