

Podcast "Somos Filantropía": Transcripción

Episodio: Impulsando la prosperidad juvenil y la sostenibilidad alimentaria en Puerto Rico

Anfitrión: Glenisse Pagán Ortiz, directora ejecutiva, Filantropía Puerto Rico

Invitada: Kinyta Smalls, directora ejecutiva de Puerto Rico, Peter Alfond Foundation

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Bienvenidos al podcast oficial de nuestro equipazo en Filantropía Puerto Rico, Somos Filantropía. Estas conversaciones profundizan, visibilizan y amplifican los esfuerzos que adelantan la equidad dentro del ecosistema social de Puerto Rico. Nuestros invitados compartirán sus perspectivas sobre temas sociales desde sus experiencias y especialidades. Así que busca un espacio cómodo, sírvete un café, café de aquí, claro está, y danos oídos.

[00:00:23.12] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Saludos y bienvenidos a otro episodio de Somos Filantropía. Hoy cambiamos a inglés. So welcome, friends, and thanks for being here and joining another episode. Today, we are joined with Kinyta Smalls, Executive Director of Peter Alfond Foundation. Kinyta, welcome.

[00:00:43.28] - Kinyta Smalls

Thank you. So wonderful to be here.

[00:00:46.05] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Thank you for accepting the invitation. I'd like to start right off the bat. Tell us a little bit about the Peter Alfond Foundation, because I think many of our listeners might not know the Peter Alfond Foundation. So if you could tell us a little bit about the story and probably how they came to invest and be interested in supporting Puerto Rico.

[00:01:17.03] - Kinyta Smalls

Sure. So the Peter Alford Foundation was founded in 1994 by Peter Alphonse himself. He comes from the Alford family, who are the creators of Dexter Shoe Company. If you go to Maine, you'll see quite a few buildings and/or other community resources that are sponsored by the Harold Alphonse Foundation. So Peter himself grew up with a strong legacy of philanthropy and consciousness around giving back. The Dexter Shoe Company had factories on the north Coast of Puerto Rico, which Peter was President over for a while, Peter ended up living on the island for many years, and his four children grew up here at different stages of their lives. And so there was a real attachment to Puerto Rico.

[00:02:13.26] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, I remember these Dexter shoes. They were like school shoes.

[00:02:18.22] - Kinyta Smalls

That's how I remember them, too. Yeah, right? I went to Catholic school. So I'm pretty sure I had at least two pair. So it's hilarious that now I'm here doing this.

[00:02:27.01] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yes, yes. Absolutely. And How did you... So that was his beginning, and then he went into philanthropy and the kids got involved in it?

[00:02:37.27] - Kinyta Smalls

Yeah, so it was very sad. So basically, Peter started his foundation in '94. He made investments in the wellness space. That was always something really important to him personally. One of his very large investments, if you will, was in a center called Kripalu in the main area.

[00:02:59.10] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yes, I know Kripalu.

[00:03:01.04] - Kinyta Smalls

Absolutely. That became a bit of a personal trademark. In Puerto Rico, a lot of Peter's giving was influenced by his employees, seeing some of the needs and gaps that existed in education. There were early small grants made along that line. He was continuing to desarrollar his philanthropy in Puerto Rico. One of the One of the areas in which he was very key was in early thought partnering and being a builder, a bridge builder for Vimenti School. The family has a long history with Boys and Girls Club, and so Peter was on what they call the Legacy Council for the Boys and Girls Club, and there became a part of really pivotal talks around what it would look like to create this Alianza School, which would serve as a two-generational model to support families in coming poverty.

[00:04:01.08] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, mobilizing them. Yes. Oh, that's amazing. And I know Kripalo, I've done several yoga retreats and meditation retreats there. So it's amazing to see that, yeah.

[00:04:12.19] - Kinyta Smalls

That full circle for you as well.

[00:04:13.28] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, a donor of that wellness institution.

[00:04:18.08] - Kinyta Smalls

So sadly, in 2017, Peter died. He passed away at the age of 65.

[00:04:25.21] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And at the beginning of 2017?

