

An Interview with Evelyn Garcia-Morales

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 Evelyn Garcia-Morales, President, Board of Trustees for Clark County School District, and was conducted on 12/14/22 by Magdalena Martinez. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Evelyn Garcia Morales

Date: 12-14-2022

SPEAKERS: Magdalena Martinez, Evelyn Garcia Morales

Magdalena Martinez [00:03]

All right. Today is December 14th. I'm here with Ms. Evelyn Garcia Morales, from the Fulfillment Fund, and also, CCSD Trustee. Evelyn, before we get started, is it okay if I record this conversation for the purposes of transcribing?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [00:22]

Yes.

Magdalena Martinez [00:23]

Thank you. And then is it okay if, in the future, we do any kind of academic publication, if we attribute any of your quotes to you after you review your transcript?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [00:38]

Absolutely.

Magdalena Martinez [00:39]

Okay. Thank you so much. So, we'll jump right in. So, Evelyn, if you could describe your role throughout the pandemic, and specifically, the role of the organizations that you are primarily a part of, including the Fulfillment Fund, and Clark County School Trustee? So, what was your role, and how did you see the role of your respective organizations during the pandemic?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [01:05]

Well, and to be clear, can we just – using the timeline, are we doing the 2000-2001? 2002, more or less? Where does the timeline start?

Magdalena Martinez [01:17]

Whatever you remember.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [01:18]

(laughs)

Magdalena Martinez [01:20]

Like a snapshot of right now – what do you remember from the pandemic? What was your role?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [01:26]

Okay.

Magdalena Martinez [01:27]

And you can go from the shutdown, or even if you were privy to information before. For

instance, I talked to Marilyn Kirkpatrick, and she talked about how the commissioners were privy to information, I don't know, almost a month before, and the planning had already started, even back then, before the officials came down.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [01:45]

Mm-hmm.

Magdalena Martinez [01:47]

So whatever memory you have.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [01:53]

The very first memory, and my role – my function within the organization or organizations – in early 2000, I was recently promoted to serve as Executive Director of the Fulfillment Fund. Las Vegas had been in this role for maybe eight months. I'd been in the organization already for a couple of years and was serving as an Acting Executive Director but was officially given that title for that point in time.

And I remember, very clearly, I participated that year. I participated in Leadership Las Vegas.

Magdalena Martinez [02:32]

Hmm...

Evelyn Garcia Morales [02:34]

And that day, before the announcement – it was a Friday. I remember it was a Friday. And I was participating in a leadership program through Leadership Las Vegas. It was on county government or local government. We were inside of – it was supposed to be Education Day. That's what it was. So it was supposed to be Education Day, and we were learning about the education system in our community. And I remember receiving a phone call from [L-??03:04] saying that we needed to talk about that there was a lot of noise in the community around the pandemic, and we needed to kind of prepare and make some plans.

And I remember, she said, "Look. Hey, we have to prepare ourselves in the event that there are – different scenarios." And I remember thinking, I was trying to make sense of the fact that I was sitting in this leadership program. Half of the participants were missing because everyone was also planning and preparing for what was to come. No one knew exactly, but something was going to happen. And then, hearing from my leadership, saying, "This is what we have to start planning for," and then thinking about how we were going to communicate that with staff. It really was my first point of contact – yes, we want to make a plan, but we need to reassure people that we're not going to enter into panic mode.

Magdalena Martinez [04:13]

Right.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [04:15]

That we're here, and we're going to support – we're going to make some slight changes. That was my first initial thought. We're going to make some slight changes. And so, people went home on

Friday afternoon. We met on Monday, and we were all asked to stay at home. And I remember coming to the office. Some of us had to come into the office to pick up some things, like our equipment. Luckily, we all had laptops, and we all were connected with devices. I met a couple of team members here, and I said, "Hey, we're going to lock up everything and make sure it's shut down." And the electricity – make sure that we lock up any equipment that's valuable. Take home some key things with us. And I remember, I grabbed my laptop. Shut down all the lights. Unplugged everything, and then walked away.

At that same time, I also remember seeing – the school district, I guess, at that time, and I wasn't involved in any elected position at the time. The school district had the people set up in the parking lot, and their food service workers set up in the parking lot at our school at Chaparral and were distributing food.

Magdalena Martinez [05:33]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [05:35]

And that was that morning, right? It was just so quick. Everyone kind of quickly moved so fast.

