

Gateways Episode 57: Closing language barriers and the digital divide in Gateway Cities

Welcome

Tracy [00:00:34] Welcome back to Gateway's, a podcast about the people, places and possibilities of our regional cities. I'm Dr. Tracy Corley, transit-oriented development fellow at MassINC.

Ben [00:00:44] And I'm Ben Forman, research director at MassINC.

Ben [00:00:47] Tracy, it's another day in social isolation. We heard today that Governor Baker and the reopening committee are going to put out a plan on May 18th. I don't know about you, but I'm getting anxious to see what that looks like. How are you holding up?

Tracy [00:01:01] Dude, I hear you. I'm anxious to see what's going on, but I'm also anxious to be back in the office with all my coworkers. I must say, though, that we've been very busy in the interim. And I'm very excited to talk about it a bit that we held last week. Our transformative transit oriented development planning and design competition. It was the first time we've ever held the event. And we're excited to have nine teams from four different schools across the Commonwealth presenting projects for the cities of Brockton Lynn, Lowell, and Springfield. They did a terrific job showing off the strengths and development opportunities in these cities TOD areas. You'll get to hear from the winning team in an episode of Gateways coming in June. Ben, let's talk about what's on the docket for today.

[00:01:46] Absolutely. But first Tracy, I gotta say, kudos to you for pulling that competition off. It was really amazing. And I think a great reminder of how much potential there is in all of our gateway cities and how much there is for making them transit-oriented development community. So thank you. We've got a packed episode today.

[00:02:08] We're gonna hear from Helena DaSilva of the Immigrants Assistance Center in New Bedford and Eva Millona, who works at the MIRA Coalition, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Association. And before that, we're going to hear from Dan Noyes, the CEO of Tech Goes Home, an organization that's working the digital divide. In more and more, we're learning that the digital divide is centered right on our Gateway City. So it's a really timely conversation as everybody's thinking about what can be done immediately, both to make sure that students are able to participate in learning and going forward to lessen the economic and social divide in our communities. So here we are. My conversation with Dan.

Dan Noyes, co-CEO of Tech Goes Home

Ben [00:02:57] All right, so Dan, thank you again for taking the time to talk with us on Gateways. You've got a lot of knowledge that we want to help get out there, because I think this issue of the digital divide is something we haven't thought on enough about in the context of our gateway cities. We always think about it as the Berkshires and, you know, the investment in broadband that has been made over the years to increase connectivity out there. And then lo and behold, I look at some census figures the other day in find out that, you know, a quarter, a third or more of families in our gateway cities don't have computers at home, don't have Internet at home. And then I'm sure, as you want to talk about, as just the digital literacy. So why do we take those one by one? Maybe start

we'll start with the devices. You know, a lot of people have smartphones nowadays, but especially when we're talking about opportunity gaps and remote learning.

Ben [00:03:50] You know, is a smartphone or tablet enough?

Dan [00:03:53] I think one of the things that has really hindered us moving towards fixing this problem is assumptions that people make just the general public is that if you don't perceive a problem, then why would you try to address it?

Dan [00:04:08] I think there's been a number of us for years who have been screaming from the rooftops like this is a major crisis, this digital inequity that exists. And it's strangely ironic that it took a pandemic for it to come out in the open. So to your point about access, yeah, the smartphone thing is it is a question that we often get on. A smartphone is an incredible device. I mean, it's a device that didn't exist 20 years ago.

Dan [00:04:34] Everyone who uses one uses it for lots of things and does amazing stuff, but you can't write a 30 page paper on it or a 10 page essay for school. You-- it's so hard to do a resumé on a phone and apply for a job or if you have a disability or if you are a senior or for whatever reason you struggle with small screens. It just it's limited. It surges as well.

Ben [00:05:02] And what about the applications that schools are using? I mean, did they work on a smartphone or even a tablet?

Dan [00:05:09] So like I have a nine-year-old daughter who is in third grade and she uses Google classroom and all of the other apps that go with it for math, science and reading, ELA, all of that. And I was curious.

