

An Interview with Vera Moore

Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada

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Each interviewee had the opportunity to review their transcript. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the interviewee. This interview features Vera Moore, Executive Director for True Beginnings Divinity House, and was conducted on 11/7/22 by Kelliann Beavers and Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Vera Moore

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SPEAKERS: Kelliann Beavers, Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio, Vera Moore

Kelliann Beavers [00:05]

Okay. Just to confirm that you are okay with us recording the interview, and we will provide you a transcript with everything that is discussed before we would use any of the material.

Vera Moore [00:14]

Absolutely.

Kelliann Beavers [00:19]

All right. Carmen, I will pass it to you.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [00:22]

Thank you. Okay. Vera Moore, M-o-o-r-e from True Beginnings. Thank you for agreeing to interview with us today. As you know, criminal justice issues are very important to me as a policy analyst, and criminal justice-involved populations are especially impacted during times like these.

So, I'll start off with a more general question that you can think back to and just take a minute to recollect your thoughts. Think of the pandemic as a timeline and your role. So I'll go ahead and read it off. Can you describe your role throughout the pandemic and the role of True Beginnings as a whole?

Vera Moore [01:13]

I guess I would say that my role through the pandemic was – the true focus was safe housing, right, and providing safe spaces for the women that were coming home from incarceration, that were put out or rather, released from the jails in the counties. They didn't do too many releases from prison until after they got the jails in the counties kind of cleared out.

And so, going into the pandemic, before they were like, "The city's shut down." You think of safe spaces as places that treat trauma that are violence-free. And you think about abuse in the terms of – like arguments and people stealing from each other in safe housing, right, in shared housing.

But then, when the pandemic hit, violence and threats of violence became more broad. And I had to take that into consideration because peoples' mental health was being affected. They could not go anywhere. They had to stay inside. People that had come home after doing large bids of time of incarceration were coming home not knowing how to operate technology, and the world was technical. And trying to stop the perpetuation of violence by – because you have to think about it

like this, right? You have providers, and you go into this space, and then you're like, okay. So the world is technical now; so everything we're doing is via Zoom because we can't go into the homes to provide services.

And so now, all of the providers are on Zoom meetings. But the women that don't know are the women or the people that did not know how to operate these platforms. It was another sense of perpetuating violence. And the reason I say that is because when someone feels stupid, they feel threatened. Or if they feel ignorant, then they feel less than and inferior, and that is a trigger across the board. And so then it becomes another threat of violence on that individual.

So, as a leader trying to keep safe spaces, and teach things that people may not have experienced prior to release – before, just shoving them into a room full of people on the phone, looking at each other, and trying to navigate that space. And changing the language on how to use a computer, instead of saying, "Just turn it on." A prime example: one of our clients came home. She turned on the microwave and turned on the computer, and – and then – or she turned the computer on, then she turned the microwave on, and then, all of a sudden, the computer went dead. And she's like, "What's wrong with the computer? It died!" And I'm like, "No, the computer didn't die." I said, "What did you do?" and she said, she turned on the microwave. And I said, "Well, I don't get it."

And then it dawned on me, there was a surge. So, I'm like, "Where's the surge strip?"
"What do you mean, *surge strip*?"

"There's a long thing, and it has like several outlets on it. Look at that." And she's like, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

And I drove from North Las Vegas to East Las Vegas to point this thing out to her and show her how it's operated. And in the interim of all of that, this woman, who's now 55 years old, had been on drugs for the majority of her life. Learned something new. And instead of me walking her through it like "I mean, you know what a surge protector is, right? It's like an extension cord," and you know, trying to do that. Trying to give her all of these context clues, just that regular, everyday people would be able to use and figure out. I had to actually go and, hands-on, walk her through this process. And she's like, "Oh, my God. That's what this thing is called, a surge protector?" And "Yes, that's exactly what this thing is called."

