



All the Best Podcast

Episode 6: “Brightening the World Through Points of Light” *Featuring Board of Directors Chair Neil Bush, Gala co-chair Lauren Bush Lauren, Light Award Recipients Khloe Thompson, and Maria Rose Belding*

President Bush: I'm speaking of a new engagement in the lives of others, a new activism, hands-on involved that gets the job done. We must bring in the generations, harnessing the unused talent of the elderly and the unfocused energy of the young, for not only leadership is passed from generation to generation, but so is stewardship. And the generation born after the II World War has come of age. I've spoken of 1,000 points of light of all the community organizations that are spread like stars throughout the nation doing good.

We will work hand in hand, encouraging, sometimes leading, sometimes being led, rewarding. We will work on this in the White House, in the cabinet agencies. I will go to the people and the programs that are the brighter points of light, and I'll ask every member of my government to become involved. The old ideas are new again because they're not old. They are timeless, duty, sacrifice, commitment, and a patriotism that finds expression in taking part and pitching in. First place, I believe that character is a part of being president.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All The Best," the official podcast of the George & Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All The Best."

Lyrics

We're Mountaineers, volunteers

We're the tide that rolls, we're Seminoles

Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

President Bush: I remember something my dad told me. He said, "Write to your mother, serve your country," and he said, "tell the truth." And I've tried to do that in public life all through it.

Barbara: You're a human being first, and those human connections with children, with friends, are the most important investment you will ever make.

President Bush: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George & Barbara Bush Foundation, this is "All The Best." Welcome to "All The Best." I'm your host, Sam LeBlond. In January of 1989, my grandfather, President George H.W. Bush shared his vision of 1,000 points of light during his inaugural address and invited the nation to take action through service to their fellow citizens. I could go on and tell you all about the Points of Light and how it got started, but instead, here is Neil Bush, chairman of the Points of Light and my uncle.

Neil: When dad was elected president, he basically understood the government can't solve all of our problems, that there are problems that are playing out in communities all over America. And that in these communities, there are solutions being applied, that nonprofit organizations are using their paid staff but also voluntary staff to increase capacity to help solve those problems. So he basically called on every American to become a point of light in the lives of others.

And he used a great metaphor saying that all of these organizations, the community organizations, the nonprofit organizations, companies, faith organizations that are sending volunteers into the community or sending their employees or their parishioners in the community to help others, he referred to them as a constellation of stars like 1,000 points of light and a broad and peaceful sky. What a great image.

Sam: I couldn't have said it better myself. Once established, the Points of Light went on to award over 6,000 daily points of lights. These recipients are ordinary people who do extraordinary things to lift others in their community and beyond.

Lauren: With KMP's passing, the thought was, "Let's create a special award. Beyond those daily Points of Lights Awards, which are kind of like the cornerstone of what the foundation is about, let's shine an extra light on really bright points of light." So we're excited to kind of establish this annual award

that will help shine that extra light on these amazing people, but then another way for people to engage with Points of Light and with what KMP had started.

Sam: That's Neil Bush's daughter and my cousin, Lauren Bush Lauren. And she was an instrumental part in organizing the first annual George H.W. Bush Points of Light Awards this past September, which took place on the Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum in New York City. The ceremony was truly inspiring, which brings us to our guests.

Today, we are joined by two of the George H.W. Bush Points of Light Award recipients, Khloe Thompson, Founder of Khloe Kares and Maria Rose Belding, Co-founder and Executive Director of the MEANS Database. We'll hear from Khloe first. Khloe Thompson was just eight years old when she was introduced to the issue of homelessness in her community. After seeing women and families living on the street in her native Irvine, California, she knew she wanted to help.

In 2015, she founded Khloe Kares, a nonprofit organization that distributes care bags filled with toiletries and necessities to the Los Angeles homeless community. Since Khloe Kares launched, more than 5,000 care bags have been handed out to those in need through partnerships with local companies, churches, and nonprofit organizations. At the 2019, George H.W. Bush Points of Light Award ceremony, Khloe said, "Being 12, I liked to be the example that at any age you're capable of making an impact.

Never let your age stop you from being the next change maker. I'm hopeful that kids all over the world will step up and make a difference. Receiving the George H.W. Bush Points of Light Award is such a huge honor that will inspire others." Khloe, I'm so happy to have you on "All The Best" today. Thank you for joining me, and thank you for being a change maker at such a young age already. I can't believe it.