Dan [00:05:21] So I had to log in on my phone to look at it. And my God, is it is a completely different perspective than when you're looking at a, you know, 11 inch screen of an iPad or a thirteen or fifteen inch screen of a computer. It is so much more difficult to navigate, especially if you've never done it before. And I think this is the key on so much of this is that there just isn't enough training out there, not only for families, but for kids, too. So it is-- we need more of that.

Ben [00:05:49] Yeah. Well, let me stop for a second. I'm surprised Libby [producer] hasn't screamed at me, but we should probably start with Dan. Who are you and what is tech goes home.

Dan [00:05:58] Yeah. So my name is Dan Noyes. I'm the co CEO of Tech Goes Home. We are a digital equity nonprofit. We're working to empower people to access and use digital tools to overcome whatever barriers they face and advance lives. But much more simply put, we get new computers, good internet and digital life skills training into the hands of those without. So kids can do homework. Adults can find jobs and manage finances, and seniors can connect with loved ones and lead healthy lives. So all of that in between. We serve people three to ninety four is what we say. We currently have a ninety four year old and one of our programs is about to turn ninety five. So I think it'll be three to ninety five shortly, but we try to serve as many people as possible.

Ben [00:06:45] And I think like so many of the amazing nonprofits in Boston that are national leaders, you try to serve the Gateway Cities, but it's challenging.

Dan [00:06:55] It's very hard because it's I mean the difference is just a political boundary.

Dan [00:07:02] The people that we work with don't recognize that. Whether you live in Cambridge or new in there or Boston, that's the that's the strand that connects everyone is that they're struggling. They're low income. They're unemployed. They might be from another country and struggling with immigration issues. So whether you are from Quincy or Boston or Lawrence or New Bedford or Springfield or Worcester. The issue is the same. A lot of it comes down to money. And it's I I know that every wants to say, well, if you could have everything except for the money, what would it be? It's like all the money is the big part. And I think as much as we're Boston is lucky that it has lucky. That's the wrong word. Boston has resiliency, the resiliency fund. They have lots of foundations, Worcester, and Springfield and Fall River. They don't have that. So it's really hard to make a change when you don't have organizations out there that at least so far are willing to put money in, that's critical.

Ben [00:08:03] So we're gonna get into the cost of this problem in a minute, but just in terms of your model. Can you just tell us a little bit about the services you offer and what they cost on a client or family base?

Dan [00:08:14] Our model, which has been evolving over 20 years-- we're a 20 year organization, so we've tried to make it as simple as possible to remove any roadblocks or speed bumps that would be on the way. It's pretty simple. So we partner with organizations throughout Greater Boston. So that would be community centers, libraries, schools, churches, homeless shelters, you name it. We partner with them. They train a staff member at that site to offer tech goes home. So we have a train, the trainer model, those new trainers who again, our staff, people at those sites recruit the families or adults that they see every day. So it might be the group of homeless women that are at the day shelter or it'll be the mom, dad and uncle, whoever is raising the third grader in the class. They then offer a 15 hour course on whatever digital skill is most needed for that group of people. I think this is an essential part of our program is that's not a standard curriculum because that would be ridiculous, because what I'm going to teach a mother of a 10 year old is very different than the one I teach someone who's unemployed and twenty five, which is very different than what I teach a seventy five year old who's trying to stay healthy. So what we do is we provide our trainers with as many resources as possible and then they pick and choose what they believe is best for the people in front of them. At the end of the 15 hours, whoever wants to can take home a brand new computer for 50 bucks. Now, during COVID times, we've weighed that wave, that \$50. But basically they get a brand new Chromebook or an iPad or the little kids because we run a program from other ones. We also give them six months of Internet access that we pay for and then they come away with the skills that we or they will use to dove into whatever challenge it is they're facing.

Ben [00:10:01] OK. And so the trainer that you train,

Ben [00:10:07] Do they volunteer to work with that family for 15 hours or are they paid for that?

