

## **“Social Change” Program Transcript**

HOLLY HOEY: So Maurice, as we talk about social change, I know there's a story behind how you got into this field. I can just sense your passion and enthusiasm for what you do.

MAURICE WILLIAMS: Well, I've always had an interest in the human condition. My undergrad was in psychology, so we studied a lot about the mind, human behavior. I've always been inquisitive. I want to know; how did we get here, who are we, why are we so different, why are we so alike, what makes us who we are? And so, literally, that's why I got into it.

Now, as I started working in the field though, I saw that, wow, it's not about being inquisitive. There's really a lot of needs out here for people. There's a lot of pain out here. It's a lot of trauma, a lot of grief, a lot of loss. And I come from a family that has always been very community focused.

And so I got into working with people with disabilities. And then next, I worked with adults who were on assistance, tenants assistance. And then I ended up working with children. And now it's like, "Wow, there it is." Children have such a vulnerability, but such a purity. I can connect with them, because children always remind me that we all were one of them at one time. And I'm fortunate enough to have gotten into a field that keeps me focused on, like Holly asked, What am I going to do good today? Who am I going to help? Not really save, but who am I going to help progress further in their life."

HOLLY HOEY: What about you Andrea?

ANDREA INGRAM: Well, I grew up in a large family, a lot of kids, and I was in the middle. So middle children, we do a lot of mediating and all this kind of stuff. But, I also grew up with a very keen sense of justice and fairness. When there are seven kids in the family, you learn that life is not fair. And my parents had a strong sense of justice also, and were great examples.

So when I went out into the world, I felt an obligation, a responsibility to try to make life better for people that didn't have it as well as I did. Because to me, it's a sense of justice and fairness to include people in the mainstream who are left out, for whatever reason. They're left out because of poverty, they're left out because of mental illness, or there are left out because of their personality. They're just left out because of relationships.

So it's just because of, I think, being raised with a keen sense of fairness and justice and wanting to have an impact on that.

I found that I really loved crisis work, because when people are in crisis there's such energy there and motivation to make things different. And there's a real opportunity to make things different and to make some really significant changes and reach some really significant resolutions in your life that really might put you on a different path.

HOLLY HOEY: I say that I'm in this field by default. But it worked out to my benefit, because I absolutely love what I do. I wasn't a middle child, but I've always been a mediator. Always. "Are you OK? Is everyone OK? Let's make sure everybody gets along." And so that's just my personality.

But I have a degree in interior design. And so I did design work for five years. And I race walked a marathon for Leukemia Society, and we had to raise money. Here we go. Here goes my life story. And I had to raise money, which I found to be so simple. And people kept saying, "How are you raising all that money?" And I said, "It's because I believe in it." If I could talk about it and I believed in it, and I really had a case for why I was raising money, I found it to be very easy.

And so here goes my career change. I loved it. And I said, "I'm not fulfilled in my previous job." And I just said, "I'm going to make a life change." And it was the best change that I made. And 12 years later, here I am. I love it at United Way.

And I just feel that I connect the dots. That's my job. I connect the dots. I connect the dots with my volunteers, with donors, to people that need help. And United Way does the same thing with partners. And I just feel that that's where my skill set is. If I can bring these people together to effect change, I've done my job.

So we're talking about how our organizations influence social change. And I think this is actually the most exciting part to discuss, because being at United Way for over 12 years, I think that my job every day is extremely rewarding and fulfilling.

What United Way of Central Maryland does is to again, mobilize the community to improve people's lives. We are touching the lives and changing lives as it relates to helping people sustain their lives, to stabilize, and then getting them out of that spiraling poverty and getting them to self-sufficiency. My job is to educate and communicate and inform individuals about the most pressing needs in this community.

MAURICE WILLIAMS: I, like you, Holly, believe that social change is very, very important for our organization as well, the Williams Life Center. We service people who are born into the number one institution, the first institution that they'll ever be a part of, which is the family. Unfortunately, their families fall apart for whatever reasons, neglect, abuse, drugs, incarceration. Some families and some parents want to take care of the kids, but they just don't have the resources and the capabilities to do so. And so we at the Williams Life Center bring them in.

Some children come into our program and they've already lost a lot. And maybe they're now 14 already when they come into the system, and some of them have a long way to go. And they may falter and they may not be successful in the program that we provide to them. But then there are others, which far outweigh the ones that don't make it, that will come in and although they have the emotional baggage that they have, and the traumas that they've experienced, we watch them grow and we watch them become connected to a family.

And that is so rewarding, because we see that as our duty to ensure that these children, no matter what their previous life would have been like, that when they come to our agency we're going to take care of them, bottom line. We're going to take care of them. And if they're in an environment that is not meeting the standard, we move them. And then those that aren't meeting the standard, but we can work with them to get them higher, we do that. And so that's how we believe we affect social change. Because this is another child who may not grow up to be an abuser himself.

ANDREA INGRAM: Well, to me, social change is very personal. You talked about volunteers. You talked about your families and the kids. I think large change starts with one person, and it goes from that person to their family, to their congregation.

An example that I would like to talk a little bit about is, we do a lot of services for people with mental illness. And they're in our shelter programs, but we also have a mobile crisis team and we go out with the police. We also do some training with the Police Department on how to better manage situations with a person who's perhaps having a psychotic episode, may be behaviorally out of control, resulting in some family conflict, and so forth.

There's one person that we respond to all the time. When she's not in treatment, it can be pretty outrageous, including challenging the police, very confrontational. It could even be sexually oriented. When the police went to lunch at this day program, there she was. And it was at a point in her life where she was in treatment. And the police were just amazed. They sat down with her, were able to talk with her, see her when she is in treatment and is doing well. And were even able to talk to her about, how should we behave when we come out and you're in crisis? So that she could even have some input into how the police and the mobile crisis team would respond to her.

That one thing transfers to other police officers, transfers to how they act when they respond to other people who are having a mental health crisis. Because they can see the person behind the crisis. And when you see the person behind the crisis, you handle it a little differently. So that to me is social change, one person at a time.

MAURICE WILLIAMS: When we think of social change, sometimes I think we think of somebody standing behind a podium saying, "Let's do it," and there's hundreds of thousands of people out there on the lawn listening. But it's really one person at a time.

And sometimes, in our jobs, we have to remind ourselves how important what we do really is.

I was in Walmart two weeks ago, and a foster family came up to me and said, "Hey, Mr. Williams." And I turned around and it was a 16-year old who I had placed there over a year ago with her foster mother. And the 16-year old has a son who was born about a year or so ago. The son was born with extreme health needs. And so working with this child, she broke down. She said, "I'm in twelfth grade. My child is sick." The child was in the hospital for like three months at a time. And we said to her, "We will help you through this. We're going to ensure that you graduate. We're going to ensure that this baby is taken care of." And we stuck with her.

And so when I walked away after we spoke, I looked back at them again and I said to myself, "Wow, that could have never happened had we not really worked to keep this girl together, to keep this baby together, to keep this family together." So sometimes, little glimpses will come that says, "You know what Maurice, what you guys do is really important."

And so it is one individual at a time. It really is.