Magdalena Martinez [05:43]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [05:47]

And I remember asking my team that morning, after all of the dust settled, we were all at home. Everyone was kind of making sense of their childcare, and their families, and plugging in their devices, and finding spaces. And I said – I remember communicating with the managers, and then with all staff. There were maybe 16 or 17 of us at the time. I said, "We're going to be at home for about two weeks. That's what we're hearing." And it was really, mostly, wellness checks with everyone, like, "Hey, how are you doing?" "Are you okay?" "Do you have everything you need?" I had to walk this line of both grounded in reality, that things were different, where things were changing, and walking in confidence too, like not losing it in front of everyone, (laughs) even though I was just equally as confused myself.

And like I said, that was my primary response. My "autopilot" was, I had to display confidence and also communicate with people what I know. And I said that to my team very early on, "I'll communicate with you, as soon as I have information." Again, without creating chaos or panic with anyone. That was my biggest concern honestly, is that people would feel like – even if their environment was – there wasn't a lot of information, and outside in the community, there was what appeared [to be] chaos. Because at the time, people were going out and buying all types of things, right? We ran out of toilet paper and Clorox wipes. And the world around us seemed chaotic, but I wanted the team, at least within the organization, I wanted to create stability, in some way, shape, or form, and that was my biggest priority.

Magdalena Martinez [07:53]

Mm-hmm. And how did you see the role of the Fulfillment Fund?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [08:00]
(hesitates)

Magdalena Martinez [08:01]

Because you've talked about with your staff. But externally, you served a lot of the same students that were being impacted equally, right, through the school district. How did you see your role then?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [08:15]

We moved to – (sighs) it felt like whiplash. I mean first of all, it felt like whiplash, and we were just like, "Hey, what's happening?" "Where are our students?" "Can we reach our students at – and I don't remember the exact timeline? But some team members were in the middle of helping students with college applications, and financial aid, and FAFSA. I mean, there was the college counseling team and the college access program team that went into classrooms. Everyone was trying to figure out, what do I do? How do I reach my students?

At the time, we had a full, robust – we had a team of three or four people who went into the physical classrooms. And because we were not allowed on campus – we thought it was just a temporary situation, but we would be able to go back eventually. We were just like, all right; we were just going to find a way to reach our students. So we activated email. We activated social media. We went online to try to reach our students and see how they were doing and see what support they needed. We continued to press on and support students who were already working towards college planning and college access, primarily seniors. We kept pressing.

The reality is that there were some students who did not – they simply – the priorities changed very quickly. I remember, at some point, students – our team would come up to us and say, "Hey, our students are now having to work because their parents lost their jobs," or "Hey, my student doesn't feel like they can concentrate at home," or "Hey – I mean, even before all of that. "My student doesn't have Wi-Fi at home." The student doesn't have a laptop. I mean at that point in time, students didn't have laptops as regularly as they do now, right? Now, every student has a device. Back then, students had zero devices.

So we were also trying to troubleshoot and determine what we could do to help with laptop purchases and help with hotspots. Luckily, within a couple of weeks, the school district had started amassing – distributing laptops. But even then, it took some time to get them all out. And the students felt that because they were like, "Hey, how am I supposed to do my work?" "How am I supposed to complete my FAFSA?"

And at the Fulfillment Fund, we had purchased, right before everyone went home before the pandemic hit, we had just invested in and bought 10 additional student laptops. Because when students would come to our offices, they needed devices to complete their college applications. Everything was online to submit their scholarship applications and to complete their FAFSA. And we were like, "We at least have these 10 devices. Can we distribute them?" We didn't end up having to, but still, students were often on their phones. And while still, within the organization, we were very cognizant of rules that exist, right, or partner with the school district.

So, we had been trained on how to communicate with students. We don't call them. These are state rules that are now district rules – district policy. And we were all very cognizant about how to reach a mass of students, and we thought the first way was – the easiest way that we knew we could reach students was through our Fulfillment Fund account, to reassure students. And then some of us put some videos together – we were trying all types, anything – any idea that came our way, we were like, "Yes, go and create a video. And tell students that we miss them and that we're here for them to support them." "Hey, let's send an email. Hopefully, it will land, and students will be able to read it." "Let's make phone calls."