Dan [00:10:11] It's a combination of both, actually. So if our school model, for example, it has to be done outside of school. So we actually pay them a small stipend. It is really small. I can't call them volunteers because there's a little bit of money involved. But it is volunteers because it's not fifteen hours. It ends up being 30 hours because they have makeup times and extra sessions. And we have some groups that schedule 40 to 50

hours, even though we only acquire fifteen solely because the learners want that when we ask people at the end of our courses. What was the best part? About half of all of our. Planners say it's the training that's what people are are thirsty for as more knowledge. So on our community side, which often our libraries can use as like I said, courses typically take place during the workday for someone. So we don't pay them a stipend because it's part of their job. That said, during covered, we're paying all of our trainers a stipend now, whether they be community or school or whatever program it is, because so many of them have stepped up and said, no, I want to do this at night or on weekends or whatever it takes to support the owners in my class. Our trainers are they are the most important part of what we do. We've got about three hundred seventy-five active trainers. And they I mean, the dedication that they have shown to the people in their communities is is incredible.

Ben [00:11:36] And so what does it come down to on her personal serve basis?

Dan [00:11:40] It's a it's a great question, but it's not-- some people ask this and I think they expect an answer like it's five thousand dollars a year. Right now you're talking about about 500 bucks a learner. It changes a little bit depending on certain situations.

Ben [00:11:57] And that includes the device.

Dan [00:11:59] Yeah. Because you can get a really good-- I mean, we fundraised for it so, it might not seem as cheap every day, depending on how good our fundraising is going. But you can get a good computer for about 200, 250 bucks a piece. I mean, like Internet Essentials, Comcast's program at 60 excuse me, it's \$10 a month. So like I said, we paid for the first six months of that. So that's only 60 bucks. You throw in things like a mouse in a bag and a sports.

Ben [00:12:27] And so \$500 a participant. Totally scalable.

Dan [00:12:33] Totally. Pre-COVID It was cheaper. It's more expensive now only because shipping is more expensive because we ship to people's homes, because we don't want social distancing rules to be broken. So it costs us an extra 20 dollars per letter to ship. And we also have to provide Zoom subscriptions, which is more expensive. So.

Ben [00:12:53] Yeah. So, you know, I I did the math. Looking at how many Gateway City families with school age children don't have a computer at home and it was thirty thousand approximately. So a two hundred dollars a Chromebook. It's like a six-million-dollar proposition. And that's assuming all those families actually need one. We know many of them have been provided with Chromebooks through their schools.

Dan [00:13:15] But there's also the other side of that coin, too, is like, I think the census, you know, through the American I don't remember the name of it now, but the census work. They do a good job of counting data, but they also leave people out, not through their fault. But there's lots of people who are undocumented who will not answer a phone or survey. Also, I know that they've started doing census online, which is going to, I think, skew results. I don't know how they account for that, but it's so much, you know, people who are doing it online tend to be higher income. So you get the response rates from those groups. But yeah. So if anything, I think the numbers you're citing are a baseline and it's probably worse.

Ben [00:13:57] So if you if you wanted to prepare a thirty thousand Chromebooks, could you do it?

Dan [00:14:04] Yes.

Ben [00:14:05] In the midst of this crisis, there's supply available.

Dan [00:14:08] There is supply available.

Dan [00:14:10] I mean, I think like I'm sure Governor Baker can empathize with this.

Dan [00:14:18] You have to make lots of phone calls to lots of vendors and move things around. I mean, I've seen what he's done for the masks and medical equipment for a similar situation right now. I will say that there's a stark difference between today and two weeks ago. And I've been told that if I just wait two more weeks, there's gonna be millions of devices available. So this could be something that if if if the state I know the state is one of things we should be proud of is that Massachusetts is definitely at the forefront of this issue. And there they are having serious conversations about how do we address this gap? How do we serve these, gosh, one hundred or three hundred thousand students out there. And there is their stock there. And it might not be here tomorrow. But also this pandemic is not going to go away tomorrow. And I. Yeah, thinking about summer learning in the fall, I think we've learned a lot in the last couple of months. And if we're smart, we should take that now that we've learned and revise our plans and create systems that will support students in the fall.

