

## Children in Crisis: How a Focus on Partnership and Education Can Brighten the Future

**Host:** Dune Thorne, CTFA, CWS

**Guest:** Caryl Stern

00:00:02 **Ken Stuzin:** Hello. This is Ken Stuzin. I'm a partner at Brown Advisory. Welcome to our NOW 2020 Podcast. NOW stands for Navigating Our World. We are simply trying to understand the world better, to navigate some of the most pressing questions that are shaping our lives, our culture and our investment challenges. We are committed to sharing the views of CEOs and other leaders so that we can all learn from their perspectives on how to navigate the future.

We would like to hear from you as well. We invite you to leave a review or take a moment to complete the short questionnaire on the NOW website so that we can learn from your thoughts, questions and feedback. As we look to the future, whether we agree or disagree with each other, the one thing we know for sure is that none of us can figure this out on our own. At Brown Advisory, we are focused on raising the future, and we hope these NOW conversations will help us do just that.

00:01:05 (MUSIC)

00:01:11 **Dune Thorne:** We are living in unprecedented times. New COVID-19 cases are increasing at an alarming rate. Communities are dealing with tragic economic devastation, and we're experiencing a profound movement to address centuries of racial violence and injustice. The challenges we face as a society can feel overwhelming. For the children living through these crises, the toll psychologically, socially, economically may have lifelong impact. I'm Dune Thorne, and I'm a partner of Brown Advisory. To help guide us during these challenging times, I wanted to reach out to someone who has spent her career focused on elevating the health and well-being of children, children in the midst of large-scale crises.

I'm really pleased to introduce you to Caryl Stern, executive director of the Walton Family Foundation, one of the largest foundations in the United States. Before joining the foundation in January, Caryl spent 13 years as CEO of UNICEF USA, where she spearheaded UNICEF's emergency relief efforts for children affected by disasters, including the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2011 East Africa drought, the Ebola and Zika epidemics, and the ongoing global refugee crisis.

I always learn a lot from talking with Caryl, and this seemed like an important moment to get her perspective.

00:02:41 (MUSIC)

I want to start with a question that more than ever is important for all of us to ask one another when we connect in our virtual environments, which is: how are you? In today's challenging time, really, how are you doing?

00:02:59 **Caryl Stern:** Well, you're right, though it is the question we should all start with. I think I'm every emotion possible right now. I'm exhausted, I'm frustrated, I'm angry, I'm sad to see changes I had hoped I would have seen coming in my lifetime, not yet there. And at the same time, I'm energized. I'm energized by this window that's gotten open, you know, the pandemic and the racial unjust. It's not the pandemic, and it's not a policeman's need that are problems today -- they actually helped us to shine a spotlight on injustices that have been around a long, long time.

So I'm, you know, I'm energized about the spotlight, I feel like this window has opened up that could potentially bring about some great change. And at the same time, I'm tired.

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**Dune Thorne:** So you've worked around the world in so many countries, and you've seen the impact that true inequity has on communities, on countries, on society firsthand. You've also been a part of creating systemic change where frankly few thought it was really possible.

I'd love to hear your thoughts on the inequities that are being illuminated in our country today and what signs of progress you're seeing for real structural change to address these inequities that's so desperately needed today.

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**Caryl Stern:** So you know wish I could tell you I'm seeing great progress in my almost 63 years of life. I've seen progress, though. There has been some. Not enough, but some. And I'm seeing something in a moment that feels different than 1968 -- you know, yes, the window opened then, and it's opening now. But a -- I think that people are beginning to recognize that our problems are not going to be solved exclusively by my government, exclusively by philanthropy or exclusively by the marketplace, that it's going to take all three.

And I was really impressed that at the beginning of this crisis with the pandemic, you saw corporate leaders, civic leaders and philanthropic leaders coming together and saying, how do I change my factory into a respirator factory, how do you now make masks instead of shirts? How can I use my supply chain to get you the fabric you need to do that? Philanthropy, can you help us convert this factory?

It was the first time I've really seen the three sectors intersect in that way, and I think that that's real progress. I think the other progress that I'm seeing that I'm excited about is -- this is just a Caryl opinion -- but there are kind of three kinds of people, so when I look at the social justice issues right now, there are racists -- you know, there are definitely racists in the world and in our country, and then there are those who aren't racists, but they don't think that the problem is theirs.

