

An Interview with Liz Ortenburger

Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada

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Each interviewee had the opportunity to review their transcript. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the interviewee. This interview features Liz Ortenburger, CEO of SafeNest, and was conducted on 11/11/22 by Magdalena Martinez and Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Liz Ortenburger (SafeNest)

Date: 11-11-2022

SPEAKERS: Magdalena Martinez, Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio, Liz Ortenburger

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [00:05]

Okay. So, we're here with Liz Ortenburger of SafeNest. Do you consent to record this interview for transcription purposes?

Liz Ortenburger [00:16]

Yes.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [00:17]

And can we use your name in quotes or memos that come up?

Liz Ortenburger [00:23]

Yes.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [00:25]

Thank you. First question. Can you describe your role throughout the pandemic and the role of SafeNest as a whole?

Liz Ortenburger [00:34]

Yeah. So, I'm the CEO for SafeNest. That was my role before, during, and after the pandemic. And SafeNest is a domestic and sexual violence agency. We work in prevention, protection, and empowerment within that space. The most relevant work to COVID is obviously in that protection and empowerment space. So providing shelter, hotline services, court services, and temporary protection orders. We respond alongside police on domestic violence 911 calls. And then we provide emergency shelter, and then long-term traditional housing and counseling.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [01:16]

Thank you. I've known people who have volunteered during those calls. I would like to know a little bit more about how those work. But maybe in the next question, you could tell me a little bit about that.

Liz Ortenburger [01:26]

Sure.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [01:29]

If you could think of the pandemic as a timeline. Were there some pivotal moments that you think shaped your response to this crisis and the way you chose to lead during this time?

Liz Ortenburger [01:44]

Yeah. So there are two sides to that, right? One is as an employer of a lot of women. Our staff is probably 85% female. A lot of moms and several single moms. So, as an employer, we really had to figure out how are we going to keep our workforce safe, but also, coming to work. Because we don't do the kind of work that you can typically do from home. I mean, there's some flexibility in there. And then the "unknowns" of the first stages of the pandemic, in terms of what does it look like to have a resource response if my entire hotline gets sick? What is our setup? What's our emergency response?

So there was all of that internal employer/employee relations work going on. And then what started to happen in the broader framework was, there are two other agencies that provide similar services. They both either completely shut down or dramatically limited their ability to provide services.

We made a decision, as a group of five leadership team members, to not reduce services in any possible way, and not to allow the health department to come in and do inspections. It was a voluntary request by the health department. But we could read between the tea leaves that that was going to mean that we would have to reduce services, and we were unwilling to do that. And we were unwilling to do that because we had already – so, looking at our predicted analytics, we were seeing the spikes; as the shutdown started to sort of throw waves through the community, we could see the spike in hotline calls, in the needs for shelter, and in the lethality rate of our community go up.

So that was really – that data that we track along the lines of the decisions that were being made to shut things down, we knew that we were going to be inundated. And so really, that early phase.

But from there, everything kind of – our rates remained incredibly high. But the type of work that we were doing wasn't – we made the decision not to pivot, not to change. To continue to do what we had done because we didn't see a different avenue that would have met the need that we were seeing.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [04:08]

That's really brave. And I noticed that you mentioned you were tracking your calls. Perhaps alongside, also, measuring arrest rates or call rates, right? Police call rates, things like that..

Liz Ortenburger [04:26]

Yeah. So the data in our space is interesting. Because we deal with three major police jurisdictions, all of which code things differently. And some code them with a realistic narrative, and some code them with a narrative that makes – looks better on paper. So, we're always navigating – now that we've been doing the data tracking for five solid years, we kind of understand the fluctuations in the data that we're seeing, and can translate into, okay, what does that mean?

But Metro LVMPD is our largest partner in that space. And they arrest – so there are about 70,000 domestic violence 911 calls a year. That went up about 20% during COVID. It has since

come back to pre-COVID levels. That's a good thing. They arrest, 15% of the time, on-scene. Another 15% of those calls go out on warrant and are picked up on charges post-incident. So that means 70% of those calls are police response-only, and no charge is made.