Ben [00:15:24] So that's somewhat hopeful news on the device side anyhow, in terms of the Internet connectivity that families need to have a reliable connection to do remote learning. You know, the numbers were. Somewhat similar, you know, at least a quarter of Gateway City households don't have reliable Internet access at home. How do we get them connected?

Dan [00:15:46] This is a you know, this is a great opportunity because I think specifically in urban environments, there is structure there to do it. It just has to be a will, there has to be a will of the cities and then miss capacities to step up and say, OK, we're going to negotiate prices or we're going to work with Comcast or Cox or we'll have the providers to ensure all our use. All our citizens are connected. And like so many things, I think it will come down to money. But that said, I think the Google experiment with Google Fiber showed that they were less worried about money upfront and maybe thinking down the road. And there have been successes with Google Fiber and they've been the failures. But I would think if I was a Lawrence or a New Bedford, I'd start reaching out to some of these companies and say, hey, let's try something else.

Ben [00:16:34] Yeah, yeah. Do you want to just quickly tell us what Google Fiber is? Oh, sure.

Dan [00:16:38] So, gosh, going back 10 years now, maybe longer. I don't quite remember. Google basically went into a bunch of cities and said, OK, we're going to install fiber for free. It was and the installation would be free and then people would pay, you know, a lower cost for it. It didn't work well in some areas. It worked better in others, but they learned a ton. It was revolutionary at the time. I feel like 10 years. In today's times, is a very long period of time. I'm confident that if a group of companies or a group of governments went in like Google did and said, right, this figured this out, they could do it. I

worry about. Even though we're focused in Greater Boston, I do worry about the rural areas when it comes to connection, because the Second Mile, as it's called, basically getting fiber to like libraries and police stations and training centers isn't as strong as it is in like a Boston or Cambridge or Quincy. So I'd be curious to see how that would hold up if all of sudden everyone in central Massachusetts decided to log on at the same time.

Dan [00:17:47] But I think in the cities. I can't think of a good reason not to do it. I'm biased.

Ben [00:17:54] So, Dan, let's get to really, assuming we were able to get all these devices overnight almost and we were able to get these Internet connections, how would we actually prepare people to use these? I heard somebody told me the other day that I won't name the city, but the city had made lots of Chromebooks available to families and nobody came and picked them up.

Dan [00:18:18] I think I think the issue is that these districts and cities are so focused on the kid, which I appreciate, but you can't focus on just the kid and ignore the family.

Dan [00:18:32] Like, I think, you know, I saw a study recently that said something to the effect of one quarter of a child's grade can be attributed to how involved a parent or caregiver is in that child's education. So I don't know why we would ignore the family when we started talking about getting technology into the hands of kids at home. So our view goes home's view is that you need to help the family to help the child academically succeed. That's what we need. That's what we do. So our view would be,

Dan [00:19:03] All right, let's get a Chromebook or whatever device it might be into the hands of every student that needs it.

Dan [00:19:10] But you damn well better have supports in place for the caregiver at home, too, because they need to understand what those children are doing. Plus, it is ridiculous in my mind that you would send internet and technology into the home and then make it so only the kid could use it because it is such a tool for opportunity for the adults too, especially nowadays. I mean, I we are hearing terrible stories about the unemployment system right now, which I know everyone is hearing that you can't call. That's what we're being told, is that the lines are the wait times are so long, you can't call. So you have to go online. If why would you not give that opportunity to a mom or a dad that they could fill it out or apply for a job, try applying for a job like in paper or in person right now. You just you can't. You have to go online.

Dan [00:20:05] So our view is that to really help the kid, help the student, you've got to help the family, too.

Ben [00:20:12] Got you. All right, then, unfortunately, we're running out of time, but I really appreciate you again taking the time to talk with us and we will check back in soon.