And then teaching them how to stay safe going out in the community, or why it's so important to disinfect, you know. And it's graduated since then – because think about how the pandemic has affected our entire community where gentrification has come into effect. Where we had tons of resources for people that were in programs, such as mine, and now, it's stretched across people that just lose their jobs because corporations don't have the funds for them, or they're not paying the kind of wages that they used to, while developers are coming here and raising property values, and landlords are falling right into that, so they're raising rents, and the criteria is steepening. And so what we've done is, we've perpetuated violence against everyone, really. Now, it's a class thing, and it's no longer a racial divide.

And so the pandemic, what it has done is, it has separated us in such a way that now, just regular, everyday people are put into positions with people that have multiple barriers, and everyone's

competing on this side, while the rich are getting richer. And as a leader, it is my responsibility to educate each person that I work with on what the system looks like. And that the system is not designed to rehabilitate; it is not designed to provide services; it is not designed to help. It is designed to keep everyone in a particular space so that our system will continue to run, right? That's the whole way that capitalism works.

So, as a leader, I had to learn how to change my language. I had to learn a new method of conflict resolution. I had to really dig my heels in deep with what the system is and why I'm fighting against it. And learn how to educate the people that I work with in a way that didn't make them feel hopeless, and still gives them the opportunity or understanding that there is something out there for them, and it looks like people like myself. It's not the other stuff. Not the Section 8. Not the food stamps. Not that stuff anymore. It literally will take your community, and the only way you're going to benefit is if you change your mindset, right, so you can your image and get in with the regular folk.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [08:19]

I find that really interesting, Vera. And I'll ask you to kind of talk about the broader mission of True Beginnings a little bit more. You and I know what we're talking about, right? But I find it super-interesting that you mentioned the race versus class issue is something that's coming up a lot. So, work with me, and see if you can kind of mesh what you're thinking about with what I'm about to ask you: If you think about the pandemic as a time, right; from the time that shutdown started to happen, or even before that. What did you do? Were there kind of pivotal moments that shaped the way that you responded as a leader? You just mentioned a great example of – even just a moment, like that driving from one side of town to another. If you could talk a little bit more about the broader mission of True Beginnings, your background, and what that brings to the table when you encounter situations like this.

Vera Moore [09:17]

It's interesting that you flipped it to that, right? Because Kelliann, what I do is – so it's more about myself, right, is I'm formerly incarcerated. I experienced, pretty much, all the barriers that we list to housing and employment education, and resources in our community. Every single organization that you can think of, from domestic violence, homelessness, substance abuse, the School Education to Prison Pipeline – the whole gamut of that – I have had that experience from one degree to another.

So I opened up this home because, in 2001, I became a real estate agent, and I sold really big homes, million-dollar homes. And someone asked me to help them buy a home that was like \$150,000, and at that time it was so easy. And so what I did was, I became an orientator and helped people go from Section 8 to homeownership.

Since then, I have relapsed, been back and forth to jail, the whole nine yards. But I've always kept my ear to the ground, and learned, and have been very aware of what the system has to offer. I stopped utilizing things like food stamps and TANF. Like I went past that in my mind. How do you operate in this world? And what I realized was that information is provided to those individuals that have the comprehensive level to take it all in, and then implement it into their lives and grow. Everyone's not afforded that.

So when I opened my organization, True Beginnings, I first thought about employment. Because in our society, we tell people, "Here's a resumé. Here's a nice suit. Here's a list of jobs that are hiring." Well, we never teach anyone how to market their most valuable asset, which is themselves. How do you tell a good story? How do you get the person that's interviewing you to like you enough to think that you fit into the family? So I started there.

But then you realize that if you come home from incarceration, how is it possible to even get a job if you don't have a place to live and a place that's safe? And as soon as I made that connection, gentrification was happening across the United States. And so I did a lot of research, and I paid very close attention to what that looked like. Having had my real estate license, I always wanted to be a developer. So, I was like, "Yes, I'm going to get into commercial development, and I'm going to provide housing." And then, when you think about the rules, and then you think about how our community – once you get into your own home, how you kind of turn your head away from everyone else. If *I* did it, you can do it. And we don't pull each other along.

So, providing safe housing, in conjunction to employment, could pretty much cure the issue that we have but it's always done on the individual level. So where my organization is concerned, I decided to pull large groups of the community together and express to them how they could be fundamental without it taking anything away from them. And helping people like myself would not only make them feel all "warm and fuzzy," but it could also grow their financial portfolio.