[00:04:27.23] - Kinyta Smalls

I think it was right before the hurricane. I believe it was July of 2017. He contracted on malaria after having gone on a safari in Africa. And so his four children took over leadership of the foundation, and they contracted the company that I actually work for, which is Intentional Philanthropy, based in Bethesda, Maryland. They're a small foundation management company that provides various levels of foundational support. One of the things that I love about the Alford Foundation, which also radically changed my life and opened the door for me to come back to Puerto Rico, was that the children, as well as the independent trustees, were very interested in the work, having a bottom-up approach. So once the foundation launched officially in 2019, early grants were being made, but the real strategy work, they wanted someone on the ground. And for a number of reasons, it worked out to where they ended up hiring me. I have a background in education.

[00:05:40.02] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

I was going to ask you, how did you end up in this? So it's interesting.

[00:05:45.05] - Kinyta Smalls

I look at it from different angles. I think personally, where I was in my life, I was looking to return to Puerto Rico. My mom's Puerto Rican, my dad's African-American. I lived in Puerto Rico from 6:00 to 9:00. So my first literate language is actually Spanish. And then over the summers, I would come back. So there was always that connection. After Maria, like every Puerto Rican, it was like the bat signal, like we've got to come back. And I was in bilingual education, and I was seeing how many of our children were coming stateside and were still struggling to read in Spanish, and their language deficits or their language differences were being processed as learning disabilities. So we had a disproportionate number of children that were going into special education. So as a bilingual, and then later English as second language teacher, I became very interested in understanding what was happening. I'm like, I learned to read in Spanish, so I know it's doable. Some of the smartest, most brilliant people I know are Puerto Rican. Puerto Rico exports talent more than any other place I know. So it's not that people can't learn. There's a disconnect, and I became very I'm interested in that.

[00:07:00.17] - Kinyta Smalls

So in 2018, I actually came with my husband, who's American, to see if he could live here. So that was happening in my world.

[00:07:10.12] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

It's like, honey, let's see. Yeah, we did. So is your mother's here? Yeah. Is she here? She is.

[00:07:15.10] - Kinyta Smalls

Oh, great. And my family. And my family is in my OS. So I get to go there and see them when I'm here. Awesome. So the work brought me back. Basically, things just came at the right I was ending my career as a director for Charter Network in New Jersey and Philadelphia, and decided I was ready to do something different. And what I had in mind is I was going to sit in the corner of a classroom in Puerto Rico and teach reading. That was what I had decided to do.

[00:07:48.14] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

The purpose is the same. You're always about serving, but you- I was really trying to crack the code.

[00:07:55.11] - Kinyta Smalls

And at the same time, I had a dear friend who was friends with the President of Intentional Philanthropy, Holly Rivera, who you've met. And basically, she and Holly were talking, and my good friend comes to me. She says, Kenita, there's this role that has your name written on it, but I know you don't do grants, but everything else is you. And one thing led to another. And my husband and I were really ready for a change. So in August of 2020, we decided to sell our very large home, our cars, half of our furniture. And within a I had moved to Puerto Rico. So it felt so like- And at a time. Yeah, the way things came together, and then in such a short time. I mentioned- Yeah, everything floped. That size and such to say it was a really big undertaking, but it felt right, and everything just worked. And so we

landed here, and it was amazing being able to come back and come with resources to help support work that I already really was invested in.

[00:08:59.13] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And how do you like working in philanthropy?

[00:09:02.25] - Kinyta Smalls

It's an area I struggled to say the word. I made a video for friends when I got here. I was like, I'm in Phl..... It was such a far off.

[00:09:15.07] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Nobody understands anyway. Yeah. Unless you're in the sector.

[00:09:18.24] - Kinyta Smalls

Unless you come from that level of affluence or if you're in the sector. So for me, philanthropy has been a real breath of fresh air. I think it's a great opportunity, and I'm excited for what you do because I do feel as though it is one of our strong avenues to keep a lot of our talent here. There's a lot of opportunity in that space to make change, and I think it's a really special sweet spot that those of us who get to work on are very fortunate. It brings together so many interests for me, and I I can see for others. It's a place where if you're an engineer, but you have a big heart for your island, you can work. If you're an educator, but you're also interested in creating ecosystems, which would be more me, then there's space. It brings together so many skillsets, and you're never bored. Unfortunately, there's never a lack of need, and you're always having to be creative with how to maximize the resources that your foundation has. Definitely. So I think it's a real privilege that we have to work in this space.

[00:10:31.10] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And I love it. Now I'm getting more ideas of connecting you with your background and the work that you do. Do you really get involved very much in this? I know you have two focuses, but in this educational, since this is your background so much, do you cause problems getting so involved?