I remember, from an infrastructure perspective, aside from having laptops at work, we had devices. We didn't have a central phone system. We depended on CCSD's phone line. So I remember calling our IT company and saying, "Hey, what do we have to do to give everyone access to the Fulfillment Fund phone line, so that team members are not making phone calls from their personal phone numbers? I mean those are the very small details that I was having to run through, to make sure that we were still compliant, while also supporting students and staff.

Magdalena Martinez [13:33]

Mm-hmm. Now, you became a trustee during the pandemic, is that right?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [13:38]

I was elected in 2021.

Magdalena Martinez [13:47]

Okay.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [13:48]

Yeah, so I took my oath of office in 2021. And we were still, very much – the students were still online at that time, and most people were at home still.

Magdalena Martinez [14:06]

Mm-hmm. Tell me about why you ran, and what you saw as your role as a trustee during this time.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [14:15]

I made the decision to run in 2019. It was only after– I've been in the education space for all of my career. I've watched how the education system has impacted students, primarily students of color. I think about my own personal story of going through the school system, right, as a high school – I thought – reflected on my own experiences, my family's experiences.

Magdalena Martinez [14:49]

Tell me about that experience.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [14:50]

For me, as a high school student, I shared with you earlier that I had hip reconstruction. So I had hip reconstruction when I was a teen, and I had just moved to this community. I remember the doctors telling me that I wouldn't be able to walk for a little while. But I needed to be at home,

and my mom said, "That's fine, but you're going to have to continue to do school in some way, shape, or form. You're going to have to continue to learn."

So my mom took me to Bonanza Campus and said, "My daughter is going to need medical leave from this school, but she's going to need to continue to learn." And so, the school district was like, "Sure, no problem." They had some sort of virtual programming that allowed me to make phone calls. And while I learned that year, I mean, I made phone calls every week. I turned in the paperwork via mail. I spent an entire year online before there was even such a thing.

And I came into my senior year at Mojave High School, just dazed and confused. I felt like I had missed a ton of information. And the school district was not responsible for my own medical issues, but I felt like I was, throughout my senior year, I felt behind. And I didn't know what that was until I actually got to college, and I ended up with remedial math and English courses.

Magdalena Martinez [16:30]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [16:32]

And then, coming to find out that they weren't covered by financial aid, and knowing that that was costly for me. Because I was the one who funded my own education with the help of some scholarships as well – but still.

And then I think about my partner's story. He came as a student, who was a 5th grader into the Clark County School District from Mexico. He didn't know – had struggled with language acquisition. And he spent – I met him in high school, or at high school/college. And he struggled just as much, maybe more, with his English classes and writing assignments. I think of my brother-in-law who attempted to take the proficiency exam. Attempted multiple times. Did the math proficiency exam multiple times. And at the end, didn't complete it and he didn't pass it, so he didn't graduate from high school.

Magdalena Martinez[17:47]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [17:49]

And I watched what it did to him, as a young man turning into a man. And now was an adult who, until recently, you know, did not have a high school diploma. The intersection of all these stories, really, and my own upbringing – watching my sister and I be the only ones to earn a college degree in our family – just made me wonder what is happening. Why are we – within the school system?

Magdalena Martinez[18:23]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [18:24]

And I just couldn't help but think that the – I'm always really curious about structures in government. And it's just not something that we grew up learning in our household. So learning

about who creates the priorities for the school district kind of encouraged me and inspired me, and I said there's nothing stopping me from being involved in those conversations.

One moment – I'm hearing some people knock on my door. [18:57] Thank you. (pause)

Okay. So yeah, I just asked myself, why can't I be part of those conversations? How challenging can it really be?

Magdalena Martinez [19:19]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [19:22]

That was very humbling. (laughs) It's very humbling to say that out loud now because it is very challenging.

And I was just angry. Honestly, I was angry that our system had – I saw our students here, through the work that I do at the Fulfillment Fund, struggling in different ways academically. They're struggling with plans after high school. So these issues, they don't show up only in high school. I mean this is not just a high school issue; this is a system issue. Early on, our students, depending on how we support them as a system, will determine what happens at the high school level. That's my strong belief. It's backed by research as well. And I just didn't see those conversations taking place at the policy level, the governance level at the board. So I said, "Well, I've never considered running for office," but I honestly was angry enough to say, "This can't continue. We can't continue." And I can choose to be angry and on the sidelines, or I can choose to put myself into these conversations to better understand, and hopefully, be a positive force.