So we wouldn't need capitalism in the sense of developers and investors – *you*, an everyday person, could go out and purchase a home, and then you could provide safe housing to other people like myself, even though it would be shared housing, and your mortgage would be taken care of, and you know that those people would be just as grateful as, say, Sandy and Bill down the street, that are just moving into town, and need to rent your home for a year; until his job kicks in well enough for him to be able to purchase a home.

So now you've, in essence, serviced four to six people, and they have the same amount of gratitude as the one family that you would have helped. And then those four to six people, their gratitude, it goes on into their family because now you've helped them, reengage with their family. So now, their kids are grateful because they have a place to go, make friends, and become happy again with their families. And then those kids, they're making friends, and it perpetuates this growth, this ripple effect in our community. Because now, the people that are living in your house are grateful to you, and then the kids are grateful that their parents are getting help, and they are providing this happy space within the community.

So, transportation has taken off, and I've watched it go from California through Virginia. And now I'm here in Las Vegas, and I'm looking at the effects. It's always been one really big thing that has taken off in the world that causes this gentrification thing to start happening. And it just so happened that the pandemic is what brought it to Las Vegas – because people could no longer live affordably in California, and they couldn't live affordably in Arizona. They couldn't live affordably in New Mexico. So then, they started coming to Vegas because we were still affordable, right? The thing here was, live cheap and gamble big. And now, it's like live expensive, and we can no longer afford to gamble. And the gaming industry isn't going to go

anywhere, so they just cut their losses by closing down casinos. And I would really be surprised if they are actually investing in properties; they've given a couple of properties away for "Help of Nevada" – "Nevada Hands." They gave that casino away for affordable housing, right?

And then, of course, you have the federal government, like HUD, and they're, even though they say, "Oh, we're there. Housing first – or what-have-you – still boils down to a class thing because, in affordable housing, you still have to make two and a half to three times the rent. So what is that? Seventeen dollars an hour. You still can't have any convictions – you can't have an eviction. But it's affordable; but then when you outside, some homeless person has used the bathroom – defecated behind one of the dumpsters, and it's just – it's affordable at seventeen dollars an hour used to be East Vegas, and now, affordable at seventeen dollars an hour is now Naked City. And as a leader, you have to take those things into consideration. And it's no longer the people; it's the system that we're fighting, and that is to help those people that don't have a voice yet.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [17:06]

You really demonstrated how a certain segment of the population is kind of being left out. Policies that are meant to help, right? And that's the thing about policies. We always have great intentions but how it comes out is yet to be evaluated.

So I think you just answered my third question, Vera. The question is, how did you work with, or did you observe groups hardest hit by the pandemic, and who were those groups in your opinion? So if you have something else to say about that, absolutely, I'll give you the floor. Otherwise, I'll pass it on to Kelliann.

Vera Moore [17:44]

Because I'm partial, people would think, "Oh, well, because you're formerly incarcerated, it would – that's who you're going to side with," right? But if you think about this in the essence of the overall world – I just finished an assignment at the Salvation Army. I called almost 100 apartments out here, and some of the apartments would say, "Well, yes, we work with people who have convictions in their background. But if it was *this*, then it has to be 15 years old. And if it was *that* it has to be seven years old. And if it was *this*, then it could be five years old." But nothing came underneath that.

So, think about people that have just come home in the beginning of this pandemic. Maybe did a year or two prior to coming home. All they want to do is get their lives together. The economy is in such a wreck that even if they did come home and make 17-18-19 dollars an hour, they cannot afford their rent. They cannot afford – because somebody, somewhere that they're living with is paying \$2,500 a month. So now, they still have to be able to afford \$1,000 to help around the house. Groceries have [??18:56] gas, 6.00 an hour. We're just going to stay safe because the fluctuation between \$4.69 and \$5.93 is just \$6.00 an hour. If you wrap your mind around \$6.00 per gallon, then we won't ever be surprised when you go to the pump and it says \$88.00 for 10 gallons, right? You'll just be like, "Oh, yeah, I just put gas in my car."