And then there are those who we would call anti-racist, who are actively engaged. I see more anti-racism than I've seen in a long time. And I think I saw more post-'68. A move from racism to nonracism, but the engagement of all kinds of people standing together right now. I see that as significant. And I see that as progress.

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**Dune Thorne:** So we're going through an incredibly challenging time. There's a triple crisis in place right now with the pandemic, the economic fallout, racial violence, not to mention the threats around climate change, critical inequities in education. The list really goes on.

You've made a career of managing crises literally around the world in a way that few other leaders have. What advice would you give to other leaders about how to effectively manage through crisis?

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**Caryl Stern:** I always say if you're not a food bank, don't become one in the wake of a crisis, because there are people who know how to do that. So do what you do best. Second, don't make the perfect the enemy of the good. I've really learned in a crisis you have to act quickly, and you have to recognize that it is both a sprint and a marathon.

So rescue and recovery in the wake of an earthquake -- that's a sprint. But rebuild -- that's a marathon. And so the same is true with the pandemic, the same thing is true with racial injustices. There are some things we can do quickly, and we need to and we need to show we're serious about it. And then we need long-term strategy. And then I think the last thing is that I would say is that you need to look at a crisis as a moment to learn. It's not only what we do but how we take the time to learn from what we do, because each time there is a crisis, there's something from the last one that informs this one.

And if we don't do that, then we are forever repeating mistakes. And so it is building into the marathon piece, especially reflective thinking, before we move forward.

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**Dune Thorne:** Caryl, to follow up on that, talk to us about how crisis periods like we're in today impact the power of partnerships.

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**Caryl Stern:** I can give you one great past example of partnership. In the wake of the storm in Puerto Rico, I was at the time the CEO of UNICEF USA, and we really wanted to respond, but we didn't have staff on the

ground in Puerto Rico. And I looked around to see who was doing something we might partner or support in the immediate rescue and recovery efforts. And I saw that Governor Cuomo had gone down to Puerto Rico and actually asked, what do you need?

And I was impressed with his journey. So reached out to him, found out he had cleared space at JFK Airport. The attorney general was on the ground in Puerto Rico vetting organizations that could help. But he had never really pulled together the fundraising side of that. And at the same time also while he was amassing equipment, we had to figure out how we were going to actually get it there.

At the time, the CEO of UPS was on the board, had just joined the board, and ironically was coming to my office the next day to be onboarded to the board of UNICEF USA, so we cancelled that onboarding and instead we put the governor's team, the UPS team and the UNICEF team together.

The next result of that was UPS had trucks on the ground, they had drivers and they had fuel. They also had transportation and logistics expertise. UNICEF had the ability to raise the dollars as a credible organization and to really vet what was needed and what should be gotten and to take advantage of things like hygiene kits that were already put together, because this is what UNICEF does. And the governor was able to clear the way to make all of that come together rather quickly.

So that we were able to get supplies to some of the most remote areas of Puerto Rico before anyone else, because we had three sets of expertise that came together with one solution.

00:09:46 **Dune Thorne:** Yeah. And love hearing about the impact that, you know, a partnership like that can have, and also you think about the root of how that happened, right, and how did that come together. It was a sense of trust and commitment to impact that you all had about how do we create change and reaching out and saying let's help.

00:10:09 **Caryl Stern:** It was. It was trust. It was impact. It was reaching out. But it was also recognition of what do you do well and let's bring that to the table. You know, I look right now at, for example, we just had at our foundation an amazing conversation with Pharrell about what he's doing in Virginia, because he's got a great idea and a great program. We want to learn from it.

And then he wants to learn from what our foundation is doing in the Delta. We're doing similar work in two different locations. Let's put our heads together. Those are the kinds of things, as I said Rachel Carlson and Ken Shinault coming together and seeing we have a Rolodex full of very powerful CEOs who've got access to facilities. How can we put those to good use? Who else do we bring to the table to help make that happen?

I was so awed by what they did, because they recognized their strengths and then sought the strengths of others that could fill in the gaps.

00:11:06 (MUSIC)

00:11:10 **Dune Thorne:** Caryl, let's turn to education, an issue that in many ways has been your life's work. Data suggests that during the lockdown of the past three months, only 60 percent of low-income students regularly logged on into online instruction compared with 90 percent of high-income students. And there are estimates that the remote learning environment could cause low-income students to fall a year behind in learning. How is the Walton Family Foundation thinking about adjusting its grant strategy to address these issues?

