



## Transcript of Social Cause Panel Discussion: Environment

**Hosted by:** Lindsey Barta (Magnified Giving, Associate Director)

**Participants:** Jonathan Adee (Keep Cincinnati Beautiful), Suzy De Young (La Soupe), Karen Kahle (Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati)

**Length of Video:** 32:25

**Question 1:** Introduce yourself and your organization.

**Question 2:** What is the impact of environmental work on the community? Why is this work important?

**Question 3:** how does taking care of the environment, taking care of the environmental impact our community, ourselves, and the people around us?

**Question 4:** What are some of the challenges facing this kind of work at the moment, what makes it difficult to conduct this type of work? And what are the things that need to be overcome?

**Question 4:** Tell me a little bit about how your organizations are able to collaborate to achieve your missions, and how those kind of work together to achieve the greater mission of solving issues related to the environment?

**Question 5:** I would love to hear from each of you, why you felt compelled to select a career in the nonprofit sector, and specifically in an area that has work related to the environment.

**Question 6:** What advice would you give a student who is interested in supporting this cause? What can they do? How can they get started? What kind of difference can they make?

**Lindsey (0:00-:027):** Hello, everyone! My name is Lindsey and I am from Magnified Giving and I am here with some representatives from organizations that have missions related to work on the environment. We are really excited to have this conversation today. I think you guys are going to learn a lot. I am going to start with Suzy from La Soupe and **I will allow her to introduce herself and her mission.**

**Suzy (0:27-1:17):** Hi Guys! My name is Suzy, I own, well I don't own, I am the founder of a nonprofit called La Soupe. We recently relocated to Walnut Hills, it is a much bigger space for us. We formed this organization six years ago to really address the need, two different needs--which was the vast amount of food that was perfectly edible that was hitting the landfills that could be utilized and picking that food up and making better food, combining all the randomness of it, creating meals and then distributing it to the food insecure of our city and Northern Kentucky.

**Jonathan (1:17-2:01):** Good morning, everybody! My name is Jonathan Adee I am the Executive Director of Keep Cincinnati Beautiful. KCB is one of 5 or 600 or so affiliates of Keep America Beautiful throughout the country. We are dedicated to making the city of Cincinnati and the surrounding area cleaner, safer, healthier, and more connected by teaching students through environmental education and picking up trash and tires and making each one of our 52 neighborhoods within the city safer, and protecting public health by making our areas more beautiful.

**Karen (2:01-2:35):** Hello! I am Karen Kahle and I am the Executive Director at the Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati. We have actually been around since 1942, we started as an organization that helped people plant victory gardens during World War II. But today we think of ourselves as more of an environmental education center. We try to really educate adults and kids using gardening, both school and community gardens, horticulture, and sustainability through our green learning station as ways to teach people about environmental issues.

**Lindsey (2:35-2:57):** Thank you, guys. Just moving on to some of the first questions we have to share about why this work is important. **Can you share, what is the impact of environmental work on the community? Why is this work important?**

**Suzy (2:57-2:46):** I can go first from our end, I think it is fairly obvious now with everything that is happening in our world what not caring for the environment can do. I think the most certain fires in California and Oregon and the continuation of climate change, anything that we can do and do it proactively now is going to save the environment for the future. I think we need to start thinking long and hard about every decision that is made that is thought of as better development, as better development, in a thousand years, not next year.

**Karen (2:46-5:00):** Just to echo that, our staff, we feel a real sense of urgency around our work now. Since the pandemic crisis and now with the wildfire and things that are going on I think we just feel a real sense of urgency and a need for what we do now more than ever. We are also I think seeing that people share that sense of urgency, we have seen a real uptick of people being interested in gardening, being food insecure with the pandemic, or just recognizing the therapeutic values of digging in the dirt and just a lot of young people getting engaged in our habitat restoration work. We are really encouraged by what we see in terms of people understanding that this is a really important issue and that you know our future and the future of

the planet depends on increasing our environmental literacy and environmental awareness and then really taking action. We are really focused around environmental education and action. Education that leads to our students taking some kind of action at home at work, or in their neighborhood.

**Jonathan** (5:00-5:55): I would just say that for, gosh, a number of decades now your parents and grandparents have made decisions that have been kind of in their short term best interest, thinking that our planet and our environment would always be there in the future and that nothing would ever change. And we are now realizing that things do change and they change rapidly and we are all scrambling at this point to repair the damage that we have already done. The planet is a huge issue and it may seem like more than you can bite off. But your neighborhood isn't, and it is important to do what you can locally and to establish those behavior changes that generations before did not establish because we do not live in a throwaway world.