But you think about all of that, and it's hitting regular everyday people. So the people that come home, and come home at the beginning of the pandemic, and are still finding their way, right

now, they're the ones that are constantly embattled because they're the only ones anyone wants to know about. And what I mean by that is, that's the only question on any application, other than home ownership, that is across the board. Education, resources, housing, and employment; have you ever been convicted of a felony; that's the only question. No one ever asks for you to go into a house and say, "Have you ever used drugs?" They never ask you to go move into an apartment. They don't ask you that for going into school. They don't ask you that for you to get food stamps. They ask you if you've ever been convicted of trafficking or sales. They never ask you, "Do you have a problem?"

And with every conviction, 84% of free people that have been convicted of some sort of felony have an underlying issue, and no one ever talks about that. No one talks about the root cause. And because they don't do that, we have people falling through the cracks. And because we have a lot of people falling through the cracks, people that have felony convictions are the ones that are hardest hit. Because they're the ones at the very bottom of the rung, that no one wants to deal with because they think that "I can't." And nobody wants their stuff stolen, and nobody wants – [audio drops out]

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [21:09]

Vera, could you repeat the last sentence? You broke up a little bit.

Vera Moore [21:13]

(laughs)

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [21:14]

You said, "We have people falling through the cracks."

Vera Moore [21:17]

We have people falling through the cracks because no one wants to deal with a person that has a felony conviction because they believe that that person has been on drugs, and is unsafe in the community. Period. They think "safety first," and it's all about their safety, not about the safety of the community. Because you think about, when someone comes home from incarceration, and they cannot find any place to go, then they're going to commit a crime. Not, when someone comes home from incarceration, and we give them a place to live, now we're all safe.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [21:58]

I'm glad that you mentioned or talked about kind of holistic assessments. Because that's how you and I met, right, Vera? Is training on how to use a gender-responsive risk and needs assessment.

Vera Moore [22:09]

Yes.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [22:11]

So not just a person's risk of reoffending, but also, of what they need to not do that.

So, I'm going to ask this one question before I turn it over to Kelliann. And because I remember, actually, implementing one of these assessments with one of your clients over Zoom, which you helped with, right? So we lived the impact of the pandemic when it was happening.

Vera Moore [22:33]

Yes.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [22:34]

I remember these three particular women who were reentering the community as we were implementing the assessment. Have you heard from them? Have they shared with you anything about what it was like to live in a carceral setting during the coronavirus outbreak?

Vera Moore [22:53]

To be completely honest, out of those three women, only one of them is still in the house. One of them has relapsed, and I have no idea where that woman is. And the other woman has moved onto permanent housing. However, she was evicted and then found – and now she's in a weekly. So there are so many levels to all of this. You can't say that it touched anyone in any particular way. You just know that it's been detrimental to our community, and our government isn't standing in the balance. And our community, the people that live in the community are going to have to be the ones that do. And yes, we might have to put ourselves in harm's way in order to make sure the next person's okay but we're in harm's way when we get behind the wheel. So, if you're going to go to work driving, or even get on the bus, why can't you just reach out and help the next person that's in front of the store asking for \$5.00? It's just that easy.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [24:03]

Well, thank you for sharing that with me. Kelliann, I'll turn it over to you.

Kelliann Beavers [24:10]

The next question is, what-

Vera Moore [24:14]

More questions, Kelliann? No, I'm just kidding.

Kelliann Beavers [24:19]

What, if anything, do you wish that the government would have done differently, either in response to the pandemic, or the economic downturn? And because of what you've already shared, I want to add that I really am interested if you have specific ideas, like you described at the beginning, as to how this can be better responded to. Because it sounds to me, based on what you're sharing, which you know a lot more about than I do, that for many of these women or individuals who have a background or a felony, what is their option if they are to want to do their very best, day one, after being released? I don't hear of *an* option, other than what you're describing, which is the support the organization is offering, which I'm sure you can't field every single person that needs support.

So, again, the question is pretty broad. What do you wish the government would have done differently in response to the pandemic, or the economic downturn? But if there are specific

things that you think are the way they should be, I'm interested to hear, genuinely, your thoughts on that.