[00:10:55.16] - Kinyta Smalls

I do.. Let us I do. I do. But thankfully, most of the people I've spoken with has received my well intentions and have heard things from me that have been beneficial. And so I do feel... So another piece of the work I get to do in the way in which the Alphonse, the Peter Alford Foundation wants to give to Puerto Rico is we give dollars, but a part of my role was also fashioned to allow me to be a support in areas where I have expertise. Grantees. And so a good number of our grantees, in addition to dollars, have been connected to resources stateside, have been connected to each other. But also because we have this bottom-up approach, there's been a significant investment in coaching our leaders, our partners, our grantees, and how do you make a case for your work? And that's something that I've been able to do. Somehow, that's a gift I picked or a skillset that is merged together from my experiences. And I think that's where I've been able to really give input, and it's paid off. I've been able to see really early NACED groups be able to evolve and very clearly articulate their mission and be able to make a case for their work.

[00:12:20.25] - Kinyta Smalls

Whereas when we first met, they were sowing the weeds doing the work, which is what attracted me to them, that someone in a different different space and from a different background may not have appreciated the work had it not been formatted a little differently. So that's something I'm very grateful I get to do, and that there's space in my schedule for me to be able to engage in.

[00:12:45.10] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

That's the fun part, I'm sure.

[00:12:46.21] - Kinyta Smalls

It really is.

[00:12:47.09] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, but it's a very refined capacity building. It's like you're supporting and professionalizing these organizations. And since you have all this background, you tell them, this is the perspective you probably need to hear it and things like that.

[00:13:07.05] - Kinyta Smalls

From an asset approach. It isn't an evaluation of which way is better. I really look at it as another language. What you do is amazing, and who you are is amazing. Now we need to package it in the language of an investor, in the language of someone that isn't in this world.

[00:13:28.03] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

So you're not missing the the teaching.

[00:13:32.12] - Kinyta Smalls

Yeah, I think at this point, I missed it for a long time. I won't lie. I really did. No, I'm not. I think, though, I'm more impassioned and committed than ever, though, to help be a part of the solution and to learn what that means. You did such an amazing job bringing us great statistics and helping us to understand broadly what was happening happening in education in Puerto Rico, and hearing that roughly one in 100 third graders are reading proficiently, I can't be okay with that. So whatever you call that, whether it's I miss teaching or that part will never be okay with me. And I've been in conversations during the convening that you had this year in October, and even just today with some leaders in the field like, Okay, what are we doing? How are we moving this? Regardless of what the political context is, what are we doing? So that will never change for me.

[00:14:36.22] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

That's great. So tell me a little bit, give me more details of how you do philanthropy. Sure. I know you have some focus areas, and walk us a little bit through of how you do it.

[00:14:50.17] - Kinyta Smalls

Sure. So like I shared, Peter- Especially not being here.

[00:14:56.18] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah. A foundation that is not... You're here, But I mean, the institution is not here. It always helps to have that infrastructure. Just wondering, because you seem to be very much like a thought partner with your grantee partners. So how are you so close? How do you continue those relationships and work them?

[00:15:25.02] - Kinyta Smalls

Well, a few things. One is that Rebecca Alford, Peter's eldest daughter. She lived here on the island, and her children were part Puerto Rican. It's a homeowner here, and it's very much still involved and connected. So there were personal connections for the trustees themselves. Another of our founding trustees live on the island full-time at the time. So the foundation was very much careful to include leaders peership at the board level that was directly connected to Puerto Rico. And then I moved here for two and a half years, so that gave me a great opportunity. And so now, going forward, how do we keep our ear to the ground? I think it's interesting, and it's evolving, right? Because being here in person and going to every event I could, reading, making connections, and just loving people, and loving the work I got to do, I was able to meet a lot of the leaders in the agriculture space as well as an education. And so those relationships are maintained in part, now that I'm no longer here full-time, They're maintained, obviamente, through Zoom calls. So there's that. But they're also maintained because we now have an advisory board.

[00:16:57.27] - Kinyta Smalls

And on our advisory board, we We have a commitment to keeping... It's our funnel for our board. And so we make a commitment to bring onto our advisory board individuals who live in Puerto Rico and understand the context. So in addition to that, every year, the board comes to Puerto Rico. And when they come, I've been able to throw a really big party and invite all the stakeholders and whatever that year's focus is. And so that continues to build the enmeshment, if you will, between the top leadership, the staff, and the ecosystem. So it's a mixture, and it's great. I think going forward, I'm no longer here full-time, so we're now contracting a consulting firm on the island to help support with some of the on the ground work and touch points that are made. But I'm here about two months of the year.

