

Catalyze - Housing Equity (S. 1 Ep. 2) **Transcript**

SPEAKERS

JB Holston, Katherine Bradley, Tony Lewis, Russ Ramsey

JB Holston 0:01

Welcome to Capital Region Catalyze, a monthly podcast from the Greater Washington Partnership. I'm your host, JB Holston. I'm the CEO of the partnership. We are a civic alliance of business leaders committed to making the region the best place to live, work and thrive. Today I'm honored to welcome three leaders who are shaping our region's future. Katherine Bradley is the founder and chair of City Bridge Education. City Bridge works with educators and school leaders to launch new schools and innovative education projects that focus on personalization, equity, and student achievement. Welcome, Katherine.

Katherine Bradley 0:33

Really happy to be here, JB.

JB Holston 0:34

Thank you for joining us. Tony Lewis is Region Vice President of State Public Policy and Government Affairs for Verizon. His responsibilities include shaping and advancing Verizon, his public policy initiatives for the wireless and enterprise business segments. Tony is also the Chair of the Board of KIPP DC, which is the largest public charter school network in the district. Welcome, Tony.

Tony Lewis 0:56

Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here.

JB Holston 0:58

Russ Ramsey is the co-founder and former chair of the Greater Washington Partnership and CEO of Ramsey Asset Management, Russ founded the partnership in 2017, to focus on large-scale economic and social opportunities in the region, led by the business community. Welcome, Russ.

Russ Ramsey 1:14

Thanks, JB. It's so great to be not only with two amazing leaders, but Katherine and Tony are amazing friends. And it's just an honor and a privilege to talk about such an important topic.

JB Holston 1:26

Thanks for being here, everyone. And I wanted to kick off a little bit, if you would talk a little bit about your journey to civic philanthropy, all of you spend a great deal of time doing that. Talk a little bit about how you came to have that as a focus. And then how did you meet each other? I'll start Katherine with you.

Katherine Bradley 1:42

I came to Washington, DC when I was 18 years old, from California, and I came about a week after I graduated from high school, originally to work for a California Congressman, I went to college on the East Coast, I came back to DC and I met my husband when he was a very young entrepreneur in Washington starting to build the companies that became the Advisory Board and the Corporate Executive Board. That's how I know Russ, because we were all kind of baby entrepreneurs in the late 80s. And really, our stories have intertwined since then, and in business and philanthropy on lots of different shared projects. Life is long, and these friendships really have mattered. I think the way that I got involved in uh civic and in public education, was really through those corporate roots. So early on, the businesses that we launched, had a very young, very civically engaged workforce. And they began asking us for opportunities to serve in the community that were what I call "beyond commerce", they wanted to make a difference in their local communities. So I began structuring opportunities for them out in the community. And that was what opened my eyes in a granular way that I'd never had before, to the challenges and the opportunities that our community had. And then the next chapter of it was really about 20 years ago, this is this is long, we've all known each other now, about 20 years ago, a colleague and I began just researching what are the very best practices out there and combating multi-generational poverty, talking with amazing practitioners, people like Geoffrey Canada, who founded the Harlem Children's Zone, and we ended up deciding that public education was the place we wanted to play that if you cared long term, about leadership and success as being your metrics of real equality, that you just couldn't get there through any intervention other than through public education. So that's really how we decided to launch City Bridge and to get into this field was really through a very organic process that started in our companies.

JB Holston 3:47

Thanks for sharing that. Tony. How about you, at this point you really are doing civic engagement full time, what was the path that led you to this? And then how did you meet our friends on this call?

Tony Lewis 3:56

So I'm a Virginia boy born and bred in southern Virginia, a very small town call, Capron, Virginia. And I must say that my grandmother who raised me still lives there. She is 101 years old this year. Oh, so a privilege to grow up in a rural environment and learn what it means to eat, which

is you go to work every day, and then you eat. I went to high school in Northern Virginia. So I've been in and around this area for a very long time. The corporation is moving around the country, but I keep coming back. And I keep coming back for one reason and two of those people on this call today. And more importantly, the young people out there that we serve. This is a marvelous community. This is a place where anyone would want to live in-play and raise a family. What I found most intriguing about this was the number of people that cared enough To be involved consistently in solving massive problems, if this were small, you wouldn't need us. But people like Russ and Katherine have literally said themselves. What more can I do on a consistent basis, these are people who care about our children. And I'm thrilled that we've had a chance to grow and learn and grow and learn and grow and learn. And we sit here today, finding new ways to attack systemic problems, and achieving it, child by child.