00:11:40 **Caryl Stern:** Addressing these gaps is already at the core of what we do. You know, for the last three decades, the foundation has worked to create access to opportunity for people in communities. So this is not new work for us, you know. This focus includes increasing student access to excellent schools where there's great teaching and where learning can and does happen. So the events of the past few months have increased the urgency and the relevance of our work, but it's not new work for us.

One of our earliest conclusions -- as a matter of fact, about COVID -- is that it just has exacerbated what were existing conditions. You know, what was true before COVID is even more true now. Too many of our most vulnerable kids do not have access to a quality education. They didn't have it before the pandemic, and now even more, you know, one in every five students, one in every five students across the country lacks access

with the remote learning.

And that's the kids who may not have a computer and may not have broadband. But there are also the kids where perhaps they're living in tight quarters, and it's impossible to learn because there are multiple children trying to learn while mom is working, or that's not even including the child for whom there's been some kind of an emotional crisis that might take them out of the classroom as well.

So, you know, we've been asking ourselves, how do we ensure kids keep learning? And the answer isn't simple. It touches everything from food security and ensuring they have that hot meal every day, to internet connectivity, to high-quality online tools, to helping teachers be ready for this kind of teaching -- everything that helps kids stay on track. And our focus is on finding and supporting solutions to these challenges while we also continue to eliminate barriers to access.

00:13:27 **Dune Thorne:** So even without the virus, the average Black or Hispanic student remains roughly two years behind the average white student. How do you think about K-12 education from a racial justice standpoint?

00:13:39 **Caryl Stern:** I think as a foundation, we know that education is a racial justice issue -- it's not this has suddenly brought that to light. And we have to really take that step back. We have to examine the structures inherent in our systems that prevent every Black child, every Hispanic child in this nation from attending a great school. And whether that's because of the tax structure that supports the schools or other reasons, whether it is assessment tools we're using, we know that there are inherent inequities, and we need to change that.

00:14:12 **Dune Thorne:** Talk a bit more about how we can make real change to help all kids get a great education.

00:14:17 **Caryl Stern:** I think we have to look at a couple of different things. You know, one, we have to start with how we fund education. You know, many places in our country are funded by local real estate taxes -- you got a problem, because that means in an affluent community, you have a better school than a less affluent community.

So I think we need to look at the overall funding structure and consider alternatives there. But I think also we have to look at teacher preparation across the board, even in the more affluent school of yesterday, because few teachers are prepared to go back in our classrooms in September. You know, they will have kids in their class who have not learned for six months when research shows us that even a three-month gap in learning has an impact. So you'll have some who have had a three-month summer break, and you will have some who have had a six-month integrated into one room.

You'll have some who had parents at home and weren't working and perhaps supported additional learning; you'll have some who have had none. You will have children who have lived through an incredibly psychosocial summer. I remember in the wake of the storm in Texas, a third grade class and I went into see the teacher because we had funded her and her saying to me that the most horrible thing was the first rainstorm after the major storm, because her third graders hid under their desks, and nobody had stopped to think about what rain was going to mean moving forward.

These kids are going to come back to school, many of them having lost a family member or having watched a family member become ill or been in a household where a parent lost a job, because we all know what's happened to jobs around the country and where the economic situation is going to be dramatically different. We also know that when people are home and lose jobs, that things like domestic violence go up. And so the psychosocial aspect of that classroom is going to be really, really significant, and few of our teachers are adequately prepared for that.

They're also not prepared, most of them -- in their formal training didn't learn how to teach remotely. So even for those who were teaching and learning, we're not sure what retention's going to be. We're not sure how to assess that learning. And I think that we need to think really long and hard about how we help teachers go back in.

00:16:31 **Dune Thorne:** Well, to follow up on that, Caryl, we're thinking you're talking so much about the importance of teacher training, which is at the root of an equitable and just education for all. So as you think about teacher training, in your view, how should we be training and equipping teachers so that their students can succeed?

This is a big program area for our foundation. You know, we believe the people closest to the challenge are closest to the solution, so we look for ideas that put educators in the classroom, you know, in the position to make the decisions about their classrooms, their schools, etc. And then we also look at, you know -- teachers are like doctors, they're like nurses, they're like lawyers and like athletes, you know, they need relevant, rigorous training, and they need hands-on experience and practice.