Dan [00:20:23] Yeah. I'm so happy that you guys are talking about this and addressing this issue. And I hope that this is such a terrible time. I hope that we can make some good things come out of it. And I think, you know, bringing about digital equity would be a massive step forward.

Helena DaSilva of Immigrants Assistance Center and Eva Millona of the MIRA Coalition

Ben [00:20:47] By now, I think we've all learned how essential immigrants are to Massachusetts, not just for their economic contributions, but literally for our health and well-being. Working on the frontlines throughout this pandemic, immigrants across the state put their own lives at risk, often without access to vital information. And all the while with the president, Washington, who continues to suggest that they're not wanted here. It's increasingly clear that the pathway out of this crisis is reliable and trustworthy information so we can all work together to identify and isolate the disease. And when times do return to normal, immigrant communities will be left with yet another traumatic experience that we must help heal. These realities make immigrant advocacy organizations especially critical to our pandemic response. And joining me, on Zoom to talk about how immigrant advocacy organizations help guide gateway cities and their residents through. COVID19, are Helena DaSilva, executive director of the Immigrants Assistance Center in New Bedford, and Eva Millona, executive director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition. Welcome to you both.

Eva and Helena [00:21:50] Thank you for having us. Yes, thank you.

Ben [00:21:55] Eva let's start with you to give us the perspective of immigrants and the work they're doing today and in how they're experiencing this crisis.

Eva [00:22:05] Thank you so. Foreign born population makes up one point two million in our Commonwealth. Immigrants make up an outsize share of the essential workers who are keeping us going, but they're also getting sick. We've called it 19 and they are suffering particularly hard from the economic impact because they do not qualify for crucial benefits that are providing a safety net for the rest of us. Grants are twenty one percent and likelier to live below the federal poverty line than Massachusetts population as a whole. Immigrants are twenty-two hundred and twenty five percent likelier to be uninsured than Massachusetts population as a whole. Immigrants are on the front lines in key essential jobs. They make up 71 percent of cleaners and janitors, 57 percent of taxi drivers, and thirty seven percent of health care aides. So we don't have the COVID-19 data on foreign-born, but the limited race and ethnicity data that we have from the state show that Latinos make up twenty four point eight percent of those cases, double their share of the population twelve point three percent and black residents are fifteen point six percent of cases, almost double their share of the population.

Ben [00:23:34] When you think about the gateway cities and some of the clusters that we've seen there and we've heard a lot of discussion about social determinants of health. You've been working on these issues in these communities and their well-being for a long time.

Ben [00:23:47] What do you think is most important for people to understand that don't think about Chelsea or Lawrence or Brockton every day?

Eva [00:23:55] Yeah. So as I mentioned, you know, racial, ethnic and class based disparities are a major issue in Massachusetts in general. And Americans are now under the COVID-19. And this is a wakeup call for Massachusetts. Looking into one of the major issues is the language access. And that is one thing that the immigrant and refugee community, it's in desperate need for, for improvement. Boston stands out for recognizing inequities and trying to address them head on. The attorney general has also stepped up

and help with multilingual outreach to ensure that immigrant workers know their rights and feel safe accessing healthcare and other supports available to them. The creation of the Spanish language unemployment portal that the administration provided, it's a very important step forward. And I do want to give credit to the Commonwealth, Sarah Bettencourt for her reporting. But as a state, we need to do much more in terms of language access. The vast majority of the Web pages and application forms aren't in English, and that creates a huge barrier for almost 600,000 Massachusetts residents. That makes up 9 percent of the population who do not speak English very well. The Spanish language unemployment takes care of 40 percent of the 600,000. So we have major needs in 13 other languages spoken there will impact over 5,000 people who are not proficient in English. And one of those languages that needed is Portuguese and Haitian, Creole and Chinese and Vietnamese. So it's really crucial for state agencies to really take the lead on language access and on multi-language outreach. First of all, most of the resources that need to be shared, our state resources. So it makes sense for the state agencies to take responsibility, but also more cities and towns. You mentioned Chelsea and and others. They don't have the resources to take all these issues themselves. So the state stepping up, it's really huge at this particular time of crisis to really help municipalities and help the communities. You'll hear from my colleague Helena that, you know, community-based agencies are really overwhelmed. What they're doing and in absence of state actions, immigrant serving organizations such as, you know, the ones that Helena leads really are filling the gap and they are feeling overwhelmed at this point. It's a lot that the state can do to really improve the situation. And one recommendation would be that the state can commission translations of key Web sites and forums, including those for MassHealth, including those for snap forms included for RAFT, which is the housing assistance program and unemployment, including Penda and make unemployment assistance. Spanish, you know, is a start. We're very grateful that that's available, but it's not enough. As I mentioned, only 40 percent of the population is taken care of and most of this is met investments. Doing it now will be an investment for the future as well and will be on will help us beyond recovery.