JB Holston 5:19

That's great. Thanks, Tony. Russ, you've obviously been at the center of a lot of really critical philanthropic efforts here in the region for a long time. You and I have had a chance to talk a lot about inclusion and equity and inclusive growth as kind of a defining opportunity for the region. Maybe take a couple of minutes to talk about why you're so passionate about that as both a theme and an opportunity for us all.

Russ Ramsey 5:42

So just by way of background, the Greater Washington partnership was started by a group of very community-oriented CEOs who really cared about the community where they live work and played. You know, we were very fortunate to try to bring our region together through a bid for the 24 Olympic Games, called "Fostering Greater Unity". And, you know, it's with that theme that we've tried to inspire the region to work together as a region. From Baltimore to Richmond, we've got the third biggest economy in the US Seventh biggest in the world. And so we've just tried to bring some sort of business entrepreneurial solutions to big issues that really matter for all of us. As we went into COVID, I think there was already a sense that we needed to infuse equity inclusion explicitly in everything we did. And as we started thinking about what we could do to try to get the economy going again, we became aware of some really great work that McKinsey had done on a global basis that showed very clearly that closing the racial equity gap doesn't cause economic growth to be neutral or less, it actually will accelerate economic growth, we know that those investments can actually cause our economy to be more prosperous. And so what we're doing as a community is bringing on a bottom-up basis, very specific programs to try to inspire all of our business leaders to make those investments to really focus on closing this racial equity gap. And as such, we believe that the region that does this will, in turn, attract the best talent and the best companies and will have the best economy.

JB Holston 7:11



Inclusion really is the new innovation. Let's talk more about inclusion in education. Katherine, can you share more about City Bridge, what it is, what it does, and how it's changing the future.

Katherine Bradley 7:22

So City Bridge is an odd duck in the philanthropy space, we've been around since 1994. We have had many different iterations of what we do because it's been always structured as a vehicle to work on the most pressing problem of the moment. Fifteen years ago, we decided we should throw our weight behind getting best in class, early childhood to DC. I'm sure the numbers look a little bit different today because of COVID. But we were more than 90% of four-year-olds in full-day school and about 85% of three-year-olds in full-day school. That's remarkable when you look at the nation. City Bridge also has worked on bringing technology and innovation into classrooms. We've had a big body of work to back and support leaders of color to found new innovative schools for kids to see the greatest opportunity they might have with having role models who look like them. What are we working on right now, two big initiatives. One is the City Works Initiative. we looked at the fact that only 10% of the local best jobs in our knowledge economy are going to local kids and said that's unacceptable. There are all sorts of partnerships here. We're trying to launch with Russ with Greater Washington Partnership with different business groups here in DC to change that reality on the ground. And then the second thing we're working on is trying to figure out a way to use high-dose tutoring as a way to catch kids up from COVID-related learning loss. That's where a group like a city bridge that is nimble and can learn things quickly and mobilize resources quickly can really lean in. When we have a problem like wow, we could use high dose tutoring as part of the solution here who can actually roll up their sleeves and get that done. That's a perfectly shaped City Bridge project.

JB Holston 9:06

Thanks so much for that background. Katherine. Tony, on to you. You're the new board chair at KIPP DC. Can you share more about your passion for education and why the KIPP model is so successful?

Tony Lewis 9:16

Sure. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to be one of the leaders at KIPP. My other dear friend, Terry Golden is our immediate past chair, Terry and I met a long time ago, also part of that early history of folks who were engaged in all things education. Terry Golden is my hero, this guy, committed his heart and soul to each and every one of those young people because they deserve the chance. As much as we want equity. It doesn't exist everywhere, we have to manifest it, we have to make it happen. And so Terry, and his leadership at KIPP, and the previous leaders put together this marvelous community of folks who had the same goals and aspirations for those children who needed it most. And that is a place to thrive. And I use that

word because KIPP uses that word. When you walk into the school building, you see the word thrive, it is meaningful because it is broad, it is not just education is not just play, it is not just the community, it is everything. We recognize that we can make a difference in the life of a child, when the parents trust us, when the community trusts us, when the business leaders trust us, when everybody looks at this entity as a full and engaging part of the community and says to themselves, we're better off with this organization than without it. And so I'm thrilled to come into an amazing organization, 7000 kids, amazing, amazing, amazing teachers and principals, and to try to do just a little bit of my part, to forge the future opportunities for education. This organization, its leadership, is doing everything it should. My goal is to figure out that next level, and that's what we're going to do.