You know, there are a number of teacher residency programs across the country as well as the traditional training programs, and they're reforming their entire curricula right now. Many, many years ago, I helped to co-author a book on professional development, and we put a model into it that was for professional development for educators, but it applies to really any professional development. And so if you picture a square with four quadrants, and down one axis is competency, and down the other axis is consciousness, and we kind of broke it into four boxes.

So, you know, the first being those that are competent but not conscious -- you know, the natural athlete, the person that goes out on the field and, you know, hits a home run the first time but doesn't understand the theory behind it, doesn't know why they're able to do it, could never teach it to somebody else but knows how to do it themselves, just does it.

And that kind of person needs, you know, substantive knowledge base. They need learning that's going to give them the facts and the theory. The second kind of person is conscious but not competent, you know -- that's a sports fan. They know all the rules of the game, they're yelling at that TV, they're yelling at the coach, but if you put them on the field, they can't hit the home run. And that kind of person needs real practice. Needs to get out on the field and actually try it out and keep doing it and doing it until they teach those muscles how to do what they need to do.

But then there's, like, the person who's both conscious and competent, and that's a coach. And that's a person who understands the theory behind it but also can demonstrate and can teach you how to do it. And our teachers need to be coaches. They need to be competent, and they need to be conscious. And we need to train teachers in both of those directions. We do have a fourth box. We call it Barry. That's the incompetent and unconscious, and we named it Barry, after a young man -- I won't name his school -- but he was a basketball player, recruited because of his height, not because of his skills.

And the particular institution made it to the NCAA finals -- only once. They were down by one point, 10 seconds left to the game. Barry got the ball. All he had to do was sink it in the basket, but he chose to dribble instead, hit his foot, the ball bounced out, the other team got the ball and they lost. He didn't know what to do, and when he tried to do something, he didn't know how to do it.

So those are people who shouldn't be on the court. And I think that's the other reality factor is that when we look at teachers, this is one of the most important professions that we have, and we need to hold it to a very high standard.

00:19:49 **Dune Thorne:** So, Caryl, you've spoken about addressing students' psychological needs in addition to their academic needs. Where have you seen this done well, and what programs can we learn from?

00:20:00 **Caryl Stern:** You know, it's never been more important than today. You know, we really need to learn from the educators who infuse psychosocial needs and emotional support across all their subject matters. And I would say one of the best programs I've seen in that area is Valor Collegiate. It's a school in Nashville. And it helps students both socially and emotionally in everything they do.

And they serve an incredibly diverse student body and help students learn to reach across boundaries and learn from one another. You know, the foundation has supported their social-emotional approach. It's called Compass. And it's phenomenal. It helps students understand themselves and others in the context of what they're learning.

And I've seen how important psychosocial support is in my work. I've seen it in the refugee camps where we have child-friendly spaces because we want kids to play in an environment where someone's watching them and getting to know them well enough to identify psychosocial needs, because that's how we help kids to move forward.

It was interesting following the storms that ravaged Texas. Psychosocial became one of the most important contributions that UNICEF made to the state, and there was a model created in partnership with one of the hospitals down there, because teachers did feel ill-equipped to just respond to the questions they were getting in their classrooms, and then, too, they were seeing behaviors that were indicative of extreme stress, extreme fear and anxiety, and at the same time, teachers were also feeling those emotions.

So if we don't give them a toolbox to pull from in a moment where they're feeling it, they feel even less equipped.

00:21:44 (MUSIC)

00:21:48 **Dune Thorne:** There are lots of innovative programs out there, including those trying to address the specific issues around education and the pandemic. For example, Tennessee is recruiting 1,000 college students to tutor kids who are falling behind. What programs are you particularly excited about?

00:22:04 **Caryl Stern:** There are a number of things going on that I'm so excited about. But I think one that I'm particularly excited about is called the National Summer School Initiative. You know, when schools closed earlier this year, several education groups came together -- talk about partnership -- wanting to keep kids active and challenged this summer, understanding that many of the usual summer activities were also going to get cancelled, as well as this big learning gap when the classroom closed -- not the computer classroom, but the physical classroom -- and then when it would reopen.

So they have more than 400 teachers already, you know, signed up, creating an entirely new distance learning experience, and 10,000 children have already signed up for the program this summer. I think that's phenomenal.