Khloe: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited.

Sam: We'll start out with this, Khloe. What inspires you to volunteer?

Khloe: What inspires me to volunteer is the smiling faces and the joy that you can see in the people. It just makes me so happy. It just really shows me that I'm able to make other people happy. So I think that's my favorite part about volunteering, and that's what inspires me to volunteer.

Sam: It sounds like it took a lot of hard work to start your nonprofit, Khloe Kares. Can you tell us a little bit about what it took to get that up and running?

Khloe: Khloe Kares all started with me passing the same homeless woman on my way to school, and I would just ask my mom why or how she was out there. And she would tell me some reasons, and I would just feel bad for her. At the time, my grandma, she was teaching me how to sew toiletry bags and shoulder bags. And so I told her that I saw this lady, and I wanted to help her. So we came up with Khloe Kares.

And so, at first, we had a goal of just 25 care bags, and we made like 3 instead. But once I had already passed out all those bags, I started to feel like I needed to do more. So I just continued Khloe Kares, and now we are four years running. And I've been able to travel all over the world like to Ghana where I installed water pumps in bathroom facilities as well as teaching leadership workshops to kids so that they can learn what it's like and what's the process to having a business.

Sam: That's amazing. So you said four years you've had Khloe Kares. I think you've delivered, what, 5,000 toiletry bags to those in need during that time? That's amazing. But it sounds like a lot of work. Have you built a team to help you with this?

Khloe: My grandma, a lot of her friends. They sew, and so we get a lot of help from them as well as my grandma. She's like an amazing seamstress. She's really fast when it comes to making bags, so she's really helpful. I have my mom. I have me. We also do Girl Scouts events. When they're doing one of their badges, they get to make care bags too. We get a lot of help.

Sam: You know, I always thought the F in family stood for free labor because I help my family for free a lot on stuff. So, that sounds like you got a good team behind you. Now, you're in school, obviously, full time.

Khloe: Well, I'm homeschooled.

Sam: Homeschooled. But you still have responsibilities in school, right?

Khloe: Yes.

Sam: You have homework, and then you also run your nonprofit, Khloe Kares, and you have to be a kid. How do you do all those things?

Khloe: I feel like, even though I still go to events, and I still have to do homework, no matter what I do when it comes to Khloe Kares, I feel like I always have a good time, and I'm always having fun. So the aspect of being a

kid, I also have a lot of friends that I get to hang out with, so I'm able to be around other kids. So that's me being a kid because when you're homeschooled, a lot of people think that you're not around a lot of kids, and you're very antisocial. But I'm the opposite of that. I'm around a lot of people. I'm around a lot of kids. I'm able to interact with people. I'm able to talk with people. I feel like I still have a kid's life. I have a bike. I sometimes play video games. It's a rare occasion though. But like I do a lot of things that kids still do.

Sam: And you said, being a kid and having fun, I know that's true because I was with you in person. We were dancing to the Beach Boys. I'm not sure if you remember. You were dancing with my wife at the Points of Life, so I know you know how to have a good time. So you talked about your friends. Not all your friends have a nonprofit organization, right? I mean, you set such a good example yourself. How can they get started? What would you say to a kid like your friend or someone else who's looking to get involved at a young age?

Khloe: Just don't let your age stop you from what you want to do because you can be an adult or you can be a kid starting an organization because your age is just a number, and it really doesn't define you. It's just how you put it out there and how you accomplish it.

Sam: What's been the most rewarding part of your work? You said that it makes you smile every day. I'm sure that's part of it.

Khloe: I think the most rewarding thing is I have these things called smile money. So it's basically like when you put in all this hard work and you feel like giving up, but it's like when you see the smiles or if you think about like the joy and the smiles that are going to be on these people's faces, it's like everything getting paid back to you just in smiles. And so I think it's just so amazing because smile money, it just pays off all my debt, I guess.

Sam: Yeah. And that works. Yeah. I mean, so you're rich in smile money. If you could pay for a house, you'd live in a mansion I know with those 5,000 bags and counting. What else have you learned through your experiences as volunteers? Is there anything else that stands out to you? I mean, you've done so much at such a young age.

Khloe: You should always be kind to people no matter their situation. You could be talking to the richest person in the world, or you can be talking to the poorest person in the world. You're going to treat them the same way as you would treat your best friend or you would treat a family member. So just treat people the same as everybody else.