So we track that, and then we track our calls. Unlike a lot of hotlines, we are not – there's no police response requirement to get to us. So, our data, we're always asking, was there a police response, so that we understand the correlation. About 20% of our calls are related to that police response, but another 80% are folks that are experiencing violence that *do not want* a system involved. They want safety, they want resources, and they want help, but they do not want the police, or the justice system involved.

And so, we track all of that and watch that. And what happened during COVID is really kind of "macro" across the board. Everything went up 20%. Stayed there for a good solid two-plus years, and now, is kind of returning. What has *not* returned, though, is the lethality rates of callers. So we track everything on a lethality index. It's Jackie Campbell's Lethality Assessment. It's a 0 to 20-point scale. We saw that number, that lethality number, leap up in COVID, which means more people are experiencing domestic violence that would indicate they're moving towards homicide. That number has gone down a little bit, but it has not matched the decrease in volume.

So we have less calls, but more at a highly lethal level. What that means is, there's a strain on emergency shelter beds in our system. We are spending \$35,000 a month, probably, on average over the last two years on hotel rooms, which is an indication, right, that we house if your lethality's a 16 or higher. We haven't seen that drop-down yet. So that our 100-bed main campus is enough volume for the lethality.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [07:47]

Wow. That's very serious. How has this shifted your decision-making process as a leader because of examples like that?

Liz Ortenburger [08:05]

Yeah. So, nonprofits always have a choice. Are we going to expand? Are we going to maintain? As does any business, right? Any business has a choice.

So there are a couple of things that have happened in my decision-making. One is, we have to aggressively educate around which providers are doing the work to actually save lives, and which providers are working in a way that may be detrimental to that. And so that's difficult, right? Because we need to work in an ecosystem, but there is absolutely no certification or accreditation process that says, "This agency's doing good work. This agency is not." So, delicate from a public relations perspective, and those conversations are mainly internal to the stakeholders and to the boards of directors that are involved. But we've made that decision because we are seeing catastrophic decisions being made in other places and in other agencies. That's been one piece.

The other piece is to absolutely not allow our governments off the hook for what they need to be doing in this space. Domestic violence is not a SafeNest issue. It's a community issue. And we, for too long, have invested 1.5 million dollars in a fantastic new stadium, which I'm excited

about the diversification of our economy. We have Formula 1 coming here. We have a huge NASCAR presence. We're doing all of these great things. But we fail, alongside our growth, to build out the social service infrastructure, in a way that meets the demand. And we put all of that – all of that ownership – on the nonprofit community.

So, as ARPA dollars became available, we requested 38.5 million dollars to build the level and type of facility that our county needs, to really do the work in line with other communities our size are doing around the country, and that, we have not been funded. And so, it is the continual push of, we want to do all of these things, but yet, we do not have the support.

And so, what that means on a weekend when the town is full, is any sexual assault or domestic violence victim is sleeping on an air mattress, on a floor of a multi-purpose room. If we really want to be a community that is prepared for the type of things that we're bringing here, just in our natural population, and then in our growth and in our events, we have got to start to have a very on-purpose, strategic discussion.

And the other thing that we have really called out stakeholders on is this sort of "macro" approach to homelessness as if it's all one monolithic population. Which then creates very – first of all, very genderized solutions. They're male-dominated solutions.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [11:18]

Mm-hmm.

Liz Ortenburger [11:19]

And they do not account for single mothers. They do not account for the intersectionality of abuse in homelessness. I would say we're short on substance abuse in homelessness. Really understanding and segmenting the market. We've really taken a position of we are not going to allow ignorance to exist and made that very publicly clear. And our government affairs work has exploded in terms of the voice that needs to be – someone has got to continue to have or raise the bar on what we're talking about in terms of what we're doing as a community. So those have been the big decisions.