**Lindsey** (5:55-6:25): Can you guys speak particularly to this issue, I think sometimes it can be difficult sometimes, especially if you have not thought about it before: How does caring for the environment really impact you, your family, and impact people. Can you speak to that, **how does taking care of the environment, taking care of the environmental impact our community, ourselves, and the people around us?**

**Jonathan** (6:25-7:33): we have done studies on environmental justice, and particularly with the Black Lives Matter movement and things like that. It is just another avenue that is access to justice and at least in Cincinnati the environmental negative effects are more concentrated in poorer neighborhoods and in communities of color. What that means is that the trash that surrounds, the blight contaminants affect public health disproportionately in poorer neighborhoods so the environment actually has a tremendous effect on childhood health, nutrition, access to good things public safety where the environment is in worse shape environmental crimes come and with environmental crimes come other kinds of crimes so crime is higher public safety and public health is lower we don't take as good care of our environment.

**Karen** (7:42-8:27): I would add to that that I think as Jonathan touched on it impacts our lives in all kinds of ways, from the quality of our food to the quality of our air, we have very high asthma rates in Cincinnati, it just impacts the quality of our life in many ways. And now I think with what we are witnessing in terms of the hurricanes, the storms, the pandemic and things that people understand that there is interconnection now and that if we don't take care of our environment we are not going to be able to survive. So I think that people are starting to recognize that more and more.

**Suzy** (8:27-8:58): I would just say to both of your points it does become overwhelming, to me I know when you look at anything past your backyard, it just seems like how could this little me picking up this gum wrapper make a difference? And it really truly is a collective experience that if all of us work together we can make a bigger difference and it is going to rely on the next generation for sure.

**Lindsey (8:58-9:17): What are some of the challenges facing this kind of work at the moment, what makes it difficult to conduct this type of work? And what are the things that need to be overcome?**

**Suzy (9:17-10:45):** Well on our end, we started as a fresh food rescue, meaning perfectly edible primarily produce is what we were most concerned with because we could see the vast amount of produce going into dumpsters, versus even being composted. Looking at it, I couldn't tell why it was going into the dump. I couldn't figure it out. I just knew if I could get my hands on it I could make some really good food. And that is how it all started is just pretty much just an experiment to see, because much like the people that we cook for, we say that the food that we rescue is imperfect, but when you care about the food that you've rescued you can transform that into something that is good for everybody. And we use our talent as Chefs to really combine create and try to figure out how to create something delicious with these 50 items of randomness that seemingly do not go together but maybe they could and create something really good for people that have been marginalized in our society and for anybody who is just hungry.

**Karen (10:45-11:45):** For us, to go back to what Suzy said a little earlier, about how these issues can just feel overwhelming and especially I think students can be left with a sense of hopelessness. I think for us, we really focus on giving people a sense of hope, a way to get involved that not only makes them feel good but makes them see that they are making a difference. I also think that sometimes issues around the environment are hard to prioritize when you have so many basic needs and so much poverty and other things that seem more important and more significant. I think sometimes it is just getting the issue to be more of a priority for people and then giving them something concrete to do to overcome that kind of sense of hopelessness and overwhelm that I think we can feel if you read the news these days or if you look around.

**Jonathan (11:45-13:00):** For us, there are COVID challenges, which are that the governor doesn't really still allow mass gatherings. And a lot of the work that we do to reduce litter and blight in our city happens with big groups of volunteers. Then there are the more basic kinds of challenges, so in the city of Cincinnati, the number one complaint call that comes into the city is about trash and litter everywhere. So if you listen to some of these calls, "well *somebody* should do something about that." I feel like going with stickers and putting them on people saying "I am somebody," it is something that everybody wants something to be done but everybody wants somebody else to do it. So there is that challenge of behavior change that each individual has responsibility for their own environment. There are things that politicians do, there are things that corporations do, and those are challenges to overcome, but we are the people who have to inhabit our planet, so we are the people who can do something.

**Lindsey (13:00-13:30): Tell me a little bit about how your organizations are able to collaborate to achieve your missions,** and maybe that is even thinking of other organizations in the community or maybe even not an active collaboration but thinking about the different

missions that your organizations have and **how those kind of work together to achieve the greater mission of solving issues related to the environment?**

**Karen (13:30-15:15):** I think the Civic Garden Center would not be where it is today or have been around this long without a really rich history of collaboration. I think everything we do is in collaboration whether it is with our over 300 volunteers, we have a very strong collaboration right now with Cincinnati Parks, several of the sites where we are undertaking our habitat restoration work are park owned properties so we are working in close partnership with them and bringing our expertise and our volunteers to do some of that habitat restoration work. We also are working with Cincinnati parks now to restore the house botanic garden that we share 8 acres we share with Cincinnati Parks, we are restoring that and turning it into a (kick \*\*\*) outdoor classroom that we can use to educate, bring students and just educate them around issues around plant diversity, stormwater management, solar panels, whatever. So we work in close collaboration with parks. We've always worked in Cincinnati Public Schools, so we have a strong collaboration with a handful of programs where we help them run their school garden and provide some education programs throughout the year. We just really depend on collaboration, we work with Groundwork Ohio River Valley now, everything that we do we really look for partners to do the work and to really magnify the impact of our work.