Magdalena Martinez [20:57]

And how did you see your role as a trustee at that time, in addition to this – I'm going to call it, "social justice agenda," if that's okay with you? Do you think it's called a social justice agenda? Let me rephrase that.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [21:14]

Yeah – no. I don't know. It's not landing fully with me, but I do understand maybe that's how I'm talking about it. I don't have an alternative term for it, but it's like social – yes. So maybe, it's "Yes, and-" Maybe it's social justice and understanding policy, and structure, and governance. Because you could be socially-justice-minded; but only focus on that, and not get anything done, right?

Magdalena Martinez[22:02]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [22:08]

And so that's why I'm like, oh, how do I phrase this? So, it's a combination of multiple things, but I am driven by ensuring that our system is focused on academic outcomes for students, like 100%-

Magdalena Martinez[22:21]

Okay.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [22:22]

-while understanding the system in place and determining what needs to change from my role as someone who has a very specific responsibility.

Magdalena Martinez[22:41]

So, how did that fit into your sense of responsibility during the pandemic specifically?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [22:55]

Well, I was elected in 2021. And like I shared earlier, and the role of a trustee is really – a lot of people don't know what trustees do or why they're elected. And oftentimes, trustees are elected with a very small number of votes.

Magdalena Martinez[23:19]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [23:22]

And we're at the bottom of the ballot (laughs), so sometimes people don't get to the bottom of the ballot. But when I came on board, in my formal role as a trustee, I remember being pretty upset at the fact that the board was being acknowledged in the community because of its dysfunction because of what appeared to be chaos and a lot of infighting.

Magdalena Martinez [23:59]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [24:00]

So I was like, hey, this can't be the only way to do business. Maybe, I asked myself, is it possible to – if we're known for that, does that mean that we're not known for student outcomes? Is this behavior taking away from students? Away from creating a united voice of what's needed for students. And at the time I said student outcomes need to change. But what is causing student outcomes to be so deplorable?

Now, there's a lot of success in the system. There *has* been a lot of success in the system, and I learned that very quickly. Oftentimes, [there's] a narrative that's out there that this system is the worst. That it's horrible. That we're 49th in the country. Those are easy things to catch onto, easy catch phrases to catch onto, but they are more complex than just 49th in the nation. And you know, when I think about my role during the pandemic as a newly-elected official in education, in a system that – education that had a lot of controversy because of masks, and vaccines, and local governments-

Magdalena Martinez [25:39]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [25:41]

-you're just so close to people. You meet regularly. You're a public official. I don't get a chance to go to hide. I can't hide anywhere. I am here. I am on the ground. And the distress that was faced by families came out and manifested itself in board meetings, and we saw like a year and a half of people coming [in] frustrated, angry, upset. And I get it because I was one of those too. I probably would have been at board meetings too if I hadn't been elected, just angry and upset, sad.

Magdalena Martinez[26:22]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [26:25]

Because of our – and not just in our school district, but nationwide. And that's another thing that I've learned over the last two years, is that the entire country has faced this trauma, and the education world was not prepared for it, like many of us. And the social sector and government were just not prepared for this type of dramatic change. But now that we're here, we have another story to tell. I hope we'll have another story to tell.

Magdalena Martinez [27:01]

Earlier you said that it's humbling to hear yourself say out loud why you ran for office. Tell me more about that, and how you came to have that feeling of humility.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [27:32]

The more and more I'm in my term as trustee, serve for four years at a time, right before they're given a chance to be reelected, I think that – and when I think about the role of the trustee, I think of them as – I think this role is an important voice, to advocate for the things that are needed for our students. And hopefully, in our case, we do. We have a superintendent who is aligned with the priorities of helping create equity and access and disrupt some of the systems that have been in place, improving student outcomes. And you know, a school board can do a lot of damage to a community of students.

Magdalena Martinez [28:36]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [28:38]

And I think about the various decisions the school district has made, prior to me, that have negatively impacted students, or being distracted by internal politics. It has created chaos and maybe, in a sense, a lack of trust from the state and/or the community. And in all of that, the system has done a lot of good too, a lot with very, very little. Last week, we had a meeting. One of the agenda items was approving our budget, and we were reminded that the state funds – students – a little over – almost \$9,000; \$8900.