The other piece of that is, you know, while we didn't receive 38.5 million dollars, we continue to ask, not only the government – because it's not just their job – but also, our private donors, okay, what is a realistic investment, as we had three homicides in October, all related to domestic violence. The person who stabbed eight people on the Strip recently – domestic violence charge in his record dismissed. The county administrator that stabbed to death the reporter – domestic violence in his record. There's an ecosystem here that we're failing to understand from a survivor's side, but additionally, from a perpetrator's side, and that's making our community incredibly unsafe.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [12:45]

I noticed that you use language about perpetrators and a community of batterers, and that's not genderized. Which is very much in line with here in academia. So, thank you for that.

Liz Ortenburger [13:00]

Yeah.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [13:01]

And you also mentioned groups. So there are offenders other than women in other gender groups, and perhaps a counterpart to those groups that were hardest hit by the pandemic. How would you say that you observed those groups, and was there any point where you would say you worked with someone, and you felt like that was a really successful engagement, something that you're particularly proud of?

Liz Ortenburger [13:23]

Yeah. So we work with about 750 abusers every year. They are typically, actually, I will say 99% of the time – we've had a couple of folks engage voluntarily, but that's normally at the urging of their attorney, to get ahead of the charges like, "You're being a good person. You're going on a voluntary batterer's treatment."

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [13:46]

Mm-hmm.

Liz Ortenburger [13:48]

Most of our groups are males. We have two groups for female perpetrators. And we do not have any groups for gender nonbinary, and that's not for lack of desire. There just is not – in order to be a group, it needs to be three to five individuals, and we haven't had three to five individuals who would fit that profile to make a group in that space operate in the way that it needs to.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [14:11]

Mm-hmm.

Liz Ortenburger [14:13]

So, yes. I will tell you one really touching engagement we had with a batterer. It was a 19-year-old. Black male. He had three kids. So, 19 years, three kids. His oldest was three years old. He had a domestic violence charge. It was his first DV charge but not his first drug or weapons charge. So, we're looking at a pattern here.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [14:38]

Right.

Liz Ortenburger [14:40]

We are very clear with our batterers when they start in our groups; child abuse is something that we have to report. But we also talk about, if you really want to make changes in your life – and we have aligned our groups heavily with – out of the University of Oklahoma, there's a researcher that does a lot of work around HOPE, and there's also a whole institute in San Diego, the Alliance for Hope International. We've aligned our measurements and metrics with their work because there is a lot of evidence to show when you can build hope in any population, things are better, and batterers are not excluded from that. So we talk about that.

Well, this 19-year-old disclosed that he punched his three-year-old in the stomach, right? So, we did the normal thing, but my counselor also did – this is why we have therapists running groups and not merely facilitators. The therapist did exactly what I would have wanted and said, "Look. We have to report this, but let's have a one-on-one. Come in for a private session. Come in for an individual session." And fortunately, this 19-year-old did that and came in. And they talked about what gets you, right? Your anger scale. What gets you to that point where you're punching your three-year-old? And really worked with the abuser to go all the way back to like, a really tough experience at work that day; rent is due; all of the stresses, right?

So, when you get home, and your three-year-old is screaming, like a three-year-old can, they're the outlet of all of this stuff that you're bringing to the table. But they're the ones, right: that little three-year-old who's getting all of that rage. And we have a great working partnership with CPS, so we did what we needed to do, and worked with CPS to say, "Here's how we're handling it." They were fine with letting us take the lead.

Fast-forward two weeks: the 19-year-old comes back into the group. And he's explaining his anger, and that he was really, really, angry. Again, he had a tough day at work. The financial stress for a 19-year-old with three kids is absolutely real. And he explained that his three-year-old was, again, acting out. And he put the three-year-old in the room – the safe room – the three-year-old's bedroom. Closed the door, and just took a walk around the block. And breathed, and was able to go back in, and have dinner with the three-year-old and play with the three-year-old. Put the three-year-old to bed, and then deal with the stuff that he had to deal with.

That is what success looks like, right? It's like we've intervened in this situation where no one wants to hear about a father punching a three-year-old in the stomach. But that's the part society misses is okay, great. We could incarcerate this 19-year-old. We could put the three-year-old and the other two kids in foster care. We could systemize this whole thing. No one, *no one* is better for that. No one.