**Suzy (15:15-17:34):** We are also heavily indebted to so many other areas that we have to work in collaboration with others. I think that one of the biggest things for us is finding places for the food that we can't use. So civic garden center being one but we have composters that come, the biggest of us right now was trying to locate pig farmers that could come and chicken farmers that could come and pick up the food strangely enough they don't want citrus so we for whatever reason, pigs eat everything, not true, they do not eat citrus, I have no idea why, but they don't. We've been pickling and preserving our lemons and limes that we get for future use.

Also, we started from some of the food pantries receiving freezer burnt food that was freezer burnt meat--and not fit for human consumption but we spent some time researching and then located the Red Wolf sanctuary down in Indiana. That is the first and always the fastest adoption of a run that we put up on our website. We have a run to the Red Wolf Sanctuary if anybody would like to bring some raw frozen meat down there to feed the wild animals. So that has been an interesting new curve for us. One of the things, I actually did a run about a month ago for the first time in a long time and they were forever grateful. Because of the pandemic, nobody was driving and they rely on roadkill that, they [the Red Wolf Sanctuary] were so low on the food they didn't know what they were going to do because 70% of their food comes from the sheriff's and the highway patrol, whatever, bringing roadkill to them and they have not been receiving it. Talk about the trickle-down effect of the pandemic, something I never saw coming was them saying thank you for this, especially today because we don't have anything to feed the animals with. We collaborate with a lot of people.

**Jonathan (17:43-18:44):** I think it's just important for participants to understand a little bit about how nonprofits work, we are what is called a leveraged part of the City of Cincinnati. So for the

city, let's say they bring in \$1 of taxes or whatever and they generate one dollar of benefit from those taxes. When you work for a nonprofit we utilize collaboration, scores of volunteers (15,000 annually), we utilize fundraising and partnerships, and being frugal on things like that return like \$20 for every \$1 that comes in. So that is why this particular sector, particularly in the environment is so important because the problems are so big that you need organizations like LaSoupe and the Civic Garden Center and ourselves, that for every dollar that comes in, we are bridging in a whole lot of benefit and that happens through collaboration.

**Lindsey (18:44-19:27):** True, and I am excited to hear all of those things from you guys because I hope that for you students watching you see really when you support any one of these organizations you're really impacting much more than just that organization and the people that they serve and the things that they do, you are really participating in this network of all of these awesome things that are happening. It is cool to me that you are getting an idea of some of those collaborations that are happening. **I would love to hear from each of you, why you felt compelled to select a career in the nonprofit sector, and specifically in an area that has work related to the environment.**

**Jonathan (19:27-20:40):** For me, I was in college when you can like youtube all this stuff, there was like "we are the world" and "Do they know it's Christmas time" and "Hands across America" and for someone who is from a "me" generation that was very powerful for me. And I was an English major in college, and two of the novels that I read were Grapes of Wrath and To Kill a Mockingbird. Those are all about helping people and kind of the plight of people who are struggling, so I kind of utilized those two areas, one kind of the concern for other and then two, kind of this realization as I am going around that there are other places in the country which still are pristine and beautiful, and we don't mean to just because we're in a city we don't have to forgo all of the benefits that nature has to provide.

**Karen (20:40-22:07):** I think for me, I grew up in a small farming community up in Northwest Ohio. I always had a connection with nature and a love of being outdoors. I am also old and so I was in college in the late 1970s during the kind of first environmental movement. I was just really impacted by that and had a class in environmental science and that really and a teacher that really just kind of woke me up to how things are interconnected and the importance of taking care of the environment and the progress that we made because of that movement in terms of cleaner air, and cleaner water. I kind of fell into nonprofit life by accident. Then just have made a career of it, because it really does give you that sense of living for something and doing something that is bigger than yourself, and that always feels good. At the Civic Garden Center, I have been there now for almost 40 years and I like to joke that gardeners are some of the coolest people in the world, and they are just really great people to be around and inspirational people, down to earth folks, so it is a great place to be with a rich history and lots of wonderful people involved in this work.

