

Beyond the Dais Podcast: Episode 1 – An Interview with Care and Share

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Scott Anderson: This is Scott Anderson. I am the Communications and Public Relations Manager for El Paso County, and I am here with Nate Springer, who's the President and CEO of Care and Share Food Bank. Nate, thanks for having me today. I appreciate it.

Nate Springer: I'm really happy you're here. Thanks for having me.

Scott: Great. So, I was wondering if you could give us a little bit of background about Care and Share. How long have you guys been in El Paso County and what is your main mission?

Nate: Yeah, so we've been in El Paso County since 1972. This is the 50-year anniversary. Our founder, Sister Dominique Pisciotta, her birthday was actually on the 14th of August.

Scott: Oh, wow. All right.

Nate: And so, kind of a neat time to be around Care and Share. We're the food bank for Southern Colorado. So, we provide food for 31 counties in Southern Colorado, and we have 273 partnered food pantries or agencies that we provide food to, so it's a really big operation.

Scott: Yeah, absolutely. Can you tell us about how many people you serve and in what communities do you serve?

Nate: Yeah. So, when you, when you think of the, the scope and impact that Care and Share gives, so think Monument all the way down to the New Mexico border.

Scott: Oh wow.

Nate: And then think the border of Colorado and Utah all the way to Kansas. And then when we talk about El Paso County specifically, this grant that we're about to talk about has done really well for us in serving even more people than we normally have been able to in El Paso County. That grant equals 5.6 million pounds of food for El Paso County, that's 4.2 million meals.

Scott: Talking about numbers, those are definitely substantial. So, you know, you submitted your grant request to the county, as did every organization who received

funding for ARPA. Care and Share was awarded \$700,000 of that funding. Can you expound a little bit more on what the money has gone to fund?

Nate: Yeah, so it's enabled us to get beyond just our traditional food bank duties. And you know, so providing food to those 273 pantries across Southern Colorado is important. One of the things that we've seen of this, over this last year with inflation increasing about 12% for food, just over 9% for the average family in Colorado, is we've had a number of families that have had a hard time getting to even our traditional food pantries. So, two of the ideas we came up with, one is Sunnyside markets. So, we established a Sunnyside market in Fountain, Colorado, and we established one in Pueblo. And when you think Sunnyside market, think a traditional grocery store, a small grocery store where you go in, you know your little coupon code that you normally have, everyone gets a coupon code, they go through, and they shop and they check out with that coupon code. So, Sunnyside markets are a new thing for us that this grant helped us, helped us do, that really is more direct services from our food bank, so almost our own food pantries. And then we have a thing called our mobile markets, really, really excited about this. Mobile markets allow us to get to communities where people don't have good mobility. So sometimes we're able to go to very rural places in El Paso County. And it's been great. So, imagine a large food truck, and you know moving- you know coming up into your neighborhood, and then once we open that food truck, all the food just grocery store-style is ready to go. And you know each one of those serves between 100 and 120 families when we go out. So that's been a really neat thing for us to add as well and that grant's helped us do that.

Scott: Can you talk a little bit about how Care and Share is a pillar within the community? You talked about being able to go out to some of those rural areas and serve those people, but the community at large, what does it mean to Care and Share to be one of those pillars?

Nate: When I when I think of Care and Share, Care and Share is kind of that pillar in the middle. When you think of what's happened in our country, what's happened in Colorado as people have kind of retreated to the fringes politically. So many nonprofit organizations are associated with something, with a political organization or religion. Care and Share is right there in the middle. And so, it's one of those things that everyone can rally behind. And then when you look at our partner agencies, our partner agencies are very broad across the spectrum from community centers to churches to local food pantries and great agencies. And so that's what's made Care and Share so important for not only El Paso County, but Southern Colorado, is to be able to be- to have that consistent and sustainable food that we're able to provide to people and to our agencies every single week.

Scott: Well, that's wonderful. And so, I know talking about personal stories can get a little bit difficult sometimes. You know, some people may not want to exactly have their story shared, and that's totally fine. But if there's not a personal story that you'd like to share, maybe some anecdotal stories, not naming any names, but just stories of people

that you've seen that have been able to benefit from the service. Can you tell me a little bit about that and you what it means to those people?

Nate: Sure, and I think this is really important for everyone who's listening to this, because I bet that who you have in your mind right now that would come to one of our partner agencies or Care and Share to get food assistance, that profile is probably wrong. I was in, I was at a food pantry in El Paso County last Wednesday and we had about 160 families that were coming through to get food assistance. And these were teachers, these were nurses. I mean these were really your neighbors. And so, I would just ask everyone to really be aware right now that because of the increase in gas and food price and utilities, when you combine all that, it's created a lot of our neighbors to cross a threshold that they've never crossed before. And for the first time they're in a position in their life where they need some help. So why Care and Share is such a neat organization is we do it so well and we give anyone who comes to one of those food pantries. It's a good experience. It's filled with dignity. And they all have- they all leave with a with a smile on their face. But just know that if you're out there and you're not hurting, and you haven't felt the pinch of inflation, there's a really good chance that your employees or your neighbors or some of your friends have. And so, we all really have to be wide-eyed right now and make sure that we're taking care of the people on our left and right.

Scott: Yeah. And I think that's a great point to bring up. And what would you say to those people who are in need of that help but just don't know exactly how to ask or feel that, you know, they can't ask or maybe they're not in a position where they should. What would you say to those people?

Nate: I'd say first that everyone needs help some time in their life. And the way, the way to give back is to just to pay it forward. So, if you need help from Care and Share or any of our partner organizations, you should, you should take that help. A great place to start is our website and that's www.careandshare.org. And then, of course, we're on Facebook and Twitter and Snapchat and all the great social media platforms. But our website makes it really easy to do a bunch of things. It makes it easy to figure out where you need to go, where the closest food pantry is, where our mobile markets are going to be. And then for everyone else that maybe doesn't need assistance out there, but you want to give back, there's a great way to donate to Care and Share. And we take, we're able to take a dollar and really stretch it far to be able to turn that dollar into food and turn it into food for those families in Southern Colorado that need it. And then on that website you'll notice that we have some great volunteer opportunities. It takes about five seconds in our distribution center when you're walking through the food to realize what the scale and scope and impact of Care and Share is. So, I would ask that if you're out there and you're looking to get behind an organization that just has a great mission and is loved in the community, whether it's just you or your family or your business or corporation, it is a great place to come, and team build and do great volunteer work here in our distribution center.

Scott: Is there anything else you'd like to share about Care and Share? Anything else that people in the community should know?

Nate: I would just say that this will be a challenging year for Care and Share because really, we're in the perfect storm. When costs are up for everyone, including every business and Care and Share, I say our costs are up about 12 percent and then you've got this corresponding need that we've discussed that's also up somewhere between ten and 12 percent, it means that we have traditionally less food and money to serve more people in need. And so, I would just say it's my call to action out there would be, we need your support and we need your help, we need your volunteer hours and importantly, you just really have to be aware of what's going on around you because some of your friends, family, coworkers, employees need your help out there and if you can, if you can, recognize those people that need help, and get them on the Care and Share website, or get them to one of our food pantries, this is the organization that's going to be able to help and we're really proud to do it. We do it in a dignified way. And again, people always leave with smiles on their faces when they leave Care and Share.

Scott: Great. Well, I really appreciate the time. Thank you so much. And I hope you're able to continue to share your story to El Paso County as a whole.

Nate: Thank you so much for coming.

Scott: Yeah, thank you.