And so, when we cannot excuse the behavior but dissect it, explain it, and understand it, we can; prevent it from happening with other individuals who are intersecting that, but we can also stop it for that one, right? And what we find with our batterers is not, you know, these sociopaths who want to control and have all this power. We find folks that have never thought about the fact that anger is a choice. That how you manifest your frustration by punching a hole in the wall is a choice. And so that is like the success of our work. It's centimeters at a time, but they add up: so that somebody may have behavior that I still don't think is appropriate, right? Putting a three-year-old in a room alone and taking a walk around the block, that's terrifying to me as a mother.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [18:31]

Mm-hmm.

Liz Ortenburger [18:34]

But, oh, my gosh – is that better than where we started? So those are successes.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [18:38]

Okay. Thank you. You talked about there's an overreliance on the nonprofit sector as opposed to partnership - in line with current demand that is not being met according to our capacity, right? Is there anything that you wish agencies, at any level, had done differently or could do differently in response to how the health crisis, the economic crisis that ensued, or any kind of crisis that we may face in the future?

Liz Ortenburger [19:11]

Yeah. So we asked for there to be an alcoholic pandemic tax. There is an absolute correlation between domestic violence and alcoholism. Seventy percent of men who abuse also abuse alcohol. And the only reason that's gendered is because I don't have a correlating non-gendered stat on it. It's real. And so when the pandemic first hit, we could see this, right? Alcohol's going to fly off the shelves before water or anything else. I mean, you see domestic violence spike in hurricanes. You see domestic violence spike any time there's a community event, right, and alcohol plays a role.

And so, yeah. Our request was, "Can't we throw a pandemic tax on alcohol because we're going to have an immediate need." Fortunately, I mean that's kind of a little bit tongue-in-cheek, and it was a way for us to raise awareness.

But I will say that our federal government stepped in, and we certainly benefited from the CARES Act money that was almost immediately available for us to be able to do this work. But I will say this: it was immediately available to us because we have a solid financial P&L, right? I have money I can spend and get reimbursed.

So, for SafeNest, that's great. I can spend a million dollars, get reimbursed a million dollars, and I'll be fine. We are a bit of a "unicorn" in the human services space because we have such a strong and diversified revenue portfolio. So, for us, it worked out great. It did not – and I saw that with sister agencies that we work with, who don't have the kind of liquidity we have. They couldn't access those dollars because when the government says – I mean the recent ARPA fund releases out of the federal government are a perfect example. We were awarded \$100,000, I don't know, nine months ago, and I haven't seen that money. It will take them forever to spin up the process of how reimbursement is going to work. So that's always.. that is not COVID-related. That is government inefficiency-related.

So no, I thought the response was great. We benefited from it in a way that we could expand. I think the difficulty for those of us in the space that works with folks who are experiencing homelessness was around the health department. They were never clear.

And so, you know, one of the things that I like about this community is, we have our independent "Wild West" streaks. So it's like okay - we're just going to keep moving forward and we'll ask for forgiveness if we need to. We could have used, probably, a bit more of a hotline to call and understand.

And as an employer, what got complicated was quarantine/no quarantine, fever/no fever, what do I really need to do to test people? And that's really from an employer's space. From a client's space, we just did what we had to do to make sure that nobody was left in an unsafe situation.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [22:19]

Thank you. Thank you for that. You mentioned the innovation of your diversified portfolio at SafeNest started with a coffee shop, right?

Liz Ortenburger [22:25]

Yes, very good.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [22:26]

Yeah. I'll pass it on to Dr. Martinez. But I just wanted to clarify that that's what you meant by diversifying-

Liz Ortenburger [22:32]

Well, no. I actually mean it's larger than that, right? So we're, give or take, an \$8,000,000 agency on any given year. Half of that's coming from federal and state grants, and half of that's coming from earned revenue and fundraising. Financially, we're like a three-legged stool, and within each of those, there are smaller legs. So, for example, COVID, right, people stopped getting married because they were closed. We rely on about \$2,000,000 in marriage license money every year. So we knew that that was going to go down, but we had other revenue arms that okay, may not – can't fill in the blank – but that means that that loss isn't catastrophic.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [23:21]

Got it, thank you.