And when I think about if our students are \$8,900 per student, on average, right, without any additional distinctions. If my son or daughter is worth \$8,900, I divide that by 180 academic days, right? I think about the daily rate that my son is worth in this state. And I would have never known that. I would have never dived into that world if I hadn't been in this role; if I hadn't

learned about all of the incredible things this state – this district has done to stretch that money to support students.

Magdalena Martinez [30:36]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [30:37]

We're expected to transport them, to feed them, to teach them, more importantly, and to ensure their well-being, to keep them safe. We don't have time for distractions. We've had years and years of distractions. "Audit this," and "we need a new level of accountability." And maybe it has been called for in the past-

Magdalena Martinez [31:10]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [31:13]

-where the system that we're in now, the stability that we have now is completely different than what we've had in the past. So it is incredibly humbling, honestly, every day, to see all the great work that's taking place in the system. While at the same time, being overshadowed by some of the narratives that exist about the district. And that's not to say that the district is great, and it's doing all these amazing things, and it's perfect. It's not perfect, like any kind of effective organization is constantly learning, and finding ways to address its pain points.

Magdalena Martinez [31:51]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [31:54]

And I think we're there, but I don't know that we were two years ago.

Magdalena Martinez [31:58]

Mm-hmm. And why do you think that transition – how did that – why and how did that transition happen? It wasn't a learning organization in the way that you're describing it. What made the difference?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [32:19]

I think the people that – the trustees.

Magdalena Martinez [32:23]

Okay.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [32:24]

The trustees choosing to say – and I can speak for myself because I saw this – choosing to focus on our role, on holding the superintendent accountable when it comes to data and when it comes to student outcomes.

So, my first week as an elected official, I received a call from an administrator. And they asked me, they said, "Can you please push this forward?" And I said, "What are we pushing forward?" (laughs) I said, "I need – it's the middle of the school year, right, because I was elected in January, I mean, I was sworn in in January. And an administrator called me and said, "Hey, it's the middle of the school year. I have cracks in my asphalt, and I need someone to push this forward. I feel like no one's listening to me, and no one's getting this done. I'm not getting any results from the district office." And I said, "What would make you think that I – I'm curious – what makes you call me?" And he said, "In the past, I have been able to forward my concerns to my member."

Magdalena Martinez [33:50]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [33:53]

I said, "Huh, okay." And so, I called the superintendent and I said, "Hey, I got this phone call. There's a concern. What's happening here?"

Magdalena Martinez [34:08]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [34:09]

And the system has been, for a long time – those types of favors have been – well, I don't know that it's been a long time. In my experience, that was a pattern of behavior that I was expected to continue. But I would make the phone call and get this fixed. There's a platform to submit your request. There is a queue. And maybe it's taking long, but that's because perhaps we don't have the capacity to meet everyone's needs at the same time.

Magdalena Martinez [34:50]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [34:54]

The asphalt issue was addressed, and the concern was addressed, and the channel of communication was addressed, right? There's a process in place to support that should be – that exists to support staff.

Magdalena Martinez [35:08]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [35:11]

You have a supervisor, a supervisor above that, and another supervisor above that. And when those chains of command are not followed, then you have trustees involved in asphalt conversations instead of, "What does it look like to ensure that our students have equal access in Summerlin as they do in North Las Vegas, as they do in any other part of the community."

Magdalena Martinez [35:33]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [35:34]

Those are the kinds of questions that we need to be asking ourselves – that we are asking ourselves, that did not appear to be a priority in the past.

Magdalena Martinez[35:45]

So it sounds like an unclear focus on the purpose of a strategic goal, maybe? Absent that, then you have multiple priorities, and multiple constituents reaching out. Do you feel like that was a part of it?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [36:15]

Sure, yes. Yes, and if we look at it from an organizational perspective, right, from a structure perspective, this is meant to be a volunteer, part-time role.

Magdalena Martinez [36:29]

Right.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [36:32]

And I'm easily – I'm not, and I will say my colleagues as well. We all have roles outside of our current roles, outside of our elected roles that allow us to be – that allow us to feed our families (laughs). We have limited resources to – unlike – we have the largest budget. The district has the largest budget in comparison to the county, the city, and local municipalities. Trustees are not compensated in the same way our colleagues in other municipalities are.

Magdalena Martinez [37:10]

Right.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [37:12]

And so, yeah. I mean the lack of focus may have existed because of – for lots of different reasons, but I mean, you have to have the willingness to get by the noise of people saying – be willing to put your stake in the ground and say, we have the processes in place. We're going to follow those, which is going to be hard. We're going to push through the "noise" because some people want their own thing to be a priority.