Sam: That's a great way to live life, and my grandfather, George H.W. Bush, did the same thing. You know, he treated everyone the same way, whether it'd be the President of France or the guy who's picking up his car in the morning. And that's really powerful. And starting at such a young age, I'm sure you're changing a lot of people's lives just by being kind. And my grandfather did a lot of the same things. Let's talk more about Khloe Kares. What's the future hold? Do you have any partnerships or programs, I know you mentioned going to Ghana, or events that you're excited about that are coming up that you could share with us?

Khloe: In December, I have my third...wait, yeah, my third trip to Ghana. I'm just super excited because it's next month we go to Ghana. I'm super excited. I have land in Ghana. I think I have two acres?

Sam: So you're going to go visit your land?

Khloe: Yes, hopefully. And I really want to build like an Airbnb/community center there. So, it's going to have an area where kids, they can come, and they can do their homework because a lot of times, like, in their house, they don't have electricity. So I guess, like, the really cool part is there's going to be lighting in there, so they're going to be able to see what they're doing as well. And there's going to be so many amazing aspects to it. I'm super excited because we're raising money for that right now.

And then, also in the future, I want to have a community center here in Los Angeles because, even though they already have a lot of community centers and homeless shelters, I feel like there should be more, especially since mine is probably going to stand out the most. Because when the homeless people, they come in, they're able to have a job there as well as they're able to have a place to live. So this job is going to be a paid job. And so since they're getting paid once they have enough money to get back on their feet, they know what it's like to have a job again. So that's what I really want to do. So, I want to have a community center here in L.A as well as in Ghana.

Sam: Okay, so I'd be remiss not to ask you, how do people give? How do people support you in this endeavor? You said you're raising money, how are you doing that?

Khloe: I have a GoFundMe account. And if you just go on to the site, GoFundMe, you can put in Khloe Kares, which is, K-H-L-O-E K-A-R-E-S, and you'll be able to find all of my endeavors and everything that I'm raising funds to. So, there's that.

Sam: That's great. Why do you think it's important for others to give back?

Khloe: I think it's important for others to give back because I feel like when you give back, you're able to put it upon other people, and then it kind of starts to grow, and it becomes more popular and it becomes like a bigger movement. And so I feel like with one person giving, it can lead to two people giving, to three people giving, and so forth. So, I feel like that's the importance of giving, I guess.

Sam: Yeah, it's like a chain reaction.

Khloe: Exactly.

Sam: You light the fuse and then, boom, everyone else follows suit. I know you've got big things on the horizon, Khloe. I'm very excited. So I'll finish with this because we were all inspired hearing you speak as you accepted one of the three George H.W. Bush Points of Light Awards earlier this year. What was it like to receive that award?

Khloe: I feel like it's like the most amazing thing to be honored and have a Point of Light Award because I feel like that's the highest thing to happen to you. And I feel like it's just an acknowledgment and something that's really telling me that I'm doing something really important. But also, it's just going to help so many people, especially in Ghana, and I feel like it's amazing that some people are acknowledging what's happening in Ghana and also what I'm doing so that they're able to do their part as well. It's just an amazing thing.

Sam: And you're an amazing person, Khloe. You know, we had a big star, Garth Brooks, receive an award the same night that you did, but everyone was saying the big star of the night was you. So thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you for coming on the show and sharing everything about Khloe Kares. I cannot wait to see all the great things that you do, and I'll be getting on that GoFundMe page after this and helping you out, okay?

Khloe: Thank you. Bye.

Sam: Thanks again to Khloe Thompson, Founder of Khloe Kares and recipient of the George H.W. Bush Points of Light Award. Next, we'll hear from Maria Rose Belding, the Co-founder and Executive Director of MEANS Database, which is a nonprofit tech company that has rerouted more than 2.2 million pounds of food to communities in need across the United States. Maria's work has earned her recognition as one of the L'Oreal Paris Women of Worth, a

Daily Point of Light, a Starbucks Upstander, and the Glamour College Woman of the Year.