Liz Ortenburger [23:22]

You're welcome.

Magdalena Martinez [23:22]

Liz, I wanted to follow up on a couple of questions or a couple of comments that you made, specifically when you were talking about – Carmen asking you how your leadership evolved over the pandemic. And so, you talked a little bit about creating this greater awareness and sense of urgency of just how much more organizations, such as yours, were going to be at the frontline and necessary, right?

Liz Ortenburger [23:47]

Yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [23:50]

Could you talk a little bit more about – and then you also talked about really complicating like who your clients are, and who the perpetrators are, and the batterers. And making it more multidimensional, rather than static and just one-dimensional, right?

Liz Ortenburger [24:11]

Yeah.

Magdalena Martinez [24:15]

Can you talk a little bit more about like what the pillars of your leadership are, that have really informed these types of questions? Because really, you're asking these questions, right, and you're asking them of – externally and internally – how you think about what you do and why you do it.

Liz Ortenburger [24:33]

Yeah. So, a big part of my leadership, and probably why I gravitate to the nonprofit world is, how do we solve these major things. So domestic violence is massive. It's a huge issue. It's an issue globally. It's an issue locally. It's in more households than we need to be – but what we've done as a society is say, "Okay, survivors. There are 17 things you have to do, and the batterer has to do nothing. Well, we might incarcerate you; we might fine you; but we're not going to ask you for anything."

And so my leadership is more about, let's understand how we got here; where a survivor has to do all of these things, and a batterer only has to do one thing. And more about, what's realistic, right? So, I really sort of – I read a ton. I look at the data. I try to look for where the outliers are in a movement like domestic violence and understand what it is that they're pulling on. Because what I said when I came into SafeNest, which irritated people left, right, and center is, "If we're doing this right, why, since 1977, why aren't domestic violence rates going down?"

Magdalena knows this, but I used to work for Girl Scouts. And you can track female empowerment along with the Girl Scout movement, such that sometimes Girl Scouts has to fight for relevancy today. Girl Scouts has been a *major* portion of girl empowerment. And they can point to that and say, "This is what we've done, and this is why it's important." Domestic violence does not have that same ability. We can point to 1977 and say, "Great. That's when it became illegal. That's when federal funding was available."

Okay, so we spun up 1,375 different domestic violence agencies across the country. Domestic violence hasn't gone down. In fact, it's gone up. Homicides have gone up. Government spending on domestic violence has skyrocketed. We have got the same per capita rates as domestic violence, as Kazakhstan, a nation that has no domestic violence laws by World Health Organization data, right? So, for me, that's like okay. There's something here, and we've got to have a thought change, an innovative [approach] – what do we need to do?

So my leadership is really about, I've got to deal with the things that are right in front of me; like what are the fires that need to be put out? What's organizational efficiency? That's critical. But then it's much more about, okay. Our mandate here – SafeNest's mission has evolved a little bit since I came in five years ago, but essentially, our mission is to end domestic and sexual violence. Well, I'm not ending it if I'm providing a bed at the shelter, because that means it happened, and you got to me.

So when we say that let's think about what it means to truly end it, and what does that have to look like. And that means understanding that domestic violence is not – you know, as a movement, we kind of point to this power and control wheel. In reality, most of my clients don't see that as their relationship. They see a relationship where people cannot argue, and they can't do things well. So I have to take all of the things that I'm actually seeing, the data and those pieces, and put them together and say, "What's the vision? What's the direction? How do we really end this thing? *And* maintain what we're doing because there's – none of this can stop."

So it's data-driven organizational change because the vision change has required that. But it's digging in; it's really understanding the space and the history of the space that we sit in.

Magdalena Martinez [28:30]

So, you say it's data-driven, but I also – I don't want to put words in your mouth – but I feel like you're also saying it's human-driven. Because data just provides a snapshot, whereas you're saying, "Look. This is what I see in my clients. This is how they're making meaning of the experience." So that's also human and qualitatively driven by this.