Ben [00:27:32] So Helena, let's hear from you. Now you are serving residents in New Bedford every day throughout this crisis--

Helena [00:27:41] Not just New Bedford, we service 12,000 immigrants per year.

Helena [00:27:45] But a lot of them are from the from Bristol County and of course, New Bedford Fall River and Taunton. But we're seeing we also do a lot of work from the Cape and Islands. We get a lot of calls. So what are the things that's happened is our building right after the set this March 16th, on the 17th. We had to shut down the building. So what happened was once we shut down the building, we were my biggest concern was we know we have three thousand of our clients and non-English speaking elders and we know that that's a very vulnerable population. A lot of them are a little bit in their own language and we see them about two hundred and seventy-five of them in for services. So we was very much in that risk population. So one of the things we started to do, we started making wellness calls. And then the following day we had a gentleman-- one of our clients who say he's seven years old, come to our door downstairs because now we've moved to the second floor and coming his pajamas. The janitor said, there's a gentleman outside who's crying and he. Can you please come downstairs? So I did. I spoke to him through the glass door and I said, could you just go home? He goes, I'm not feeling well. And I couldn't find your number. I couldn't I couldn't find the card with a number. So I keep me. Could you please call? So we called him up. We called his doctors. We knew that he was having he wasn't feeling well. And so we basically, you know, spoke to his doctor. Needed he

needed more. They use having a problem with oxygen. So that's just an example. And that right away as the executive director, I made a decision that was no way that we were not going to. We needed to stay in the building because we're right in the middle of the community. And we knew that just knowing that we're in the building and we can answer their calls is makes such a tremendous difference. So we've been in the building. We have two case managers, three languages that are spoken fluently, providing wellness calls, answering phones. We've been bombarded with unemployment claims. So we've been doing unemployment claims over the phone. A lot of our clients have. Not only do they have the language barriers, they have technology barriers. So being really helping them on helping them, I applied for unemployment and it's been really a challenge with them. And at the same time, you also have a population of mixed immigration that their children are born here. But the parents have no status that are essential workers that are working in the front lines.

Helena [00:30:19] We you know, when we look at our fishing industry, we have a lot of that population, our working in fish houses. And many of them are they are not practicing the social distancing that PPE that everyone's talking about. And we know that directly from them because they call us. And one of my biggest concerns that I have had is with the testing is that New Bedford will not see a surge. Even though we have going up until we stop testing the fish houses. So working closely with South Coast Health, the greater New Bedford Health Center, to make sure that there's a tent. Now, this seems like there's going to be more testing available. We need to start testing the fish houses because we know that this population are also going home and they're sharing five, six, seven people into US households. So social distancing is not happening with this population. So that is a huge concern. And we know that they don't have access to unemployment. They are not going to because they don't have a Social Security number. So that is also another huge concern. So that's something that we're seeing and we're facing.

Helena [00:31:27] And of course, it's just been or where now it's like because we have a direct service providers is how much services we are providing over the phone. At the same time, being here to answer questions and I've done I'd say 95 percent of my work since the coronavirus has been being in the state task force, being really working with the ethnic media.

Helena [00:31:51] I've done radio television because we know a lot of our elders, a lot of not just elders.