Magdalena Martinez [37:42]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [37:43]

That's not – what's good for the organization. Because when we run, we run as individuals, and we say we're going to do this, and we're going to do that, and we're going to do this. But when we come to the dais, we are one voice. We are one board.

Magdalena Martinez [37:56]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [37:59]

And if someone chooses to be the one who runs – this is what my community is saying – and not

really think about what's good for the whole, then it will be really difficult to make progress. I believe it could be even more difficult to create progress.

Magdalena Martinez [38:14]

Yeah, that makes sense. From your perspective, who is the hardest hit by the pandemic?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [38:31]

It's really hard to answer. It is, it's really tough to answer because I feel like everyone was impacted. Certainly, our students. And I think about, okay; so if it was our students, then within our students – I mean, students who had challenges with access to devices, technology, who weren't able to upload things, who had to care for their siblings. Students who, from an access perspective to a – students to have the privilege – and I maybe bear it better than students who did not come with privilege. Like if your parent had to go out to work, and you were the oldest and had to stay at home to watch your siblings, while you also had to learn, that was hard. I know it was necessary and important, but it was hard for our students. They would come back, and then they struggled to keep books, so the system has to come in and readjust itself.

Magdalena Martinez [39:43]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [39:46]

We had our educators – anyone in education who worked with students. They not only experienced their own trauma, but they also experienced secondary trauma as a result of their students' experiences. I know our team did. And that was hard because how do you help – how does someone show up for a young person when they're struggling themselves?

Magdalena Martinez [40:24]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [40:29]

Our families, our parents? And our parents, I hear the shame that has come from not knowing how to use technology. Just last week I was at a school, and the parent was telling me how – I was at a school holiday gathering. It was a beautiful event. Tons of families came out to support their students and their performances. And I sat next to a woman who cared for her grandchildren, and she said, "I feel so bad. I feel like because of my limited knowledge in technology, I didn't know how to help my kindergartner."

Magdalena Martinez [41:41]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [41:46]

And she feels the burden and the responsibility, right, for not – for her granddaughter's academic angst.

Magdalena Martinez [41:55]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [41:59]
Or lack thereof, right?

Magdalena Martinez [42:00]
Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [42:04]
I don't know. I mean, you know, from the educational lens, that's kind of what I think about though. We all equally were impacted. Educators eventually had to come back to us, staff who eventually had to come back to sides and say, "I'm going to prioritize my health for a little while."

Magdalena Martinez [42:20]
Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [42:23]
Meaning they lost income. People who became unemployed. It's hard to select just one community or one group that was most impacted. Our seniors, who lost out on all the ceremonial senior things, and lost that connection and support that they needed desperately to transition to that next phase, whatever that was for them.

Magdalena Martinez [42:46]
Yeah, the ritual practices.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [42:50]
Right, yes. And you know, we had those last year. They felt strange, and we'll have them again this year. And I don't know. And at least for me and from my perspective at the Fulfillment Fund, I'm constantly thinking about it's hard not to operate sometimes in a place of fear.

Magdalena Martinez [43:13]
Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [43:15]
All right – what are the liabilities? What are the – I was already thinking like that. But now, with health being front and center, like all right. Who's not well? Who's well? How do we make sure we protect people? We take extra precautions when it comes to food, and if someone is unwell like in the past, I am like, "Please go home right now. You don't need to be here. Like, go. Just get out of here."

Magdalena Martinez [43:45]
Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [43:47]
I know not all employers have that flexibility. And a system like – yeah. Larger systems may have more challenges when they have the demands of a workforce. It may be more challenging, at least for the purposes of the Fulfillment Fund. I'm like, all right. How do we have to change, as

an organization, to continue to meet the needs of our students, but also, our staff? We need our workforce too.

Magdalena Martinez [44:19]

Yeah. Okay. Do you think there were some innovative ways that the organizations that you were associated with responded during the challenge of the pandemic? And if so, what were they? For instance, collaborations, programs, or anything like that?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [44:43]

Well, on the Fulfillment Fund end, I can tell you that we developed an entire – two different arms of our work. We transitioned our in-classroom instruction program to an online format. We built six lessons online on our website. We are now creating partnerships with different organizations to serve students, and as a result, impact more students. One of our partnerships is with Keepall High School, and they are offering all of our college-access curricula to students. So, completely – we were on this path before the pandemic to take what we know our students need when it comes to college access, and then turn it into an online digital format, that the pandemic really advanced that work.