[00:17:57.23] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, you're here a lot. And I was more curious on when you came in at the beginning. How do you create those relationships? Because you had layers of layers, you coming in, your husband coming in, and then cold calling organizations.

[00:18:18.01] - Kinyta Smalls

How easy was it for you, too, in connecting with other peers, philanthropic peers, that they could tell you this and that.

[00:18:27.16] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

But then, Then you take a car for two hours.

[00:18:32.22] - Kinyta Smalls

Find on a project.

[00:18:35.09] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Then this was 2019. Well, you came in 2020, so we were...

[00:18:41.25] - Kinyta Smalls

Impending.

[00:18:42.08] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Earthquakes. I mean, we were earthquakes. We were like, Running seeing earthquakes and then COVID hit.

[00:18:47.19] - Kinyta Smalls

So you were like... Locked in my apartment with a mask on.

[00:18:50.21] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Trying to create relationships. That's a great question. I'm wondering, how easy was it for you?

[00:18:57.26] - Kinyta Smalls

That's a great question. I inherited a good number of relationships. In 2019, before I came, there was a convening in Puerto Rico where a number of leaders...

[00:19:08.07] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Oh, yeah, I went to that. The education philanthropic roundtable. Was that? Correct.

[00:19:13.13] - Kinyta Smalls

That's right. And that was the unofficial launch. And so at that roundtable, Holly, along with two of my colleagues, Daniel Aste, who you know- Yeah, I met Holly and I met Rebeca in that. As well. And then another colleague, Laurel Dumont, they were early on the ground. So from that roundtable, a number of projects were identified. In addition to that, I'd inherited the Vementi project. Like I said, the Peter had been key and as a thought partner and a connector for. So when I come in September of 2020 to my first board meeting, I've

inherited this slate of grants that allowed me to begin to learn the ecosystem. Going forward, there were also relationships that trustees had. Was key and connected me to some of the relationships that he had on the island. So there was that. And that allowed for a lot of learning. Our first year and a half, I would say, involved a lot of learning. Then for myself, coming here, again, having connection to the island, I felt very passionate about finding the people who were doing the work before Maria, because I understood that there are those who speak the King's language that show up when opportunity arises, and they're able to capture resources ahead of those whose hands are in the dirt, in the work, that don't have the ability to present themselves in a way that maybe puts them at the front of the line.

[00:20:57.16] - Kinyta Smalls

And so I committed- Or their focus is different.

[00:20:59.28] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

People, you're in it. You're doing the work. And when you're in crisis, you're even more in it.

[00:21:04.00] - Kinyta Smalls

I always know who is involved in their work. When you look at their LinkedIn page, it's a mess. You look at my LinkedIn page, it's a hot mess. I am busy working. I do not have time to tell you about my work. I'm busy doing it.

[00:21:20.17] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, that's a good point.

[00:21:21.24] - Kinyta Smalls

That's true. Similarly, I wanted to find those folks. So some of the things that helped. So I had inherited this really robust grant slate. I had the resources that came through some of our trustees. So that was amazing. And then you just have to be a little nosy and a little

curious. And so I remember one of my first forays was at Barrista Square, the coffee shop here in Condado. I walked in and I said, okay, show me your coffees that are 100% from Puerto Rico. And there was one. And so I ordered the coffee, I bought the bag, and I called the phone number on the back and answered Sandra Farms. Wow. That was really cold calling. I went into the grocery store and I looked for products that had made in Puerto Rico, and one of the products was Amasad. I called the number, and Marisol answered the phone. And so that really was one of my approaches, was just I wanted to know from the bottom up. I didn't want someone I'm fancy talking me about things. I wanted to see what Puerto Ricans were telling me, what Puerto Rico was telling me.

[00:22:38.04] - Kinyta Smalls

And so. Then the foundation decided they were interested in what we I would say is nutrition in the food system. And that was a whole new field for me. I mean, I came in for education, and then we added this other piece. So I had to do a lot of research. And I remember trying to wrap my brain around on agroecology. I just started googling. And I remember finding a video on YouTube of this young lady, and she's talking, and she's all soft-spoken, and she's laying down, and then she gets up, and I'm like, What? I want to turn the page. And it ended up being one of our top grantees. The more I listened, I was like, Wow, this person really knows what they're talking about. I don't know this information, but I'm understanding it through them. And so it's just... And then I would go to events, and I would pick up books, and look at the back, and that's how I found ProCafé. We'd call the number, and someone picked up. And so it really was this combination of things. And I'm really excited because I think we have a really solid group of people that we now support.