Helena [00:31:57] The families are really getting the information from television and radio. So we're doing some work with Telemundo in Providence, Latina. We've done with WJFD, The Voice of the Immigrant. We've done-- I mean, it's been that's how I've been really, really occupying myself has been media and really being on task forces and making sure that they're what we're basically speaking about the guidelines of CDC, making sure if they are sick, they should not be going to health centers, they should be calling them before they go there as a community based organization.

Ben [00:32:33] Helena, do you have the resources you need to do the casework?

Helena [00:32:36] No, we don't have. And that's the thing is we were having our annual fund raiser, which was our spring fund raiser, so we had to cancel that. Now we're looking into doing virtual some kind of virtual fund raiser so we can get them, so we can get the funds, so we can provide the direct services. So a good thing is, is that we have definitely lots of social distancing within our staff. But it's just very difficult because we're also

working with the skeleton crew because some of them are moms and they have to. They don't have no daycare, so they have to just stay home. So it's been it's been challenging and then it's, you know, just trying to put up work, help as many people as we possibly can over the phone.

Helena [00:33:18] And English language learners is another issue that we're very concerned is some schools are providing virtual learning. But now in New Bedford, it's high school and elementary and middle school. But English language learners in an elementary, they didn't have access to Chromebook. So we've gotten some grants. So we're purchasing we've identified sixty five families. That's just the ones we identified that we are going to be not only getting school supplies, art supplies, but getting Chromebooks and also getting some gift certificates for food. So these families can get it. So that's another one that we know that our children, our English language learners, are not having access to virtual learning. And so they are going to be lagging behind. And that is a big concern of ours.

Ben [00:34:07] Understood. Eva, how do we make sure these organizations get the resources they need to do this important work?

Eva [00:34:13] So one thing is that the state also needs to come up with an emergency fund to really help the most vulnerable families. The governor and the first lady created a fund, a relief fund, the COVID-19 relief fund that has over \$20 million. We're very grateful that, you know, this is available will be available, but it's nearly not enough to meet the need across the state. So we're calling on our Massachusetts legislature to really come up with and work with the governor, to come up with different ideas and funds, relief of funds to help vulnerable families without excluding those who pay taxes with the ITIN. And there are different, different ideas and different models who are happening across the country. There are private and public partnership created. California had a model also there. Senator Eldridge has introduced a very good bill in the Senate who helps those with the ITIN. So that's one way of expanding that. Also, the philanthropies have stepped in and helped many, but the need is so much bigger than what's available right now. So I think we need an orchestrated effort. You know, of the private and public partnership in Massachusetts as a progressive state, as always, a leader in so many issues need to step up and really create an emergency relief fund and create channels for assistance through non-profits and help all families, regardless of immigration status or citizenship requirements. And also and other ways that the state can help is dramatically increase the funding for the housing program of the RAFT program to provide support for thousands more families. The five million added to the program will help about sixteen hundred families by the state estimate, and we need to scale up the funding and ensure equitable access to the program. The moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, which we're very grateful for, provides a temporary protection. But at some point, you know, the rent is going to come due and we could see massive displacement if we don't have if we don't help people to cover the actual costs. So one of the big things that we are hearing from our members on the ground is that displacement, it's really a huge issue, especially for minorities and immigrants who are living in, you know, in big groups. And no one has the name on the list, but many others are sub contracting from them. Subleasing. But listening from them. So it's a displacement. It's really a huge issue. So we need to get more resources. And as I said, you know, we think of ourselves as a passive state. And indeed, we have done a lot of wonderful things. But the reality is that there are major inequities that we haven't addressed yet from the housing to health care to education and more. And, you know, they don't just affect immigrants or people of color, but, you know, they hit those population particularly hard. And that's why we're talking more about that population,

but we need to do our best to improve the conditions right now, but we also have to commit to a long term effort to make Massachusetts more equitable, more inclusive and fair.

Ben [00:37:53] Thank you, Eva. Helena, what is your greatest concern? An issue that you think could be the most troubling if we don't do something right away?