Russ Ramsey 11:12

JB, if I could just give a shout-out to both Katherine and Tony. KIPP is to me, one of the great success stories from the beginning, and now under both of their leadership's KIPP has done such a great job that you mentioned KIPP, and immediately people engage. But I just applaud what you've done, because the results and the potential, the possibilities are just amazing.

Tony Lewis 11:37

Thank you, Russ.

JB Holston 11:38

Russ, let's talk about GWPs Capital CoLAB, the collaborative of leaders in academia and business, CoLAB's had Equity and Inclusion at its core from the start, can you tell us a bit about how it came to be and how it's building a diverse digital talent pipeline?

Russ Ramsey 11:51

I'll try to give a brief overview. But you know, the first rule of marketing is to find a need and fill it. And in the early days of the Greater Washington Partnership, Wes Bush from Northrop Grumman through his work in the Business Roundtable, he had realized that digital skills were the number one issue globally for all business leaders. And he also pointed out that as a percentage of employment, we were already the second biggest employer of IT workers in the country, but the talent wasn't keeping up, the supply was not keeping up with the demand. And so we also realize that we have terrific universities in our region. And so we had lunch, and we invited twelve university presidents to come to have lunch at Peter Scher's offices at JPMorgan. You know, half of the presidents never met each other. In that short two-hour meeting, Wes laid out this vision of building a digital ecosystem and having a common digital tech credential that can differentiate these universities from all the rest of the country. So fast forward a couple of years later, we came up with the capital CoLab. These universities have all come together and we're in the process of raising a \$5 million scholarship for these digital tech credential students.

And we've targeted half of that to go to underrepresented communities because we need to make sure that this digital system is for everyone. This is only the real second full year of implementation. But I think it's going to impact employability. And I think it's going to shine a light on this region as a community that people want to come and stay.

JB Holston 13:13

Katherine, I do want to talk a little bit about the impact of COVID. And you talked about sort of the accelerating inequities that it's bringing everywhere, but certainly in the education system. Talk a little bit more, if you would about that.

Katherine Bradley 13:25

I think that the bracing thing we all have to wrestle with, is what are we going to do to avoid having a lost COVID generation? The students who are in school now lose a year or two years of learning, and whose lives are therefore affected by that learning loss, in terms of the opportunity and the economics that they have forever. And McKinsey has looked at students of color and said, they predict students of color will lose between seven and eight months of learning in math by the end of this year, which actually is almost like a full year of learning loss in math. Locally, we've had a group called empower K12, which has done assessments like mid-year assessments of about 30,000, DC public school kids. Overall, their numbers didn't look that bad at mid-year, it was about a one-month loss in reading about four months loss, and math. But if you began to slice that data for at-risk kids, and in particular, for Ward Seven and Eight kids, all of a sudden those numbers went up. And you got two numbers that were very much like McKinsey's, I think part of the scary thing here is that McKinsey looks at the nation and says, most likely, because of COVID, we're going to have between a 2 and a 9% drop in high school graduation rates, if that happens, it translates into about a \$2,000 economic hit across your whole career per year for your life. So it's really significant. It's going to be all hands on deck to figure out how we safely reopen schools to do different kinds of interventions around mental health supports, and around things like tutoring to catch kids up. And we're gonna have to pay attention for a number of years here to try to get to an equitable outcome. And the last thing I'll say on this is equity is really looking at the outcomes and saying, alright, it's not just about equal inputs, we actually have to look at where different groups are ending up and take into account that people are not always starting on an even playing field, and actually design our interventions so that people get equal access to opportunities so that our outcomes begin to be juster and fairer, I'm actually very optimistic for all the reasons that Tony is that we will be able to tackle this, but this is a hard problem to get solved.

JB Holston 15:47

Yeah, one of the aspects of the pandemic is everyone's been looking toward the next three months, and the reality is this is extended, and it isn't gonna be binary. It's not, you know, we're

all done. Tony, some of the charter public schools have had a little bit more success, reopening a little bit more quickly than the non-charter publics. How has KIPP gone about this?