Magdalena Martinez [45:54]

Okay.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [45:56]

Because we – yeah, we needed to do that.

Magdalena Martinez[45:59]

That's pretty cool.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [46:00]

And so, we have other partnerships.

Magdalena Martinez [46:00]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [46:02]

Yeah, there's definitely a highlight, and I'm so grateful to the team who were resilient enough to me, to have these videos professionally produced. We developed a curriculum, and there's more that's coming, but that's really one of the biggest changes. And then we developed a social media content position as well. We didn't have that before. We would all just kind of like – the responsibility of social media lived with different team members.

Magdalena Martinez [46:34]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [46:37]

And so we found the need to communicate with students, at least distribute mass messages about college access and be a voice for college access through social media.

Magdalena Martinez [46:46]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [46:51]

So that was a big thing. And with the school district, there have just been so many great things that have come out of it. And the Nevada Learning Academy, [it's] digital, that students and educators have the option to learn online, that didn't exist fully the way it does now. It's an entire program. There's some schools now that have a hybrid approach to online learning and in person. I mean there's just a long list, honestly.

Magdalena Martinez [47:32]

Mm-hmm. That's helpful.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [47:35]

And they're still innovating. The district is still innovating, I believe based off of the needs of the things that they have learned from that time.

Magdalena Martinez [47:46]

Just two more questions. From your perspective, what lessons have we learned that can be used for future crises? And again, operating as a leader of an organization and/or policy maker.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [48:05]

Hmm – what lessons have we learned? Nothing is certain.

Magdalena Martinez [48:11]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [48:13]

I mean we may have the best plans, intentions, and strategies, but you know, a global health pandemic can halt everything.

Magdalena Martinez[48:21]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [48:24]

And you have to be willing to change. You have to be willing to determine what is it that you have to learn that's preventing you from making changes. And that's a question I kept asking myself throughout the entire we were all at home. Okay, let's – I – naturally, I am a people-oriented person, so I want to make sure that people are well, and they feel good about themselves and the work that they're contributing to the organization.

Magdalena Martinez [49:03]

Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [49:05]

And I also learned that I have to take care of myself.

Magdalena Martinez [49:07]
Mm-hmm. (nods)

Evelyn Garcia Morales [49:10]
I have been non-stop since March 2020, and I think it's catching up to me, and I'm still learning about that. I mean leaders have to take their own well-being seriously.

Magdalena Martinez [49:27]
Yes.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [49:32]
And not just power through like "Oh, I'm not a hundred percent right now." I've just got to power through. Leaders also have a responsibility to develop infrastructure in place to ensure that, when something does happen that's kind of out of the blue, you're semi-ready for it.

Magdalena Martinez [49:54]
How do you know when it's time to take care of yourself?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [50:02]
Your body starts yelling at you. (laughs) That's the first thing that comes to mind.

Magdalena Martinez [50:07]
Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [50:10]
Well, I've had these thoughts lately like, why am I so – I feel angry. I feel angry about a lot of things, and some things that are not even in my own control. If there are things that are in my control, I'm like, all right, let's change this; let's change this; let's change this. But maybe, you know, feeling upset or losing my ability to stay in the present is a great indicator to me that I need to reset. I need to hit the reset button.

Magdalena Martinez [50:50]
Mm-hmm.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [50:51]
And yes, my body yelling at me too. It's either getting sick or things falling apart. (laughs) It's like, oh, okay. Something has to change.

Magdalena Martinez [51:04]
Yeah. Are you hopeful?

Evelyn Garcia Morales [51:11]
I am. I believe deeply that after darkness comes light. And I feel like so much has been learned in the darkness. We've learned to navigate the darkness. We've learned to live in the darkness. We've learned about ourselves – I've learned about myself. I've learned about other people who I

work closely with. And we have to continue to distribute – to think about the light. The light, and how much closer we are to the light than we were two years ago.

Magdalena Martinez [51:49]

Yeah.

Evelyn Garcia Morales [51:54]

We're not out of the darkness yet. (laughs) There's still a lot of darkness, but the light gives me hope.

Magdalena Martinez [51:59]

Mm-hmm. Okay – on that, I will stop the recording. Thank you, Evelyn.

End of audio: 52:04