

## "Growing the Good": The United Way of Metro Chicago Doubles Down on its Core Mission

**DAVE CASPER:** Welcome to Growing the Good. I'm Dave Casper, head of BMOs, North American commercial banking business. We're working with our customers to help them through this incredibly volatile time. They're stepping up in so many ways, helping to keep commerce moving and keep people safe. I have the pleasure of speaking with a number of CEOs running businesses in a variety of industries, hearing their personal stories about the challenges they're facing, and some of the very innovative ways that they've adapted in these uncertain times. They I have the pleasure of speaking with Sean Garrett, President and CEO of the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago. Sean, this has been a particularly difficult time for all of us. Difficult in Chicago, difficult in Minneapolis and difficult everywhere. What is the United Way doing specifically to help our neighborhoods heal during this tough time?

**SEAN GARRETT:** Yeah, well, first of all, thank you for having us. You're right. It certainly has been a difficult few weeks. But I think we also have to acknowledge it's been a difficult few centuries, for so many of our neighborhoods. And in many ways, our focus has remained the same. Our focus has been on the neighborhoods across our region, that have been disinvested in for years, and adored the brunt of some of the economic challenges that we see across our region. And so we pre COVID, we're focused on those neighborhoods, neighborhoods like Austin, when COVID hit, these are the neighborhoods that were most disproportionately impacted, both in terms of the number of cases as well as the economic impact. And so we double down on our partnerships, and our partners in those communities have risen to the occasion. And now as we look at the unrest that we've seen over the last few weeks, what is really made clear to us is, though the work we have been doing has been critically important, and needs to continue. We also have so much more to look at the underlying causes and challenges associated with racism, that have plagued our communities for far too long. And so we're going to continue doing the work we have in partnership with neighborhoods. But we're going to continue to challenge ourselves to ensure that neighborhoods are driving that work, that neighborhood leaders are the ones helping to drive and really making those decisions for the neighborhood to have control over their destinies, and not others coming in and helping tell them what to do. And so really, for us, that has been the continued focus on where we started. But really looking at how do we do a better job of changing some of those underlying causes to make sure that we don't go back to where we were, but come out in a much better place.

**DAVE CASPER:** Sean, you very eloquently remind people of what's really important. And so let's get right into it. In just a few months, the covid 19 pandemic, has affected so many people in so many ways, Ellis a little bit about what the United Way has done in leading how this has fit into your mission. For those that are so much in need right now.

**SEAN GARRETT:** When COVID hit, we knew this was going to have an impact. We obviously didn't know the extent. But we were able to come together with the Chicago Community Trust in the mayor's office, to launch a COVID response fund. And, you know, it quickly gathered interest in dollars. But more importantly, what we began to see were the exact neighborhoods were working before, were the neighborhoods that were hardest hit by COVID, both from a public health perspective, but also economically. And so that's meant things like food. You know, we've had literally millions of dollars of food distribution across our region. It's meant things like rent and mortgage assistance. It's meant helping people meet their basic needs. And you know that we've been overwhelmed by the generosity of the community, but also, unfortunately, the need that we're seeing.

**DAVE CASPER:** How did this actually get underway? And how did you end up working with the Chicago Community Trust?

**SEAN GARRETT:** You know, right before the stay at home order was put out, we were seeing what was happening, particularly in Seattle. You know, Seattle was ahead of us at that time period. And in Seattle, the United Way, along with their Community Foundation and the public sector, had come together to create a fund that really was meant for the economic hardship that they were already beginning to experience. And we saw that clearly, as things were coming this way, we were going to have some sort of impact. And so we reached out to the mayor's office, and we reached out to the trust to see if they would be willing to partner and within an hour everyone said yes, and let's get to work. And over the course of about 24 hours were able to raise the first \$8 million, which we thought was amazing at that time. A week later, we had given out the first round of grants, and that continued and has continued for the last 11 or 12 weeks and today we have nearly \$33 million dollars raised, and nearly \$19 million to have been distributed throughout our region.

**DAVE CASPER:** 19 million already spent, tell me a little bit about who's actually getting the money, what types of nonprofit has the program really support.

**SEAN GARRETT:** So we've focused really on the emergency response needs me think of things like food and shelter, think of basic supplies, cleaning supplies, the types of things that are needed at all times that have become heightened during this time period. But what's been really interesting to me at least is the makeup of the nonprofit's that we've been working with really fall into two categories. The first of the large organizations that you would think of think of the Greater Chicago food depository who's been remarkable at getting food delivered throughout our region. But the other part of it has been these, what I would call hyper local organizations, folks that are small and trusted, that work in a really niche markets around our region. And what they have been is the trusted last mile provider. And they're able to, to take whatever the need is. So if it's food, they understand what the cultural needs within that community, they're trusted, they know how to work in ways that the residents feel safe. And

so these large scale organizations have been working with these smaller, what we call community hubs. And together, they've been working seamlessly. And it's really been impressive to see that helping ensure that folks have that food, they have the access to pay their rent, have the ability to stay in their home. The other thing, though, that's really been, I think, impressive of the nonprofit community is every day, these these staff members, these workers are going into work every study themselves. You know, there's been reports that have come out about the homeless shelters in over half the staff and some of the shelters have contracted COVID themselves. And yet every day, they're there to care for the residents to make sure that they have a safe place to be. And so we've also been able to provide funding for PPE funding to ensure that they have the cleaning supplies so that more of those staff members can be protected, because they're there every day making sure that the residents of this community are taking care of.

**DAVE CASPER:** People that either still have their jobs, or are potentially in retirement or some have actually saved money during this period of time. And now they're saving more just because of the great uncertainty. What would you say to those people in terms of how they might consider giving a little bit back to the United Way?

**SEAN GARRETT:** Yeah, so I think two things, one, there are times where we are called upon to do something that's bigger than united way bigger than ourselves. And clearly, we're in a time like that right now. And there are a lot of people who can't give right now. But there are those of us who are lucky enough to be in the position, I think we have to look in and say this is about our city. This is about our region. And there are so many people who need our help right now. What is it that we can do? What is it we can do as a donor? What is it that we can do as a company. And so I think these are one of those moments, and our city has done such a good job over its history of standing up in those moments. But clearly, we're in it. But the part I also tell people is that it matters what you give, but it matters that you give and what I mean by that is we've raised \$1.5 million for this fund from individuals who are giving 2030 and \$40. their individual gift might not stand out. But collectively that \$1.5 million has meant people are getting food, people are getting shelter, people are getting access to peepee the types of things that we need to do right now. And that's what coming together means, but also sends a clear message to neighborhoods around this region that people care about them.

**DAVE CASPER:** Sean, as always, I really appreciate the time you've taken to speak with me today. Thanks to you, and thanks to all of your team for the great work that the United Way is doing to support the Chicago communities during this unprecedented time. Thanks for listening to growing the good. I hope you'll join me again for another conversation. Until then, stay safe.