Liz Ortenburger [28:52]

Yes, absolutely. And that side really came when I moved into this work. I went to a ton of conferences. I still do. I really get immersed in it. But when we had these survivors speaking at these conferences, I'm going – "That's – congratulations – that's an incredible journey that you've been on." You don't look like anybody I'm serving.

Magdalena Martinez [29:16]

Mmm.

Liz Ortenburger [29:17]

What I'm not seeing, right – and this was actually a real argument inside my agency was, where are we talking about the intersectionality of poverty and domestic violence? And everybody said there's no correlation.

Well, I caught up with a researcher from Maryland, a professor, and a researcher, and she had it. It's 5% of women – sorry – women are five times more likely, at below the poverty line. So that's kind of how it works for me. It's like, I'm not seeing this. Okay. Where's the correlating data? Does it exist? Can I get behind this, or am I seeing something that might be a 'blip', an abnormality, or has yet to be proven out from a dataset?

So, yeah, there's a huge human element in there because we're missing this. We are missing this entire epidemic as a society.

Magdalena Martinez [30:14]

Can you talk a little bit about how, during this time, you've worked with other organizations, be they nonprofit, or you know, for-profit, or government agencies? What did collaboration look like during this time?

Liz Ortenburger [30:25]

Yeah. So there are sort of like three buckets, right? On the corporate side, it was fantastic, just the reality that domestic violence [response] got a lot of good PR. We pushed a lot of good PR explaining the realities of this space during COVID, and that had its correlating increase in support and donations. So that was really the corporate side. We had a couple of corporations who run employee foundations that called in to check on us, see how we were doing, and see what we needed, which I appreciated. But really, that created some funding streams for us that were vital. So that was really the corporate partnerships.

The government partnerships were interesting. Because the government is wholly inefficient in rolling out anything on a dime. So those partnerships were frustrating from – it would be like, "We've 10,000 diapers in a warehouse, and I don't know, like outside of Reno, do you guys need any diapers?" It's like, "No, I'm good, thanks." They were trying to fill a need, and trying to work in an innovative way, but without any of that context within their own operating systems.

And then they continued to roll out new funding, which was great. But what was happening was, new funding's rolling out, and then they're changing the guidelines behind it. So there was a lot of gratitude, but frustration with the government during that time.

And then with my nonprofit collaborative partners, a lot of was informational. So, Deacon Tom at Catholic Charities, I rely on him a bit to understand what's happening within the homeless population because he's got a lens. And then, also, what's his COVID response? What's he doing? So I connected with folks like Deacon Tom, who was in my orbit already, so my orbit didn't really change a whole heck of a lot.

What got interesting in the nonprofit space was, all of a sudden, you had these new nonprofits who are meeting a need that many of us have been meeting for a long time. And instead of being collaborative, they tried to be controlling. And that's not unheard of in the domestic violence – or, sorry – in the nonprofit space. But it became sort of hyper-focused during COVID. And those of us that are just doing this work it's like, I don't need your food program. We've got this. But don't come in here and tell me, if we don't collaborate, then we're not having access to this larger – there's a lot of just nonprofit speculation happening, so that was interesting. I hadn't seen that at that level before. Every once in a while, a new nonprofit will pop up, and you're like, "Okay. Great." And they'll say they're doing all these things, and then you scratch the surface a little bit and you realize, well, it's not – because when people tell me they're doing something, it's like I've got, in my mind, probably 30 to 2,000 clients who could benefit from that, so I'm referring them to you. And then when I get my information back that they're getting turned away from service, okay. So, a lot of that was happening in COVID.

Magdalena Martinez [33:45]

Very helpful. And reflecting back on the last two, two and a half years; from your perspective, what are some of the most important lessons learned from this experience?