In December 2018, at age 23, she became the youngest woman featured as the CNN Hero of the Year. Maria Rose graduated from American University in Washington D.C. in May of 2019, receiving a bachelors of science in public health while on the pre-med track. At the 2019 George H.W. Bush Points of Light Awards, Maria Rose said, "I was born almost three years after President Bush left office. And despite never having lived under his administration, I found my life enormously shaped by his legacy." We are happy to have Maria Rose featured on "All The Best." Maria, welcome. How are you?

Maria: Thank you. I'm good. How are you?

Sam: Good. I'm so happy that you're here in studio because you're here in D.C.

Maria: I am. This is like the shortest commute I've ever had for work I bet. I could have walked here.

Sam: Well, Maria, I want to talk about MEANS Database. How did the idea of MEANS Database come about, and how is it grown over time so far?

Maria: I grew up volunteering in the food pantry in my church. I am from a town in Iowa with approximately three-cow residents for every human, and the church I grew up in happened to be the one that housed the food pantry. I spent a lot of time volunteering there. And even by the time I was 12, it had become very, very clear to me that we had a problem with communicating.

We had all these clients, which is the term we used to describe people who come to us for free food, we had all these clients with Type 2 diabetes, with heart disease, and we would be giving them ramen noodles and other foods that were actually exacerbating their health conditions because we could not communicate quickly enough to get fresh food. We couldn't talk to the grocery stores and to the farmers fast enough to save the produce, which is what they really needed and what they couldn't afford.

So by the time we got to eighth grade, I'm very frustrated seeing this over and over again, and also realizing that this is not a problem with our executive director, that this is not an issue of the people in my pantry not working hard enough or thinking about it strategically. It truly was they did not have access to a tool that would allow them to communicate quickly. I thought somebody else had built this. No one had. I looked at our executive director, and I was like, "Okay, but the internet though."

Sam: So this is in eighth grade?

Maria: This is in eighth grade because it was so obvious to me because I was a child with the internet. Because I was someone that used the internet every day at school, it didn't make sense to me that that was not something we were using. Like we were using fax machines, and I was like, "Why? What is this? This is so dumb. Like why is this machine a thing when we have email?"

And I thought that we just did not have access to a network like this because it was such a simple idea. I assumed that someone else had built it, and we just didn't have it because, again, more cows than people. It turned out, no, nobody had actually built a completely free accessible software or technology. They were only for-profit versions. I couldn't morally justify charging the food pantries to pay for access to software like that, so we built it.

Sam: In my intro, I said 2.2 million pounds of food you've rerouted.

Maria: Actually, so, 2.3.

Sam: Is there an update? Okay.

Maria: And then depending on how some phone calls at work went today, I was out of the office today, but might be up to 2.8. Someone gave us more than 400,000 pounds of frozen beef this week. So I know they were successful in the office in moving at least some of it today. I'm going to find out when I go in tomorrow how much we were able to fully move.

Sam: Wow, that's amazing. So how did you and your team come up with this technology to make this happen?

Maria: I built a horrendous, Google site's version of MEANS. I did not have the tech skills to build out the stack the way it needed to work. So instead, I spent a lot of high school doing informational interviews with food pantries and with donors saying, "Okay, what do you need? What should this system do? What sucks about what you do right now?" And when I met Grants, our co-founder by chance the day after high school graduation, he's a coder, and I hooked him. I hooked him. He fell in love with this concept and really wanted to build it correctly. So we went from me having this very fleshed out concept but no tech skills to the perfect person to actually pull it off. So we were able to launch nationally in February 2015, so my freshman year at American.

Sam: It sounds like the perfect partnership. It's like the Yin and the Yang.

Maria: Yes, we are opposite people. We're both from Iowa. We both have a very Iowan sensibility about using resources effectively, about not wasting things. We are such opposites in so many ways. And, unfortunately, for both of us, we're both very stubborn and very good at arguing. I am Leslie Knope, he is Ron Swanson...

Sam: Okay, I see it now.

Maria: ...in a lot of ways.

Sam: Okay, nice.

Maria: But it has worked out well for us.

Sam: Well, 2.8 million pounds of food rerouted, I think I'd say that's a success, to say the least. Can you share a little bit more on the major problem of food insecurity in our country?

Maria: It varies a lot based on which neighborhood you're in. But nationally, between 1-in-6 and 1-in-8 Americans is food insecure. Food insecure is the technical term that the USDA uses. It basically means not sure where your next meal is going to come from. They may or may not be skipping meals. But if they aren't skipping meals, they are buying food that is not healthy to supplement.