Vera Moore [25:31]

So, I'm not a big fan of government. What I kind of wished that what would have happened is that the government would have stood down and that someone "ballsy" would have stood up in our community. Because the government made it about money, and if we would have taken the approach, the "Vegas Strong" approach, that we did when we had the Mandalay Bay occurrence, and each one took someone – our economy and our community would be so much better off right now. I mean because think about it. When the Mandalay Bay thing happened, people went out and brought water, and food, and banded together in such a way that we didn't even care what each other's background was. We just knew that you were hungry, you were tired, and you could be hurt.

And everyone chimed in – Uber drivers turned off their apps and started getting people home, and we operated as a community, as a family, regardless of one's background or any of that. And if we would have taken that approach during the pandemic – which I'm not saying that people didn't – because we had whole teams out here that put ourselves in harm's way, putting together food baskets, and holistic medication packages, with honey, turmeric, and vitamin C, and fresh fruits and vegetables, and getting those out to people that were sick and shut-in, or that had COVID. If more of us would have done that, instead of following this money-grubbing thing of raising the rents because now they can get more. Raising the rents because they took a little bit of the care. And I don't want to minimize it because I know quite a few people that own property, and they're like, "I went up on it because my taxes went up on my house. And if I didn't charge *this* amount of money for rent, then I was going to have to take that hit, right?"

And I get that because no one wants to take the hit. But what if you did? What if you did for just that one year, or even two years, right? Took that hit and paid those taxes, or learn a way to itemize the taxes that you have to pay, so then you would get money back, as opposed to having to pay more in taxes. And you provided a safe space for someone else, a family, or allowed people to live in that home for a certain amount of time. What would that have done to our community? Because right now, Nevada is number one in youth homelessness, so that says a lot because we used to be fourth.

So that's what I wish would have happened. But you know, that's like – Thanksgiving is coming, you get the wishbone out of the turkey, and I get one side, and you get one side, and then you're like, "I wish hot apple pie was like going to be on my plate in two minutes." And everybody in the house is allergic to apples, so you know it's not going to happen, but it's a wish anyway, right?

Solutions – a lot of people are moving in this industry or moving in this direction. Shared housing. We're moving into that space. There are a lot of individuals out here, not just families, but a lot of individuals who are homeless, that make okay money but they cannot afford to have their own place. And so, helping individuals to be able to grasp the understanding of communal living, and then putting them in shared housing, and teaching them how to [audio drops out –??29:51] without looking at each other as strangers, we could build a community that is Vegas

Strong. Because when you come together in the house and you're like, "I've got the groceries. I'll get the meat. You get the vegetables," and it's like a reservation, right? "I get the meat. You get the vegetables. You, over there, you clean the house. You do the yard," that sort of thing. That everybody has a position, and you're making it work, and it's affordable, and everyone is comfortable. So, shared housing is not necessarily accepted – but not legally as far as policy is concerned – but it's becoming the fad.

There's an apartment complex out here right now where you can go and get a four-bedroom apartment, and you would pay \$800 a month for your room, and you get to share the common area. It's an apartment. It's not even a house. This is an apartment, and they call it "quad living." So, shared housing is the thing that's up-and-coming right now, and that's the solution. Because no one's going to take the money away from the developers and no one's going to take the money away from commercial owners, you know, eight units or more, and no one's going to hold them responsible, especially not in this state. We just took it to the legislature two years ago, and not one of those bills made it past the floor. Not one.

Kelliann Beavers [31:37]

Can you describe specifically what you're talking about that you brought to the legislature, or give me any more information? And then I have another question about shared housing. But one thing at a time.

Vera Moore [31:47]

Okay. So, it was two years ago. I want to say, something AB twenty-six where we got together with Congress to move to put limitations on landlords on the type of criteria that they would be able to have. It never made it past the floor. So now, landlords can pretty much say who they want to move into those apartments or in their homes.