**Suzy (22:07-23:44):** I kind of came around the back end of the nonprofit world. It was really driven by the sense of, for the 30 years prior to that, and I am old like you Karen, I was part of

that generation too! So for me, I thought, you know it seems ridiculous that we grew up, and I know Karen can probably quote this same thing we were told all growing up is that “finish your plate of food there are starving children in Biafra.” Where in the heck is Biafra? I don’t even know if it’s a real place but I was told to eat my food because somebody else couldn’t. It became even a bigger issue when I became part of the problem, which means my profession is a chef is dealing with food every day and unless I’m going to be mindful about where every bit of that food goes from the minute it comes into our door, I’m not being a good steward of the earth. So, it was almost easier to become a good steward by becoming a nonprofit. I know that sounds odd but it kept me focused and I don’t think I could do it without the collaboration of all of these other organizations that are putting in hard work. Us working together is what will actually make the difference.

*\*Note, yes Biafra is a real place. It was a region in West Africa (in Nigeria). Suzy is referencing a famine that took place between 1967-1970 during wartime. The famine resulted in the loss of millions of lives, most of them children. A photo of starving children from Biafra became one of the first publicized images of wartime famine, and led to an increase in public support for wartime civilian relief, airlifts of water/food, and resulted in the foundation of international relief organizations including Doctors Without Borders. I encourage you to continue research on Biafra, as this is a very simple explanation to a complex series of conflicts, loss of life, and resulted in a global response.*

**Lindsey (23:44-24:04):** The last thing that I want to touch on before we end the recording, is just speaking directly to the students who are listening: **What advice would you give a student who is interested in supporting this cause? What can they do? How can they get started? What kind of difference can they make?**

**Jonathan (24:13-26:14):** The first piece of advice I would give, is that every time you give of yourself you receive a lot more in return than you ever give. There are all kinds of psychological benefits of giving and I think that you’re really most fully human when you do give of yourself through volunteerism, through thinking about what somebody else is going through, through generating empathy, and just by being considerate of other people. That’s what separates us from everybody else, our capacity to think about the needs of others, and when I’m saying others I am thinking of other people, people outside your families, and then there is the planet at large. Our home, despite what they show on Netflix, I don’t think we will be hitting Mars any time in the near future so this is really what we have. And it all starts in your own neighborhood, it starts on your own block, we do indexes of litter and blight block by block in Cincinnati and if you’re working on cleaning up your own block you’re doing a very big thing and if you’re learning about the environment that’s also important. As I said before, the only real weapon we have is behavior change. You can teach your peers, you can also teach your parents, I know that I learned about some of the principles of recycling and green habits and things like that from my kids because it wasn’t something that was taught to me. But when you realize just how important that piece of your education is for your life and the life of your children when you grow up, it is going to be something that is really going to impact you.

**Karen (26:14-27:54):** I think I would say, you know for a lot of kids they have grown up mostly indoors and their attention span and health have suffered as a result. In a lot of ways, I would just say get outside and get in nature. Nature just does something to you, you kind of fall in love with it when you get outside and then there's just so many opportunities to educate yourself about the environment and I think as you educate yourself and become more aware you will be inspired to take action and you will be able to find kind of where you fit in and what you want to undertake. I think to echo what Jonathan said, volunteering and giving back is one of the most fulfilling activities that we can take as humans. Being part of a group, we had a group of students at St. Xavier high school on Saturday at our habitat restoration project, we had 21 student sand just watching them working together and the feeling and the energy and the camaraderie, you can, it's inspirational to us to see students getting involved like that. So I think there are just lots of opportunities to volunteer and be a part of a group and part of an effort and have an impact that is really fulfilling. I would encourage kids to get outside in nature and let nature fall in love with nature and see where that love for nature takes you.

**Suzy (27:54-29:57):** Even at my age, I have found now I have become a forager. I love just going into the woods and trying to identify. It is like a big old easter egg hunt, you never know what you are going to find out there, and it's out there! I find it almost fascinating that I would do that when I would go on vacation in Europe. My family lives in the mountains in France and we would forage all the time, why I never felt like I could do that here I have no idea but the volunteer opportunities that come along with that. Just as I was laughing at myself I went looking for mushrooms but I came out of the park with a bag full of garbage to throw away. That is what I foraged that day. Just to be open to seeing that and every little bit helps I feel like, we were producing so much more disposable paper goods everything from carryout mentality right now because of the pandemic. The first thing that we did when the pandemic hit we signed up with terra-glove because we could see how many disposable gloves we were going through, it almost felt like it was beating up the purpose until we did this. It was like why are we trying to ramp up when we're just making it worse by all of the gloves that we are going through. So I think just taking a little bit at a time would be my answer, and do it with friends, I think it's really important. We see all the volunteers, it's the arc we are like the big arc now. Everybody comes two by two, and it just seems that people enjoy themselves more, it is a more positive experience if you're just having fun doing the work. That is what we try to give at LaSoupe.

**Lindsey (29:57-33:30):** Thank you so much for your feedback, I really appreciate your input. For students watching, thank you for watching, I hope you learned something. I hope that this inspires you to look into this issue even more. I hope you realize how important you are in contributing solutions, we need you.