It means they're doing things like eating less in order to feed their kids more. And then about 1-in-20 Americans and 1-in-20 and here in D.C. as well has what is considered very low food security. And that is someone who's going days without a full meal. So this is an incredibly prevalent problem. Fifty million Americans use a food pantry, or soup kitchen, or other emergency food provider at least once a month. And, at the same time, we throw away up to a third of our edible food supply. It gets so fixable. It is so, so fixable.

Sam: So you talked about eighth grade, obviously, you came up with this big idea. What inspires you to volunteer?

Maria: There are 12 people on the team at MEANS, and there are a lot of different reasons that have brought them to this work, and every one of them is as legit as every other. I always say MEANS is not a faith-based organization, but I'm a faith-based person. From a Christian perspective, the existence of Jesus Christ means we do not get to decide who deserves help or food or not. So, for me, it comes from a religious perspective, but there are plenty of folks

and plenty of other faith traditions and new faith traditions on our team who are equally morally outraged by the existence of hunger in a country this wealthy.

Sam: What's the most rewarding part of what you're doing? I mean, obviously, you're feeding people. So that's got to be just rewarding in its own. What do you take away from what you're doing?

Maria: To a tie. So, obviously, getting to feed people, enormously meaningful. Knowing that at the end of the day you have done something to make someone else's life better, that's incredibly meaningful. And, it made it possible to be able to do things like work 60 hours a week and be in full-time pre-med classes and keep going. The other thing I find so much meaning in is getting to build an environment for really talented young people. Our youngest kiddo is 14. Right now I'm the oldest at 24, but we've had people up to their mid30s as employees. When you are 15 or 16, and you have the intellect of an adult, that's really isolating. And it's also really scary because you are intellectually a grown-up but socially and emotionally 16. You're still a kid.

So you're looking for opportunity that will challenge you, but often doing that puts you in environments that may not be safe, and it makes you really vulnerable. I find so much meaning in being able to say, in the best way, nobody cares if you're gay. Nobody cares if you're struggling with a mental illness. You are not looked at differently. You are welcomed and celebrated the way that you are. And I did not have that as a kid and paid for it dearly. Here's this space where these kids have a group of adults whose first priority is always that they are safe and then their second priority is, are they doing their job?

Sam: Maria Rose, in my introduction, I mentioned many of the accolades you've received thus far in your life. Most recently, you received the George H.W Bush Points of Light Award. Can you tell us what that award means to you?

Maria: Oh, that was wild. I had an interesting summer. So I had taken the MCAT, and on the same day found out, "Hey, you took the MCAT with two blood clots, so you're gonna have to have surgery like tomorrow, and then also retake the MCAT, this thing that you studied for six weeks nonstop for." So you have that news, and I'm just like, you know, casually crying on my couch. And then like an hour later, I get a call telling me that I'd won this award.

Sam: That's amazing.

Maria: At the end of the day, I think I just like laid on the floor, and this is like, "Nope, I have all the feelings, and I don't know what any of them are. So I'm just gonna be here if anyone needs me."

Sam: It's good timing.

Maria: It's good timing.

Sam: Yeah, you needed it.

Maria: So after they had said, "Hey, you have this blood clot," they'd also put me on some meds. And when I got this call, the next day, I called them back, I'm like, "Okay, that really happened though, right?" Because it was a phone not an email. So I couldn't go back and read the email and reassure myself.

Sam: Sure. Just to be sure.

Maria: Yeah. Oh, but it was wonderful. We got to go up to New York. Our COO, Sammy, who's going to take my job when I start med school next fall, she was my guest. It was so cool. I got pulled on stage to dance with the Beach Boys, which is wild.

Sam: That's pretty amazing.

Maria: It was an honor, and it was very cool to be entrusted with this legacy moving forward. So I was in the midst of re-studying for the MCAT to take it again, and the awards were the week after I had just taken it. And as soon as I was done cramming the 20 essential human amino acids, I like switched immediately to H.W. Bush, just like, "Okay, I was not alive for any of this. Here we go."

Sam: Oh my Gosh, That's great.

Maria: So I just read a bunch of biographies and several of his books and speeches and just try to dive into, you know, who was this person because I didn't want to be accepting this award without some understanding of who this was beyond just the title.