Liz Ortenburger [33:59]

Business matters in the nonprofit world. Having a solid business foundation will help you continue to meet your mission, if not expand that work. Especially for those of us that are kind of

in that direct service social safety network, it matters. And I think that we too often don't – there is no – I don't have stockholders, so I don't have profit in the way that the business world thinks about it. So we allow a lot of nonprofits to limp along for a very long period of time, taking money out of the pipeline and delivering an inferior product. COVID equalized quite a bit of that because you could not limp along on government dollars during COVID. You needed to have a good business foundation, and you also needed to be doing what you're saying that you're doing. And I think over the next – the outcome of all that is, over the next three to five years, we'll see some merger and acquisition activity in the nonprofit world that will benefit clients and benefit the landscape of nonprofits in Las Vegas. But we have some that COVID hit them so hard, they won't recover.

Magdalena Martinez [35:19]

And when you say, "business matters," do you mean the business management side of the house of nonprofits, like the financial management and-

Liz Ortenburger [35:29]

Yep. Financial management, your human resource management. We made a decision, for anybody that had to put their school-aged children in childcare, we would pay for it. Because I need my advocates to keep coming to work, and far and away, they wanted to keep coming to work. So I have really good people who now have a barrier because there's no school. How can I fill that, right? So, you've got to be people-focused on your team, and yes, you've got to have a solid foundation. And people need to believe in you, right? Any of my staff could have left and got unemployment probably at a pretty good rate, and then all of the other things that were available during COVID. They've got to believe in the vision. They've got to believe in the leader, and they need to feel supported. And a lot of our nonprofits, I mean, I see it. We don't – the compensation is one thing; but it's actually, really caring about the people who are doing the work on the frontline, and there needs to be more of that.

Magdalena Martinez [36:40]

Liz, I've known you before the pandemic. And now we're having a conversation, and you've always been someone that speaks your mind and speaks truths to power. Did the pandemic change this in any way? Did it make you feel a greater urgency for that? How did it shape you, as a leader, in terms of how you approach your vocation and your mission, really, in life?

Liz Ortenburger [37:03]

Yeah. I don't think it did change anything. What it did, I think, was to really elevate the agency as being seen as an expert and a leader in the space for the state, which is flattering and also, on purpose. I believe so solidly in the work that we're doing here, and I see the outcomes of what we're doing, and I see what's happening in other parts of our orbit. And, if anything, it just gave me a bit of a larger megaphone, which is – I hope, right, sort of somewhat arrogantly – I hope that that is – I know, in my mind because I see what we're doing. This is what our state of Nevada needs. So, no. If anything, I think it just got louder.

Magdalena Martinez [37:59]

Okay. And Carmen, I know you wanted to ask a follow-up question on Marsy's Law.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [38:05]

Yeah, if it's okay with you, Liz. If I could ask you about Marsy's Law.

Liz Ortenburger [38:09]

Yep.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [38:10]

So my overall research question is, from your perspective, how did the implementation of Marsy's Law affect the domestic violence sphere?

Liz Ortenburger [38:22]

I'm going to be brutally honest here. It has done nothing. I have not seen any change in what we're able to accomplish in the justice system, for clients, or anything from the outcome of Marsy's Law. I mean, it may be too early, right, to tell, and then we had this pandemic sort of in the midst of all of it. But on the frontline of what we do, there hasn't been any fundamental change. And I don't know enough about everything to know, is that because we're missing something in implementation that hasn't been executed? But I do know there was – I want to say, it was 10 or 15 million dollars in the state budget in 2019 for implementation, and that got yanked. So my guess is, is that a lot of the good things that we had hoped Marsy's Law was going to do have been underfunded, which is just sort of classic "Nevada 101."

But Carmen, I will say too: I'm certainly not an expert for the agency because I'm not on the frontline. If you want access to my court folks or any of my folks, I'm happy to get – they will have a better answer than me probably.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [39:34]

I will happily take you up on that.

Liz Ortenburger [39:35]

Good.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [39:35]

I'm going through IRB right now. So it's one of those big projects that require time. I can tell you, preliminarily, that I have conducted a literature review and a financial analysis of state budget documents and things like that. And found that a lot of the funding sources for victims' services varied, right?