[00:23:51.14] - Kinyta Smalls

And we're at the stage coming into our fifth year of grantmaking in Puerto Rico, where we're refining. And what I was able to share at that the convening was about this approach we have to go deeper with some organizations and really make a commitment to them, regardless of what the stock market is doing and what our yearly budget is. We needed a way, if we really wanted to make impact to follow that up with some processes that

safeguarded our support to some of our key partners, which is what we call them, our priority partners. So, yeah, that's how it happened and where we are today.

[00:24:31.24] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, I appreciate it very much how you, in our convening, you were sharing your strategy and the priority and that little space that you leave for whatever comes. I think it's a really good, transparent, clear framework and simple of grandmaking. So you have two focus. So it would be education and then agriculture, but it's really like wellness agriculture. So tell us a little bit more about those.

[00:25:10.19] - Kinyta Smalls

So we're in the process of refining those. Because education is huge. It is huge. Yeah, for sure. And you were really helpful. You supported our board meeting this year, where we went into that a little more. So currently, we're currently working with a third party to refine our problem statement, theory of change. But where we are today is we understand that our interest in education is really around youth thriving, and so supporting conditions that allow children in Puerto Rico to thrive. And so obviously, we support K-12 through our support with Vimenti and Caras, but we also support out-of-school time that provide enrichment to students that help give them some of that that gives them the background they need so that the information they're learning has a place to be deposited. If I don't have an exposure to ideas beyond my physical experience, then new information is really hard to land. Yeah, because you don't see it. You don't see it. And so you're busy trying to make meaning, and it never really becomes a part of your toolkit. So out-of-school time is so important that One of the examples is Manta and Vieques, which is an amazing environmental program.

[00:26:35.17] - Kinyta Smalls

They also teach about food and nutrition. And so that's an example of that. Or Cortés Foundation that does amazing social-emotional work, supporting youth, using art to help youth identify their feelings and develop language to be able to express and manage

themselves, just as a couple of examples. So in education, we really are around youth thriving, and we're continuing to refine what that means and really look forward to hopefully coming back next year. And I know we talked about maybe coming back with Rebecca to really define that more. But that's an exciting path to be on. And then in agriculture, it really is more around nutrition. It's the idea that with a Puerto Rico that imports 85 to 90% of its food, and what that means for the offerings that are available in the store, does that equate great nutrition? Does that equate to food that is authentic to the Puerto Rican history empowered? And so that was the work that I got to really throw myself into through farmer convenings. I spoke with over 100 farmers in various parts of the island, as well as families, and was able to understand- And taste things.

[00:27:51.21] - Kinyta Smalls

Oh, boy, I have to say that has been such a joy of my job.

[00:27:56.02] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

It's going to- I mean, I can't even taste.

[00:27:57.24] - Kinyta Smalls

Oh, man, that I will not I'm even lying. That is, hands down, the cherry on the top. So when we say agriculture, again, we're in this process of really defining what we mean. And what we're finding we mean is connecting Puerto Rico to its authentic palate, connecting Puerto Rico to nutrient dense foods, and allowing Puerto Rico to feed itself, not just in the case of an emergency, but in a way that supports and uplifts its food system. And I guess one of the things I can add there as one coming from the outside, one of the real treats was finding how dense and rich the leadership in agriculture and the food system is. Some of the most kick-butt leaders on the island that I have met are in the food system space. And so that was another Another special part of the work. And really leadership, I guess I could round this off with saying that that really is how the foundation has taken its lead on its grant-making. They look within these areas It's a focus, a focus. But when they identified

leadership that is busy at the work, that they can come alongside and accelerate, that's where they've decided to go deeper.

[00:29:26.11] - Kinyta Smalls

And I really appreciate that about our board, that they've really allowed the leadership to take lead, because I love saying hustle, knows hustle. I know when I'm speaking to someone that's doing the work, as opposed to talking about the work, because I've had to work hard in my life. And that doesn't mean that's the only way. The point being is I feel like we've been able to identify people who've really been working hard for what they believe in. And it feels so good to support their leadership, to support them with general operating funds, to support them with funds to contract a third party, to create better structures in their organization, to support them with increasing salaries. We've been able to increase salaries of our key partners about 27%. We feel proud about that.