Kelliann Beavers [32:24]

Which creates a circumstance – unless I'm misunderstanding you – where there is a portion of the population who *cannot rent* unless they can find someone who's willing to work with them outside of that kind of circumstance? This speaks to what you were saying – the model of shared housing, I understand as you described it, as being more enjoyable and supportive of a lifestyle. But I also hear you describing something that would need some ground under it, from the government and the community, to help guide people toward the right places where that's available. And encourage them with some of the information about who they might be living with, and make it such that it's both welcoming and honoring them, instead of it being no, after no, after no. And what you're saying about the legislation, surely, and maybe I'm just naïve, but I wonder if there is enough of like a compassionate community and a movement that there could be some properties that are operating intentionally an exception to that, right? And that they're could be funding given to them, so that they could be created really to welcome people without those blocks. Because we're talking about real human beings who need a place to live, and they don't just disappear if you say they can't live there.

Vera Moore [33:58]

Kelliann, I am going to say this, and I do not mean any offense whatsoever, okay?

Kelliann Beavers [34:01]

Oh, that's okay. I want to hear and learn from you. Please do.

Vera Moore [34:04]

The government is *shit*.

Kelliann Beavers [34:06]

(laughs)

Vera Moore [34:10]

I would *never ever, ever, ever* accept money, for a project such as this, from the government. Because they're going to attach so much red tape, and so many policies, that it's just going to create what we call "the projects." As opposed to creating a space that is safe, and people learn how to live communally, with love and respect for one another.

Kelliann Beavers [34:37]

Mm-hmm.

Vera Moore [34:41]

Because, like I said, where the government is concerned; take HUD, right? "Housing first." That's the motto. We give housing above and beyond anything. But do not tell those people they have to be clean and sober. Do not mandate programming. Don't do anything towards bettering them unless they ask for it. How many people are on drugs, have to sustain so much trauma, and are going, "I need help. My mom used to kick my ass." I'm just saying, right? They're not doing that. They're saying, "I need to get high because I can't deal with the emotions from the abuse that I've sustained, that I can't even put my finger on right now; because it happened so much throughout my life, I can't even fathom the very first time when this thing affected me. And now, everything after it feels exactly the same, even though it is not the exact, same experience." There's no way. No one's doing that.

So, the thing that you don't understand and know about me, and my program is, we do not take government funding. And the reason that we don't is that they tie you up with reporting, they tie you up with policy, they tie you up with laws and regulations. And if they were going to do it right, they would have done it by now.

Kelliann Beavers [36:06]

Are you supported by private, philanthropic funding? And don't let me interrupt you. Please share whatever else it is you wanted to share.

Vera Moore [36:12]

Absolutely. I am supported by philanthropic – that good stuff – funding. So we get a bunch of little grants, you know? But then the people that live in our homes, they pay their rent and it takes care of that property. So then our grants take care of us, right? So there are enough people in the house, and all their money's together, and it takes care of the rent and that property and the utilities. And then they have money, and they put \$100 in individually, and now they have \$800

worth of groceries. And who doesn't want to live in a house with \$800 worth of groceries, where they can get whatever they want to, whenever they want to?

I mean, I brought – this is the funniest thing ever. These women, we had five women in a house at one time. And they went shopping, and they were like – they have a whole double-door bottom-shelf freezer thingamajig, you know? It's a huge refrigerator. It's not just like one of those little top-drawer things. And they're like, "We just went grocery shopping. There's more – what are we going to do with all this meat?" Because it was the first time that they had been able to, in *years*, buy whatever kind of food they wanted because they'd all put \$100 in. That was \$5-600 worth of groceries, and they're like, "Oh, my God. What do we do with this meat? It's going to spoil. We can't cook all of it." So they asked me, "Please, get us a deep freezer."