Liz Ortenburger [39:58]

Yeah.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [39:59]

Like you said, marriage license fees. But also, bigger than the money path is how the implementation of the law and its requirements affects both victims and defendants. And these are two groups that you deal with regularly, victims and defendants. So, I feel like you have a very unique perspective, your agency does-

Liz Ortenburger [40:20]

Yeah.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [40:22]

-to answer these types of questions about what the real-life impact is like, right? That can follow the money. But I'm still, three years later, wondering whether this was a good thing or a bad thing. And so, of course, it's still too early in my research to say one way or the other.

Liz Ortenburger [40:37]

Yeah.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [40:40]

But a lot of groups in other states have filed lawsuits, have requested revisions to the law, or called it unconstitutional altogether. So it's really one of those states as policy labs experiments if you will. Thank you so much for answering that question.

Liz Ortenburger [40:55]

Yes.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [40:58]

I will definitely follow up with you on LinkedIn perhaps, or email [??41:00].

Liz Ortenburger [40:59]

Yeah. Email me; because then my executive assistant will get it and she'll make that happen.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [41:06]

Okay. Thank you. Got it.

Magdalena Martinez [41:09]

Liz, one final question. You talked about hope, and how important it is for the clients that you see and the individuals that you serve. What keeps *you* hopeful?

Liz Ortenburger [41:26]

You know - that there are solutions to this. That there is absolutely a possibility, within one or two generations, we are dramatically decreasing what is happening in this space of violence in our households. And that right now, at this time, SafeNest is poised to really lead that revolution, in terms of what access to information young people have around their basic human rights, as it relates to their relationships with a romantic partner, with a family member, with a friend when we don't do that work in CCSD.

And so, we keep pushing. And I think at some point, we're going to break down that door. But what keeps me going is that there are answers on the micro level with the clients I work with, on all sides – kids, abusers, victims, or survivors in my space. There are micro answers, but there are macro answers. And gosh darn it, if Nevada could just – especially like those of us – there are 13 agencies like mine in Nevada. We are the largest – you put all the other ones together, and they don't even come up to half our budget.

If we could get Nevada to see the power of one hotline. Imagine the power of having lethality information on every 911 call where an arrest was made, right? We could start to change the scope and the way that our justice system in the state works, that could be much more relevant to what survivors *and* abusers need so that the violence ends there. And then if we could just get the school districts across the state – Clark County would be the first one – to recognize the power of a young person knowing 'it's not okay for my uncle to traffic me in a tent on the weekends.' And we hear these stories of what our young people are going through and creating those pipelines, so that they have access and information, so they don't repeat the cycles. So that keeps me going.

Magdalena Martinez [43:35]

And why aren't you in the schools with "Communities in Schools," or other social-serving organizations?

Liz Ortenburger [43:44]

So, we partner with "Communities in Schools." But what we've been pushing for is an on-purpose healthy relationship curriculum that's served across, from kindergarten on up, that's appropriate at every age level. So that any child that's experiencing something in their home understands that that's not normal, and what are the resources that are available to teachers, counselors, and students to navigate some of that? And the number one reason that's not happening in Clark County is because of the inabilities of that administration and the school board to understand the complexities of our kids, and the different needs, and to listen to only one group, you know. My children are growing up in a completely-informed household. They get everything that they need from me. I get that. But I also know that that's not normal.

And you know, I talked to moms – we just did this Facebook Live on pornography and the teenage brain. And what pornography's doing to the frontal cortex in relation to those; our ability to view sex, and how sex, and what sex should look like. And I was talking to a group of moms, and they said, "But my child – that's not *my* child." I said, "If you're not talking to your kids about this, 'Porn Hub's' doing it for you." And that's the absolute reality of what we've got going on, and that's sort of an extreme example because that's very much couched in sexuality and all of these things. But young people do not have safe places to get the information that they need. So we have all kinds of programs in that space, and we've been working with the school district for – long before COVID, with the backing of Intermountain and the Raiders. And I mean, we know why; it's the fear of a backlash, so our kids just continue to suffer, and our foster care kids continue to be piped into trafficking, and we continue to see these young people not have the information they need to make good choices.

Magdalena Martinez [45:57]

Yeah. Thanks so much, Liz. I really appreciate your time. I'm going to stop the recording now.

End of audio: 46:01