[00:30:16.01] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

I mean, that's what philanthropy should do, because this is money to risk and to expand and to amplify whatever those efforts that are being there. Absolutely. It's a cherry on the top.

[00:30:27.20] - Kinyta Smalls

It really is. Yeah.

[00:30:29.07] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah. That's amazing. So it looks like you really bet on leadership.

[00:30:35.26] - Kinyta Smalls

On people.

[00:30:36.21] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

On people. Yeah. Yeah. Whoever you see, like shining, you go and...

[00:30:41.11] - Kinyta Smalls

Maybe not shining, but... You know what I mean? Yeah. I have to say.

[00:30:47.09] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, I mean, that's my way of saying it.

[00:30:52.10] - Kinyta Smalls

And someone else would have done the work differently and maybe landed in a similar place. But because of who I am, When I see someone and I can tell they are in it, then I'm like, I want to know you, and I want the board to know you. I think that's really been also how the relationships have grown. It's because it's like, I want my board to know you. I don't just want to be the one to know you. I don't want to stifle your exposure.

[00:31:22.06] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

So how do you see the sector, more the funder sector in Puerto Rico? And have you seen any changes? I mean, in the small time. And I say because we were in critical time crisis, now it seems we're not so much in crisis. So I'm wondering if you've seen a change. And then How do you see us as a sector?

[00:31:48.17] - Kinyta Smalls

Sure.

[00:31:49.24] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

You can be honest.

[00:31:50.27] - Kinyta Smalls

Yeah. No, no. If I'm really honest, I really have been that person with my head in the sand during my work. And so my relationships at that level do need to develop. Obviously, Baby Jaunarena has been a mentor, a friend, a thought partner. And so we work together quite a bit. And her role actually inspired the foundation to create what is now my role. So that's been a really great partnership.

[00:32:21.00] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

A side note, a side note. I love that you guys at the convening. I love people that engage. So the two of you are like, you have You have a question? You have a question? You two. Okay, let me.

[00:32:33.15] - Kinyta Smalls

We'll always have a question. I know.

[00:32:35.07] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

I love it. I love it because you're in it. Absolutely. Yeah. Thank you for that.

[00:32:40.20] - Kinyta Smalls

I think I'm getting to understand the sector, and I You've helped me do that. But I've also seen beautiful work. I was really inspired by the work of Alexandra. Two years ago, at one of our convenings, she gave me some of the language I needed to start bringing trust-based approaches to the foundation. And I feel so inspired and motivated by their example. Looking at Banco Popular and meeting young business owners and seeing the opportunities they've brought. So I love that the sector is really here and showing up for the people. And I would love the world to know that. I really want that to be amplified more so that Puerto Rico can really be seen more fully. I think that this latest collaboration between some of the foundations with Flamboyán, Colibrí, Titín, Segarra Boerman. No, I think it's... I forget who the others are, so I'm not going to overspeak, but they're looking to

help move reading forward. I think that's really exciting. I think the potential that lies in collaborating together to move the needle, it seems to me that that's where we're positioned, and I hope we go in that direction because we're going to be here pretty much.

[00:34:15.12] - Kinyta Smalls

Regardless of who's in office. Many of us live here. And so I feel as though we are the right place for, like you said, change to be sparked, to be innovated, and then to hopefully be caught up through the systems that exist in the government. So, yeah, I think that I've been very impressed and very inspired by what I've seen. But I do wonder, how do we move the needle forward more? Because there are some amazing leaders in these foundations. I mean, there are no slouches. And so I would love to see us really partner up more and really target an issue, a problem area or something to solve or create and really see some real momentum that we can point to. And then together we did that.

[00:35:08.28] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah. And I think I always ask this question, but I think we're ready. We're ready for that. And you said, oh, I've been with my head down. But we've been coming from some times that we were all doing that. Because as people that are in the sector, that you're one of serve and be there and support. And there has been so many things happening one after the other that everybody was like, Forget it.

[00:35:40.06] - Kinyta Smalls

Let's get it done.

[00:35:41.16] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Let's get it done. Let's go. Let's go. So I think now we're ready to like, okay, let's take a breather for a moment, and let's look together and focus and see what we can do together.