Tony Lewis 16:07

The right way, if I may, and I say that because I'm thrilled that our leadership team took safety as the mantra first. To Katherine's point, this is horrific. Thousands and thousands, of thousands of lives lost in our region, our children are part of that, that's a mother, a brother, and an uncle. That kind of loss will affect them. It is real. We can do everything we can to intervene. But the loss is there and understand that we're going to have to craft a plan that is ultra inclusive because this is so devastating. I'm optimistic about how we come out of this because we do have great leaders, from the teachers to the principals, to the folks maintaining the buildings, people are committed to our kids. That's not the problem. The problem is, this is horrific. And we have to collectively find the right path out of this. And to Russ' point, when we think about the jobs that are available, becoming available, his co labs are the beginning. I mean, if you look at my structure and the jobs that I can tell you, we're going to need 5, 10, and 15 to 20 years, watch the Superbowl, and look at the immersion that we're putting in front of the fans at the Super Bowl. And it'll tell you what we're building the networks that we're building now. The point is the opportunities to work in that environment to create in that environment may not only need to have digital intelligence but how does that start reading? Right, our kids have to be able to read at scale. We can't let anybody miss. These are valuable employees for our community for our town for our city. And so, big problem, we're gonna have to dig in, and really, really come to grips with everything that must be done to save our kids.

JB Holston 18:17

If we've got to get too inclusive growth through inclusive recovery, what kinds of things does a business need to make sure it's doing through this next year to make sure that we're recovering as fast as possible?

Russ Ramsey 18:28

JB, it's a question I think about a lot. I believe that business leaders can really step up here and demonstrate their commitments. I find it ironic that after, you know, this most recent terrible event in Washington and the Capitol Building, that it turns out, according to many surveys, that business leaders were the most trusted voice through this. Now, whether that stands up, or whether it's right or wrong, I think that's a call to action, that there is an ability for a business to actually not just talk the talk, walk the walk, and really step up. It means really applying not just the talents and skills of businesses, but to work with our policy leaders to work with our government leaders, not to lobby for their own self-interests, but to lobby for what's best for our country. So its ideas. I mean, Tony, how do we put a stake in the ground of the, you know, the role of 5G and closing the racial equity gap, and let's figure out a way to rally communities

around these new technologies in these new futures. So I think it's about all of us being smart, and entrepreneurial, about how we can come together and make these investments. I do think this is a generational opportunity for us to say enough is enough. And we need to have candid difficult conversations, about equity, economics, discrimination, about, you know, racism, and all forms and figure out how we can build from here.

Katherine Bradley 19:55

Russ' is group has also been working not just on the digital certificates, which is really important, but also on changing mindsets around what kind of signals employers are looking at in the market. So the work that Tony and I do with Kip, we're about education. But it's because that connects to opportunity in life to a meaningful job that can support a family like we're not about this work just for high school graduation, it's because of what that leads to that matters. And if you look at one of the biggest barriers to the kids we serve doing well, it's the signaling system that exists, that doesn't want to look at any human being as a talented contributor until they've gotten that four-year college degree. But employers need to broaden the signals that they're looking at. The way that we four did college, which was a four-year residential, that's just simply not going to be the reality for most of the kids Tony and I are trying to serve. They need flexible, local, affordable options where they can work and go to school and earn their degree at the same time. Employers have to start realizing that those are very valid options. And those can be signals of really spectacular talent, kids who have grit and perseverance and can really perform for them. So I think if we can attack that barrier, at the same time, as we're just trying to get lots more digital training out the door, get a much better education done for our kids that we begin to have a holistic solution.

Tony Lewis 21:25

The only thing that I would add is to remember, this equity problem existed before COVID. And so what we are examining, and what we're talking about solving here today, is systemic, it's been built-in. And so the charge that we're talking about is massive. This has been there, it's been exposed.

Katherine Bradley 21:47

Well said.

JB Holston 21:49

Let me ask each of you, as you look back at 2020. What did you learn about yourself as a leader? How did you change as a leader? Tony, let's start with you.

Tony Lewis 21:57

So much learned in 2020, about leadership. But the one that comes to mind that I think about most often is empathy. I needed to continue to wrap my head around what my teams were feeling and going through every day, with their families, with the job, with not being at a work location, or with having to go out in the field. It was such a variety of different circumstances that I had to deal with. But I had to be the leader, I had to be the one that they can turn to. You can't take all that on your own. Just as a snap of the finger. I think it's going to work. One of the things in addition to empathy that I had to really re-emphasize was my communication style. And I got that from our CEO. Our CEO had a daily call with the entire employee base. Now we're a global company. 130,000 people. Every day at noon, everybody was on our Zoom call with our CEO, so that he could talk about where Verizon stood, That inspired me. I have never seen that done before. And what did it do? Instill trust. So empathy and communication were the two things that really rose to the top of my own leadership, and what I wanted to improve throughout 20. And certainly, want to improve in 2021.

JB Holston 23:21

That's great. Katherine, how about you? What have you learned this past year?