Immediately, I went out and got a deep freezer. I didn't wait until the next day, no. I went and I got a deep freezer right there on the spot, and I brought this huge deep freezer. And they were like, "Oh, that's too big!" I was like, "Okay." And they filled it up, and it only went halfway, right? Then we moved another woman into the house, and that woman, the next time they went grocery shopping – now, it's \$600 worth of groceries – so they asked her to put more stuff in there. Now, they've got snacks. Now, they've got meat, they've got vegetables, they've got canned items, they've got all these – and now they've got ice cream, and not just one thing of ice cream, but now they've got ice cream, they've got sherbet, they've got whipped cream, they've got cookies, they've got chips, they've got bread. And the bread isn't from going over here to the bakery and the things they have just sitting outside. No, they have fresh bread, and they've living a life they never thought – they've never been able to fathom before. From smoking drugs behind the dumpsters, and sleeping on people's couches, and performing sexual acts for somebody, just so they're able to lay their heads down in a space that seems safe – when that's another perpetuation of violence, and we won't talk about that.

But just think about that. And so, we've had five women living in this home for two years as a family. And two of them just moved out, and now we've put two more in. And now, we're moving three out into independent living, where they don't even have any rules anymore. They are just upgrading the services that we provide, like credit restoration, financial literacy, contract comprehension, and things like that. Teaching them about getting their LLCs and building trust. So that now, their family would be able to benefit off of the things that they're doing right now in the future. Because they're not going to necessarily benefit right now. The economy is in an uproar. Nobody gets it. But down the line, the steps they're taking right now are going to benefit their family in such a way that they will look back and be like, "What happened?"

And how do I know this? Because my kids experienced something with me. I experienced something with my mother. But my granddaughter, right now, is living in a house with a swimming pool and a jacuzzi in the backyard, and a TV on the outside. I've never seen nothing like that – a TV on the outside of a house, so you can watch TV by the fireplace that's outside – they call it a firepit, while you're in the jacuzzi. Like, give me a break! My 12-year-old granddaughter – and she's only one generation removed, right? Because the steps that I took in my life, changed my child's life, and in essence, allowed her to change her child's life. And that is what this is about. And I did not take one food stamp; I did not take one thing of welfare; I never got public assistance in order to have Section 8. I just made it work as much as I could.

And so, we had other people living in our house. Our rent was \$1,900 a month. I moved in another family. We were squooshed; we separated – we split the rent. And then I was able to get my kids off to college that way until we could afford to do some other things.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [40:46]

Yeah, that's really the practical application of all these things that we've talked about, in terms of community, holistic assessments, right, and working together. But Kelliann and I are essentially consultants to government and other types of organizations: businesses, nonprofits, what-have-you. But since you have us, what are we supposed to say to government(s) – "This is how you helped Vera in True Beginnings, and people with similar missions, and people under her care." What do we tell them?

Vera Moore [41:20]

The best way that they would be able to really make an impact is to replace the numbers on every spreadsheet with a person's name. And if they made it somewhat familiar – personalized it in some way – instead of thinking about "We need 38,000 people to take this money."

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [41:54]

Yeah.

Vera Moore [41:56]

Just think about it as "We need people to take this money." I think that might help. But in the real world, I will tell you this: if they did organizations like mine, and did PPP funding for us – and what I mean by that is, when we got the PPP loan, there weren't a bunch of criteria stipulations.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [42:30]

Right.

Vera Moore [42:34]

They just gave it to us. And we did the best we could, right, with it. So, if they took organizations like mine, and said, "Hey, we're going to give you 2.5 million dollars, don't – it's a grant. You don't have to worry about paying it back. Here's 2.5 million dollars. We're going to do this for the next two years. That's it – just two years. We've seen the work that you've been doing. No – the most you do is report. Because the PPP required us to report. We had to apply for forgiveness.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [43:11]

Sure.

Vera Moore [43:13]

So we did that. But the government said, "We're not going to intervene in the sense of, 'what are you doing with the money?' But we're going to intervene with, 'what are you doing with the community?'" So the data reports saying how many people you've helped, what help looked like for those individuals. What are the results? The impact? As opposed to, "Did you spend the right money? Did you spend enough money? Did you not spend enough money? Did you actually buy

bus passes this time?" Instead of being worried about that, be worried about the impact that the money is making. That, right there, would probably be a great solution – if they vet us correctly.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [43:57]

I'm hearing "impact." Thank you. Kelliann, I'll hand it off. But one of the things I would like to follow up with you about, Vera, is the names of those bills, of that legislation, whether in the past, during COVID, or now, that we could get behind, that we could research, that we could submit testimony to, that would help you and your clients at the end of the day.

