

Java with Jim: Meet Tracy Broccolino, President at Community Action Council of Howard County

Jim Ries: [00:00:00] Hello and welcome to Java with Jim.

I'm Jim Ries, Director of Business Development at Offit Kurman, joined here today with Tracy Broccolino, who is President at Community Action Council of Howard County. Tracy, how are you today?

Tracy Broccolino: I'm doing great. Thanks, Jim. Good morning.

Jim Ries: Yeah, good morning. Tracy. Tell us about community Action Council of Howard County, what do you do there and how do you serve the community around you?

Tracy Broccolino: I'm happy to share. We proudly have been operating in Howard County for 60 years. We were established in Howard County in 1965 and are one of 17 community action agencies in the state and over a thousand in the country. Community action was started actually in 1964 as part of the President Johnson's war on poverty and as a sister act to the Civil Rights Act.

And, community Action is designed to meet local needs. [00:01:00] And so if you've met one community action agency, you've met one Community Action agency. And here in Howard County we are proud to sit on the prevention side of the continuum of human services, enabling families to continue to thrive and stay out of poverty and crisis.

And we do that with our five core services. So we are the sole headstart grantee and have been since 1979, providing free early childhood education year round, full day so families can continue to work full-time. We own and operate the Howard County Food Bank as well as dozens of partner pantries across the county.

We are the local Energy Assistance Agency on behalf of the Office of Home Energy Programs, which is a state agency. We also provide eviction prevention and housing assistance like first month's rent. And then we are also the state's largest nonprofit weatherization provider. And that by budget is [00:02:00] our largest program, interestingly. We go into low and moderate income households and perform energy audits to lower their energy bills, but also make their home more healthy and more comfortable.

Jim Ries: Wow. Fabulous services for sure. Thank you Tracy. So when it comes to community Action Council of Howard County, what are you most proud of?

Tracy Broccolino: I am most proud to say that we are a reliable, efficient, and trustworthy partner and friend to so many people across this county and across the state. Not only to our other nonprofit and human services partners and friends and government, local, state, and federal. But also to our clients.

We provide a service across those five core areas and in ways that many other organizations and perhaps agencies cannot provide because we do it in an efficient way. And we do it in a way that surrounds our clients with dignity and respect and recognizing [00:03:00] that every single

human and part of the human experience will face struggle. And as deliverers of service, we want to make sure that folks felt, cared for, and that they feel respected and that there is no stigma and no shame when you come to us for assistance for the areas that we can help you with. And if we can't, we have a huge network of partners that we will warmly hand you to and coordinate with so that you can get those services. Not only that we are a trusted partner to our volunteers. We're a great place to volunteer. Our food bank couldn't operate without our wonderful group of volunteers. We have a community garden as well, and have lots of ways that we reach out to the community and to support our community that we need our volunteers for.

And then again our donors really look to us because we are a solid fiscally sound organization that is great to invest in.

Jim Ries: Excellent. Plenty to be proud of. I know you've got some exciting things ahead, so tell us what will you and [00:04:00] Community Action Council of Howard County be focused on in the next six months?

Tracy Broccolino: Great question. You will hear lots from us in the next six months. Chief of which is we are launching a capital campaign. Our current Howard County Food Bank, which is located on Gerwig Lane, was established there. We started distributing food in the mid eighties, actually out in the little school in Ellicott City, but, our Gerwig Lane building has been exhausted by the demand. And so not fit for the demand that we see. Prior to COVID, we used to see 80 people a week. We see 80 people a day at that building. And we need a larger space. And over a third of the folks who visit our food bank or who engage with our other services are living along the Route One corridor in Howard County.

And at this moment, other than the multi-service center in North Laurel, there are really no human services along the Route One corridor. We have purchased land on the corner of Montevideo and Dorsey Run, and we will be building [00:05:00] a campus over there that has a much larger food bank that will operate much better than the building we have now for the capacity that we're seeing co-located with early childhood, where families can come and not only receive food and have their children cared for, but also be able to engage with other community partners.

So we need to raise some funds to build those buildings. The land is paid for. We need some funds for those buildings. And that's gonna be launching here in the next couple weeks. So we're really excited to provide some of those details as we share that with our friends and the public.

We also are looking to diversify our funding as there are some climate changes happening inside the beltway. South of us. So we want to make sure that we continue to be the strong fiscally sound organization that we already are. So we aren't dependent on those funds that are coming from there.

So that's gonna be important for us to continue to be innovative. To meet community needs. And then not least, importantly, for the first time in Howard County history, we have early Head Start. So [00:06:00] we have introduced infants and toddlers into our care, so we will have babies. Focusing on the implementation of Early Head Start and I'm really excited about that because I don't know about you, but holding a baby makes you feel better all the time, so we're excited about that as well.

Jim Ries: Wow. So many exciting things to look forward to for you guys. Congratulations. Now last question, and this is the fun question. What do most people watching this video not know about you personally?

Tracy Broccolino: Oh my goodness. Something strange is happening in my life. I told my husband the other day, I think I'm turning into Snow White because I go out into my garden and all the bees hang around me and don't bother me, and birds are showing up and hanging around me.

So I'm not sure what's going on, but I totally dig it. And I love birds. I love to watch birds. But I don't know if they're like little messengers from God just saying, it's cool, you're doing the right thing. Keep going.

Jim Ries: That sounds great, as long as you're not attracting the deer into your [00:07:00] gardens.

Tracy Broccolino: Oh, no, they stay away. Odd.

Jim Ries: Keep them away.

Tracy Broccolino: Maybe the bees are scaring the deer.

Maybe that's what it is.

Jim Ries: Yeah, maybe so. Well that's certainly an interesting, fun fact. That's one of our unique ones, I will say. Tracy, thanks for sharing your story about you and Community Action Council of Howard County.

It's really awesome, the work that you're doing and you're touching so many lives. It's really fantastic and keep up the great work and we hope that this video gives you some additional exposure and visibility throughout the Maryland region.

Tracy Broccolino: Oh, I appreciate the opportunity. Thanks Jim, and have a great day.

Jim Ries: Yes, bye.

Tracy Broccolino: Bye.