Katherine Bradley 23:25

My kids are all grown, I was not trying to work through the pandemic, and manage school or manage the needs of small children. And the depth of my appreciation for what so many of my young colleagues have managed with young children at home and keeping everything going through the pandemic, it is just extraordinary what people have had to juggle and manage. It's also been superhuman, what families without resources have had to manage through this. So I would land also on empathy, but also for just deep appreciation for what so many people have carried.

JB Holston 24:00

So true. Russ, how about you? What have you learned?

Russ Ramsey 24:04

I think two things. One, what really matters, I think, for all of us is certainly for me, you know, it's health, family, and friendships. And you know, thank goodness for 5G and zoom and broadband. You know, I say that because I then think about just how resilient a society we really are. And I certainly hope 21 can be all about celebrating, all that's possible in our society, but we got to really focus on you know, those that have real everyday economic fear about getting to the next week, and getting COVID. And, and not being able to get the right health care and, you know, that has to be front and center. But it's inspiring to think about how resilient society can be and how much we can really do together.

JB Holston 24:46

Resilience, trust, empathy, together, are all really critical words for all of us. Last questions, actually an opportunity for you to ask each other a question, Tony, you're up first.

Tony Lewis 24:59

This is a tough one. So I'm going to do what I do best and make a statement. I want to thank Katherine and Russ, very specifically, their voices on this issue are really critical. We need people like you all, to continually talk about inequity and the way that you do to continually reach out to our kids in this city, who we know will benefit more from your voices than everybody else, your voices are important. This is not a judgment. It's not fair. But it is. And we need that. So I thank you for taking the time to do this. I know your hearts. And it's your hearts that people need to understand and they will grow from because they will see your true intent is so sincere because you look in the eyes of those children. And you say, yes, that is our future. That is what we need to do in order to move this great society forward. So without a question, I say thank you for what you're doing. And I'm proud to work with you.

Katherine Bradley 26:06

Thank you for that, Tony.

Russ Ramsey 26:07

Yes, thank you very much.

JB Holston 26:09

So wonderful. Katherine, you have a question you'd like to ask?

Katherine Bradley 26:12

Alright, so I have to give one right back to Tony because he was just overly kind to all of us. So that amazing grandmother who raised you who's 101 -- what's the most important thing she taught you?

Tony Lewis 26:26

Oh, that work is a part of being. And work on a farm is life. It was going out to the garden, picking the greens, you know, getting them ready for dinner. I so enjoyed and got this fundamental understanding of you going out and work and things grow. And then you eat. I mean, the very simplistic part of what we understand life is my grandmother who had zero education taught me simply by demonstrating that it's okay to do hard work. Hard work is good. We all benefit from that. And I will say that every one of her children went to college. Zero

education from my grandmother, zero education from my grandfather, but smart enough to send every one of their children to college.

Russ Ramsey 27:19

Amazing. Oh my goodness, amazing.

JB Holston 27:21

Russ, how about you?

Russ Ramsey 27:23

These are tough acts to follow but I just have one comment and then maybe one charge. First of all, I do this, you know, once a week forever with you too. So we can find things to move the needle and change the world together. But Katherine, I just you never cease to amaze me. And I just want to share that, you know that kindness just pervades everything you do. And I just, it's just such a model. And I just thank you. It's just really inspiring.

Katherine Bradley 27:50

Well, that means a lot. Thank you.

Russ Ramsey 27:53

And Tony, you know, my charge is to use that Donnie Simpson-like sort of DJ voice. And all of that technology of a Verizon to just do more, man, you mean, you're just so talented. And I'm saying this from the bottom of my heart because I'm dating myself. Donnie Simpson is like the best DJ ever. And I just hope that Verizon you have the charge from the leadership at Verizon to just be a visible voice and a visible leader, because you inspire all of us, and you can change the world.

Tony Lewis 28:23

It's very kind. Russ, thank you so much.

JB Holston 28:25

Well, it's been a wonderful conversation. Thanks so much, Katherine, Tony, and rest for your time today.

Russ Ramsey 28:30

Thank you.



Katherine Bradley 28:31

Thank you, everybody.

Tony Lewis 28:32

Thank you, JB.

JB Holston 28:33

Thank you for listening to Capital Region Catalyze. Tune in next month, where I'll talk about Amazon HQ2, racial equity, and COVID recovery with Jay Carney of Amazon and Matt De Ferranti at the Arlington County Board. Be sure to check out our weekly interview series called fresh tape, where we talk one-on-one with thought leaders from across the region. For more information on the podcast and what we do follow us on Twitter and Instagram or visit Greater Washington partnership dot com. Thanks for joining us.