00:22:51 (MUSIC)

00:22:54 **Dune Thorne:** I want to ask you about the transition you've just made as a leader and in your life. What did you learn that could help others who are going through transitions?

00:23:04 **Caryl Stern:** So when I told my friends I was taking this job, everybody was so excited, and they said, and oh, by the way, I'm moving to Arkansas too, and they looked at me and they said, you're doing what? You know, you've lived in New York most of your life, not all of my life, but most of your life. And when you have that list of what are the most stressful things you can do -- move -- I moved, take a new job, I took a new job, deal with a major illness, the pandemic crisis started. You know, it's been a really crazy time.

I mean, I was in the office literally five weeks before shelter at home began. And so by the time I left the office, I hadn't even had a personal interaction with my entire staff. So it was scary [and] at the same time fun. I have to admit it was like being a college freshman again and moving to a new place. And for the past 14 years, you don't go into, you know, 30-plus countries where you know no one and the cultures are different and the language is different and the conditions are different without getting somewhat adept at doing that.

So I kind of like the challenge of the newness and of figuring it all out. And I think that's been really kind of informative to me. But I think the biggest thing I would say to somebody who might be my age thinking about a big job change that I hadn't contemplated -- this is my biggest takeaway -- I was doing my last job for a long time.

And I had been at UNICEF 14 years, the CEO 13 years, UNICEF USA, and so by year 13 especially -- I don't even know when this kicked in -- I had a lot of confidence. I wasn't afraid I was going to really screw it up, and I wasn't afraid I'd get fired if I did. So my risk factors were, you know, a little bit bigger, maybe, and I knew my board really well, and I trusted them, and they trusted me. And so my confidence level was really high.

You start a new job -- it doesn't matter that I'm almost 63, that I've got 40-plus years of a great track record -- I am the new kid again, and I have to learn all over again whether I'm good at this or not. And I was shocked at how I, I actually commented to somebody, I think I'm 13 again, like, I'm entering high school, and everybody else is sitting at the cool table, and I'm just not sure where my seat in the cafeteria even is, you know.

I was shocked at how it rocked kind of a little bit of the "am I any good at any of this." So if you're

contemplating the change, think about that.

00:25:37 (MUSIC)

00:25:40 **Dune Thorne:** Caryl, in closing, given all the sadness and tragedy around us right now, what gives you hope?

00:25:46 **Caryl Stern:** You know, I think all of the faces in the street gave me hope. I really do believe, you know, it's on the dosomething.org site, I think, where it says our children are, you know, young people are 25 percent of the population and 100 percent of the future. And we're seeing the future in the street right now. We're seeing the future demand change. We're seeing the future not only demand change, wanting to be part of making change happen. Strategically, they want to do it in ways that make sense.

I think it's really exciting to see young people stand up for what they believe in. And I've seen the power of young people so many times. You know, I always say it's like cigarette smoking. Every campaign that tells you you were going to get sick people ignored. But when they went to kids and said to kids, tell your mother not to smoke, mothers stopped smoking.

And I think we're having a "tell your mother not to smoke" moment. And I think that's really exciting. I also think that the focus on education, that spotlight, really gives me hope. There is a quote I'll end with, and I'll probably bastardize it, so I will apologize. And Dune, you've heard me say this, I think, before.

But it is on some level somewhere Thomas Jefferson, I'm told, but I've never been able to find the exact words. So bear with me, but that's who I think said it. But he said something to the effect of, if we solve all the problems of the world and we fail to solve the problems of education, then our children will destroy what we bequeath them. But if we solve only the problems of education, our children will solve the problems of the world.

And I see a spotlight on education right now, and it gives me great hope that our children will solve the problems of the world.

00:27:28 (MUSIC)

00:27:30 **Dune Thorne:** Thank you, Caryl, for being with us today. Your hands-on experience has brought such a grounded and human perspective to the table for all of us. We're grateful for everything you're doing to make such an impact in the world today. Thank you.

00:27:44 (MUSIC)

Next week, we'll be back with the final episode in our NOW Podcast. And we are all in for a treat. My partner Ken Stuzin will be speaking with Jason Kalirai, an astrophysicist and the head of Civil Space at Johns Hopkins' Applied Physics Lab, where he studies space science and leads space exploration missions. I hope you will join us for what should be a fascinating conversation. (MUSIC)