Vera Moore [44:22]

I have a list of them but not up here (gestures to her head), right?

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [44:23]

Yeah, of course. Which is why I said I'll follow up later and we can talk.

Vera Moore [44:27]

Yeah, absolutely. I'll definitely do that.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [44:31]

But we'll move on to the next question.

Vera Moore [44:33]

Another one. Okay. I can't hear you.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [44:39]

You're muted, Kelliann.

Kelliann Beavers [44:45]

Thank you for everything you're sharing. I want to be respectful of your time too. I know we only have a bit of time left here. And I really appreciate the amount of detail you're sharing with us. It gives us a way to think about, you know, not only like Carmen was saying; the potential for looking at some of this other legislation; but also, for thinking about what legislation needs to exist that doesn't exist.

And I think we also want to know how we can support you – setting aside the government aspect and the policy aspect – how we can be supportive of your organization, and help people learn more about what you do. And if there are volunteers that support you in some way or anything like that, I'm eager to learn that from you as well. If you have anything that you'd like to share with us about that, either now or later.

And then the last question that we have is, Are you hopeful, and if you are hopeful, what are you hopeful for?

Vera Moore [45:50]

So the question is, am I hopeful? I couldn't do this work if I didn't have hope, right? But I don't

have any faith in the government, but I do have hope in the people. And it takes a lot of people to change or to create change, and we're seeing it happen. We know that it's going to happen.

So, I'm definitely hopeful that people like yourself – I see Gen Z coming along and flipping this thing upside down because they just don't care about the past. So, there are a lot of them that are like, "I don't care about that history book. This isn't fair," right? It's just like that. And because I have a Gen Z daughter, it's changed my perspective. I was like, "You should get a car," and she's like, "Why? Why should I get a car, Mom? I spend \$300 a month on an Uber or Lyft," – or no, she spends \$600 a month on an Uber or Lyft, right? I'm like, "That's a lot of money." She asked me, "How much is your car note?" "Like \$450." She said, "How much is your insurance?" I'm like, "\$150." She's like, "How much is your gas?" I'm like, "I don't know, it's like \$300 a month." She's like, "Already, you've spent more than me." And I go, "That extra \$300 is for convenience." (laughs) So, yes, I'm hopeful.

Kelliann Beavers [47:26]

Yes, you have a really different way of looking at things, and that being a part of hope, and what you're doing makes me hopeful. I've never heard of anyone doing anything like what you're describing. And that's another question I have, is anybody else doing this kind of work? I mean I know you don't work completely alone – but we need more people doing things the way that you're doing it, and more of the corporate and philanthropic community behind supporting it. Because to your point, it needs money that doesn't have strings attached or red tape attached to keep people from getting help.

Vera Moore [48:07]

Right. So, I'm a part of what we call a "Safe House Network." It was started by Susan Burton down in Los Angeles. And she started providing safe housing to formerly incarcerated women immediately upon exit. They don't have to come in with any money. That's how we operate. You don't come into our house, with any money, in the women's house, right, and we're going to help you through that.

And then we're going to – the goal is to assist the women with becoming leaders, not only in the community but within their own lives. And that's why we call it "Divinity House." So you can define your divine purpose in all of this. And once you do that, you're a leader in your own right.

So there are others doing it but let me tell you this. People – some people are doing it because the money can be good. Some people are doing it because [audio drops out @49:19] And some people are doing it because –

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [49:26]

I'm sorry, Vera. It looks like you're breaking up a little bit too much for us to transcribe that last part.

Vera Moore [49:31]

The money's good. I mean you get a house; you bought it at \$150,000. Your mortgage is \$900. And then you charge people \$1,000 a room.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [49:43]

Vera, can you hear me?

Vera Moore [49:46]

Yes, I can hear you.

Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio [49:46]

Okay. It looks like you're breaking up from that last part to be transcribed. So I think we can finish recording here Kelliann if that's okay. I turned off my camera to see if that would help.

[over talking 50:01]

Kelliann Beavers [50:05]

I will go ahead and pause the recording.

End of audio: 50:09