Helena [00:38:02] I think definitely I think the testing is huge. And I also feel that these families who are mixed immigration that maybe have been ITIN number and have paid taxes and all of a sudden they don't have access to any programs or funding available to help meet the needs, the basic needs of the families, just like everyone's talking about the children. And I understand and I'm very concerned, but these children who are us, they have parents and these parents have no status. So when you-- it's the wraparound services that we need. So if we're really if we want to help the children, we help we need to help their parents, because the decisions that these parents made or we thought they overstayed or they crossed the border, they was not it was a this on the parents. And we should not be punishing children for the parents' decisions. Right. So now we really need to provide services to the parents to which will in turn around, help the children. So I think it's important that we look at the family as a whole and not just trying to help the children.

Helena [00:39:11] Because if you're not helping the parents, you are basically doing huge dissatisfaction to their children.

Ben [00:39:17] And Eva mentioned the effort to try and get emergency funds to families. In the meantime, how are the feeding efforts? Is there enough food making it to people that need it?

Helena [00:39:30] Well, I think what's happened is the food banks have been really stepping up.

Helena [00:39:34] And one of the things that we were also able to be able to do was through a Harvard Pilgrim program, get a restaurant, really also helping the local. Once we identified about 80 elders who did not get Meals on Wheels. And so what we've done with those elders is creating a program. So these children, these elders would get a food delivery. So they get Monday through Friday a food delivery for two meals. And this is basically also helping out the local restaurants that were struggling to provide and having them being delivering meals right to the home of the elders. And I know that there is some working very good food banks with food pantries really stepping up to really help as many as many families as we possibly can. And also through the schools, these children picking up their lunches or picking up their food for their children in the schools. But I still say that what we really need to do is really we need to offer these families like we've done a little bit of it with so much. Somebody donated their stimulus check to the Immigrants Assistance Center and they said, Helena, what can we do? I'm going to give you a thousand dollars. I says, go to Seabra and go to Price Rite. Visit to choose the two grocery stores that we know they go to. So what she did is she gave me a thousand dollars and good food certificates. And what I did is I called that families that we know that are most in need and gave them food certificates. Right. To make sure because we think it's good for them to be able to go to the grocery store. So they don't wait lines and lines. And for it to get actually access to food and many times because of their ethnicity, they might be giving foods that they might not use to. So I think that we also look at them with the lenses of the ethnicity. So by providing gift certificates or food vouchers, I think that really also helps these

families. And that's something we are wrong, you know, always saying that that's so important.

Eva [00:41:33] I think what also would be very helpful in this time of crisis is for Massachusetts legislature to pass the sick leave bill to ensure that essential work workers are forced to work even when they are sick or they need to care for the family members. Massachusetts has a particularly strong aren't sick time law, but the 40 hours it provide that it provides does don't meet the scale of the crisis. And the accrual requirement leaves out many people. The federal families first grown a virus response act. It's helping some, but it is huge. There is a huge coverage gap that excludes an estimate of one point eight million workers in Massachusetts alone, including anyone working at companies with over 500 employees, as many health care workers. So passing the sick leave bill, providing a emergency relief. For the most vulnerable families without citizenship or standards requirement, especially for the undocumented families who are living in enormous fear. Under the current regime of enforcement providing testing for them, and that would be very helpful. Yeah.

Ben [00:42:57] No, thank you. Thank you, Eva, thank you, Helena. Both of you, for all the work you're doing and for taking time to talk with us. We'll definitely be keeping our eye on the emergency relief funding and funding for the community-based organizations who are who are so crucial to getting information and support to immigrant families.

Eva [00:43:17] Thank you so much.

Tracy [00:43:29] Well, that's it for this week's episode of Gateway's. I'm Dr. Tracy Corley.

Ben [00:43:33] And I'm Ben Forman. Thanks to our sponsors, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Eastern Bank, Enterprise Bank and the Barr Foundation. Today's show was produced by Libby Gormley, music by Worcester's own The Curtis Mayflower. Thank you all for listening. We'll see you next time.