[00:35:53.13] - Kinyta Smalls

For sure. Obviously, everyone mentions the funds, the Esther funds that are still to come in, the different disaster funding that is still to be spent here. So it's a great opportunity to position our local work to attract those dollars. It's a great opportunity to match dollars. We really do have some good levers right now that we can pull on to be able to create long term change for the island and for the Afropelligal. I'm sorry, I'm trying to correct my language. But yes, for sure. So, yeah, it is a moment. I do believe in that. I believe that moments matter, and this is one of them.

[00:36:38.09] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah, especially the change in government and everything. We need to take advantage of it. Beautiful. What motivates you right now? What's in the future that you're like, yes.

[00:36:52.11] - Kinyta Smalls

I have to say, I just came from a ConPRmetido event, and I'm so fired up to see how businesses are coming together and getting behind the potential to equip our youth with opportunities here in Puerto Rico for those who choose to stay, but with skills and opportunities that could even translate and transfer to other concepts. I'm really excited about that. I really believe in equipping the youth to be here. I don't think change is bad. I've never thought change is bad, but I think it's bad-It's inevitable. It is inevitable, but I think it is not good. Change is not what it could be when everyone is not involved in the change. And I think that right now we have an opportunity to help our youth be involved in the change, be able to have access to more professional salaries, have access to the world through work that happens here. I think as we're attracting businesses to relocate here, it's so important that what the Rizos in seen is the place to hire your gesture made and just your maintenance person. Those things are amazing. Those are the people that raise me and put me through school.

[00:38:18.14] - Kinyta Smalls

And so those are forever valued roles to play. But also, Puerto Rico is the place to come and hire your executive director, hire your department head. And so I'm very passionate

about that. I grew up in an inner city in New Jersey, Camden. I've watched companies come in and get tax breaks and totally exclude the community they're in and contribute nothing. And so,, I have that fire in me, and I'm seeing an opportunity to correct that here, to be able to open up opportunities that are meaningful, that allow Puerto Ricans to live in Puerto Rico.

[00:38:59.16] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. This is something, I mean, you're getting, I get rallied up with this because I came from, I believe, and again, this is just my perception, but it's where I grew up with There was a much bigger working middle class, which now we're more either you got the money or you don't and the opportunities. And there's these models of, yes, investments from outside and economia del bastante. And then the locals just serving whoever comes in. And I'm an engineer. I come from that, that you had other models. And yes, you hire the engineers, and there's lawyers, and there's more other things, and there's more creatives and things like that. So I'm glad to know that there are initiatives and that it's recognized, and there are initiatives also to get back and to say, Hey, there's young people here. They can stay, be professionals, develop however they want to develop, either technical or creative or artistic, in different ways to do that.

[00:40:09.27] - Kinyta Smalls

And some will leave and want to come back. You're a great example of that. We were talking earlier, it isn't bad to leave. No, no. But it's that there's a place if you want to be here. I know many people would like to be here, but don't have access.

[00:40:23.23] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Or have this as your home base. That's right. Because I think we're definitely much more international than we used to be. It's true. Which I think is so global. The world is more so global, but you can be Puerto Rico, and yeah, I go, I'm back, come back, and I have my- But this is my development. Exactly.

[00:40:40.19] - Kinyta Smalls

Yeah. Our aging population We need our youth here. We need our youth here. And what it means to be Puerto Rico, it will evolve, but we don't want to leave behind the traditions that make Puerto Rico what it is, what brings people That's right. That's right. That's right. That's right. That's right. That's right. That's right. That's right. And that needs to be a bit different. And so we need our intergenerational relationships. And for that, we need for some of our talent to stay here or be able to come back.

[00:41:09.15] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And to keep, I always say, we can't lose our flavor.

[00:41:13.27] - Kinyta Smalls

Así es, estaba pensando en sazón. En eso mismo, que no se nos pierda. That's right.

[00:41:25.24] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And that needs to... I mean, it can evolve because obviously it's going to evolve, but we need that inter-generation. That's right. So that flavor stays. That's right. Which comes with a lot of solidarity and love for sure.

[00:41:46.10] - Kinyta Smalls

I remember in education, talking to families who had come from other countries or maybe from the islands. I would say to parents,..

[00:42:10.20] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Yes.

[00:42:12.07] - Kinyta Smalls

We need that. That is all a part of the foundation that makes success. I was in part able to go into agriculture because my mom and my stepdad, when they brought me to Puerto Rico at 6:00, we lived on a farm, and we engaged in natural living. And so I grew up hearing about plant-based living and macrobiotics. I think it was the term at the time. Yes, I know.