Sam: Well, I think you figured out, obviously, if you read a couple books that he was a pretty incredible guy, and giving back and service to others was a huge theme of his entire life.

Maria: Yes. And reading it, I felt even more sad that I had not gotten the chance to meet him. And I had been asked actually as part of Points of Light to go meet his casket at Andrews, and I had had a blood clot. Like, I was in the ICU, and I couldn't go. That was one of my regrets already. I already knew that I would have been paying respects to a great man, but then I realized just how great, and how wonderful, and how moral of a human being President Bush was.

Sam: He was a great man. Now that you're a Points of Light recipient, now you're going to be carrying part of his legacy with you and all the great things that you do. So whether you met him or not, he's going to be part of your life forever now.

Maria: Yeah, that's wild. That's wild.

Sam: That's great. Well, I want to talk more about your foundation. Are there any future partnerships, or programs, or events that are coming up that you're excited about?

Maria: Yes. So...

Sam: Let's hear about them.

Maria: ...we just started working Cargo, which is amazing.

Sam: Okay, that's great.

Maria: They gave us an incredible \$50,000 gift, which was lovely, and we are starting to move excess product from them. It's a lot of frozen...It's really great high-quality meat. The 400,000 pounds that I mentioned, that is from them. It is going to aid people who recently survived the fires in California, so that's where it's all going to go to. We are still kicking off our program in Rhode Island. We actually run the entire state's Food Recovery Program.

A couple of years ago, the head of the Rhode Island Department of Health called us and said, "Hi, we want to build something kind of like what you build. Would you mind telling us how you did it?" To which we said, "Sure, but you can just use it. You don't have to rebuild this. It's gonna be really expensive and terrible. Like, you are totally welcome just to use what already exists."

Sam: And you still manage that?

Maria: We still manage it. We love this partnership. We would love to carry this into Connecticut, and into Massachusetts, and then to other states and cities

because it has worked so well. It is us, the Health Department, the State Restaurant Association, the State Tourism Board, and the governor's office. One of the things that we deal with a lot is potential food donors who want to be giving their excess food, but they're terrified they're gonna get sued. And even though the law that protects them from being sued has been on the books since '96, it is four months younger than me, it's not very well known still.

And when we work with the health departments, they literally brand all of the materials with their logo. So when they get these postcards saying, "Please donate your food," like there's a literal seal of approval from the health department saying, "Please do this. We want you to do this. You are covered in doing this, please do it." That's been so effective.

Sam: And so do you help connect all those people together and kind of get that conversation going?

Maria: Yeah.

Sam: Because it seems like there's not many people that are able to do that. I mean, are you the only show in town that actually connects everybody?

Maria: We are not the only show in town, we are the only free show in town. We are the largest organization of our kind by geography for-profit or nonprofit in the United States. Our next two biggest competitors are both for-profits. They both gotten several million dollars in venture capital. Neither one of them has been able to break out of their regional markets. Even if you're comfortable charging recipients, these nonprofits, for the food and we're not, they don't have money.

And where a lot of these organizations have failed and we have succeeded is in recognizing that often the food donors don't have money either. Like the average American food retailer runs at a 1.5% gross profit margin. Like, they don't have \$400 a night to pay you to pick up their food. You have to be cheaper than a dumpster. If you want people to donate your food, you have to be cheaper than a dumpster. And we are. We are the only ones where it's free, and it is not just dumped on you.

Because one of the things that several other apps do is they take the donation, and they drop it off at the nearest open food pantry, regardless of whether or not the food pantry actually can use that or if that makes sense. Like we work with a mosque that people keep giving pork to, not on purpose. They're not trying to be terrible, they just don't get it. So then they contact us, and then we have

another nonprofit who does not have such religious restrictions and takes it and uses it. So it's a pretty easy sell.

Sam: So, obviously, it's all free. You must rely on a lot of private donations in order to fund all the great things that you do, or how does that work?

Maria: So, yes, nonprofit is a tax status, it is not a state of mind. We are very much grants and private donation reliant right now. One of the things that we are looking to do in the next year is fully flesh out a sustainable revenue stream. One of the things that most food companies don't do, even when they donate their food, is actually claim all of the tax credits and deductions associated with those donations.

You have to be able to prove how much you donated, when, to whom, their EIA number, the location number, the time, the date. You've to be able to prove all this data. If you're not using a system like MEANS, that's just like on a sticky note that your boss boy wrote down and it's sitting on a desk somewhere. So if you're not tracking this digitally, it's going to take several full-time humans to keep track of all of it, and it's not financially worth it for you to try to claim those deductions. We have all that by nature of what we do. It's just all in our backend like that.

So what we are planning to do is offer up all of this data to our food donors as an option if they want it. There's a company that's given us \$100,000 worth of food, let's say. Just at the federal level, 25% of that, you can write off as a credit. So that's \$25,000. It's a small example, but we would sell that data back to them for \$5,000 so they have 20,000 reasons to pay us for it. That is \$5,000 in sustainable revenue for us, not on the backs of poor and hungry people.

Sam: That's amazing. So it sounds like the sky is the limit for you. I mean, where do you envision the end game? Are you going to just take over the country, the world? I mean, how big can you guys get?

Maria: I think we can get a lot bigger.

Sam: There's so much need.

Maria: There's so much need. There's just such astronomical need. We want to be very clear, we are not ending hunger. To truly end hunger, we have to end poverty. And, historically speaking, that is a battle that has not gone well for us. We're doing better than we once were. But to untangle all of the reasons people go hungry, we have to untangle this brutal knot of poverty, and race, and policy. There's so many pieces to that. But we can address the actual hunger that exists.

So we are not working to structurally change the reasons people go hungry. That's beyond our bandwidth. There are plenty of other folks doing great work on that front. We exist to treat the hunger now.

Sam: We've talked so much today about all the amazing and great things you've done for others throughout your short life so far. Why do you think it's important for others to give back?

Maria: It's the rent we pay for life on Earth,

Sam: I like that. Yeah, it's true. My grandfather, George H. W. Bush always says, "A life well lived isn't one without service to others." You've done some amazing things, and I want to end with this question. What do you want people to learn from your story?

Maria: So for someone who's younger, I think I want them to learn that you are not defined by any of your experiences at 12 years old. You can experience some really awful, traumatizing things, and you can still be incredibly successful and that can coexist. When I experienced being raped, when I experienced the pieces that come along with that, I had never heard of someone that this had happened to them and then they had gone on and done something incredible that was completely unrelated.

So I want young women in particular to know that that can be part of your experience as a child, and you can still crush it and do incredible things, and you are not defined by that experience whatsoever. So that is one thing I want to put forth because that was something that I did not hear and really needed to hear. And, for general people, there's a lot we can do. And everybody is really good at something. There's probably a way you can put that of use to other people.

Sam: Well, Maria, you said crushing it. I know that you are crushing it, and the MEANS Database is crushing.

Maria: We are, yeah. Sure trying.

Sam: It's amazing to see what you're doing, and I can't wait, especially that you're in D.C. I want to come by and visit the state.

Maria: Oh, it's so fine.

Sam: Will you invite me?

Maria: Yeah.

Sam: Okay, cool.

Maria: It's a co-working space actually at American. So it's just, you know, 12 college kids.

Sam: That's great.

Maria: It's an ongoing joke that our COO, for some reason, really wanted a money gun. Our interns this summer bought her one on Amazon and then found and had printed a bunch of fake money with her face on it. And we used the money gun to the point now that like we still find \$50 bills with Sammy's face. We'll like be cleaning the office, and be like, "This was under the trash can. Like, can you guys help me?" We are very good at what we do, we are very proud of the work that we do, but it is also an environment that does not take itself too seriously. And I think that allows us to confront the injustices that we face every day and keep going.

Sam: Thanks again to Maria Rose Belding, Co-founder and Executive Director of MEANS Database. The September event mark the first of what will be many George H.W. Bush Points of Light Awards. I'll let my uncle, Neil ,say some closing words on Points of Light.

Neil: When dad first used the words "points of light," there were 34 million Americans volunteering. Today, there are over 64 million Americans. So the voluntary service movement has doubled, you know, and more corporations, more faith organizations, more educational institutions are sending people into the community. And, it's helping. It's making a difference in the lives of others.

Sam: For Khloe Thompson, Maria Rose Belding, my uncle, Neil, and my cousin, Lauren, we'll see you on the next "All The Best." I'm Sam LeBlond, reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All The Best" on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate "All The Best."

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house, every house all over America.

President Bush: Preparedness, strength, decency and honor, courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country, America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America, the greatest country on the face of the earth.