[00:42:42.14] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Eso fue como bien de moda.

[00:42:44.28] - Kinyta Smalls

No, forget it. But that's how I recognize these projects today, because I couldn't point to a word, but I recognized it. Similarly, experiences, you need.... We need our families, we need our roots so that we can deposit the new experiences we have and filter them through what is uniquely us.

[00:43:24.20] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

That's so nice. I love that.

[00:43:26.27] - Kinyta Smalls

Okay. I'm happy that that works.

[00:43:31.09] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

So last question I always ask, how can we have a more equitable Puerto Rico?

[00:43:42.18] - Kinyta Smalls

Oh, wow. Yeah.

[00:43:44.15] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And how do you feel that you support that through your work?

[00:43:47.22] - Kinyta Smalls

I guess today, from my point of view, there's many angles, but from my point of view, it really is around salary justice. It's around having salaries that allow Puerto Ricans to live here and live a dignified life. I have a friend in my faith community here that she has a master's, and she makes \$28,000. It's a mom of two children. It's not right. I have relationships with business owners that are needing help, and they're doing really good work, but they don't have access to some of the tax credits or other opportunities, where it's just so complicated that they don't have the capacity or bandwidth to engage. And it isn't just Puerto Rico, it's everywhere. It's everywhere. But I think we really need to be intentional about opening pathways so that our talent can rise up. Obviously, we're all really annoyed about how Puerto Rico was described here recently in the news. But we have to let our talent raise up as well, and we need to do a better job of that because people will always look to the lowest common denominator. They will always look to something that's deficit. And we have to ensure that the narrative that is coming out of here is around all that is, not what is not or what is not understood.

[00:45:17.28] - Kinyta Smalls

And so for me, equity right now, particularly where we are in this digital age, it really... Because now everyone's moving around, right? And so it's really about helping Puerto Rican talent that's here. It's not that it's not here. That's the frustrating part. It's everywhere. It's everywhere. And so helping that talent come to the forefront and supporting it, I think, is so important right now more than ever. Yeah.

[00:45:49.12] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Thank you, Kenita. You're welcome. And thanks for all you do. Such an honor to have you. Thank you so much.

[00:45:59.04] - Kinyta Smalls

Thank you. Thank you for opening the door for me. You were one of my first... I remember in New Jersey, right before I started the job, Holly was like, Well, we're going to be on a Zoom with Philanthropy Puerto Rico. Would you like... I think you were having a digital remote event where you invited people. This was around July of 2020.

[00:46:24.08] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Oh, my God. Was this the despojo that we had the magician? Yes. That was your first event? That was my first event. Yes. And I was like, Oh, my gosh.

[00:46:35.22] - Kinyta Smalls

These are all the people.

[00:46:37.23] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

So you never know the impact you're making, Glenisse. And that was like a coming together because we had been We've been locked down here since March, '16. It was July, and we took all the membership. We were like 50 in a Zoom call.

[00:46:53.05] - Kinyta Smalls

It was a large Zoom call.

[00:46:54.16] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And then we had Reynol Alexander, El Mago, which he was really It was.

[00:47:00.29] - Kinyta Smalls

It was great. I was so excited. I was already excited for the work. So I want you to know in other ways, but one example of your impact that you don't always get to see. And I remember it really I was like, oh, my gosh, I can't wait to meet these people. Yeah.

[00:47:18.05] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

That's cool. Yeah. And we had families and kids and everybody. You did. That's right. That's awesome. That's so cool. We had fun.

[00:47:25.19] - Kinyta Smalls

It was a fun time.

[00:47:26.21] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Those were interesting times for sure. We open It's funny because we opened a membership in 2020, and then COVID hit. I'm like, Okay, so we're a membership. I can't connect with people. We can't meet. This is awesome. Great time in Glenny.

[00:47:45.03] - Kinyta Smalls

It was a great time. But it was good. Oh, wow. That's great. I didn't know that was the way it was. So it's good to know. So thank you.

[00:47:53.02] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

Thanks again for your time and your work and everything that you do. I'm so happy to have you as a resource looking out for Puerto Rico.

[00:48:03.17] - Kinyta Smalls

Thank you, Glenisse. I appreciate it, too. Thank you.

[00:48:06.29] - Glenisse Pagán Ortiz

And thank you for listening. And if you like this episode, please share it and keep on listening. We'll see you next time.

[00:48:14.01] - Kinyta Smalls

Bye-bye. Adiós. Adiós.