

**COMMUNITY COMES FIRST**

**REASSESSING THE FUTURE OF**

**VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT**



United Way Suncoast

# AGENDA

- **UWS History & Progress**
- **What is Community  
Centered Volunteering?**
- **Analysis of United Way**
- **Next Steps**
- **Panel Q&A**



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IN  
PROGRESS**



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# HISTORY & PROGRESS

## 1995 - 2017

- HandsOn Tampa Bay, is volunteer center of United Way Tampa Bay – CI Team
- Focus on many services
- Mergers into United Way Suncoast

## 2019

- End participation in large, off-mission events
- Inclusivity: All volunteers are UWS Volunteers
- Remove “HandsOn” branding

## 2021

- Formal UWS volunteer policy
- Volunteer appreciation includes all volunteers
- Days of Service regionalized

## 2015-2018

- Volunteer events were marketing strategy
- HandsOn vs United Way Suncoast
- Pay to Play corporate model
- Disconnect between experience + UWS mission

## 2020

- Day of Caring becomes Week of Caring, optional
- Data acumen sharpened
- Focus events on UWS mission

## 2022 - Beyond

- Embark Community Centered Volunteering Journey



**WHAT IS  
COMMUNITY CENTERED  
VOLUNTEERING?**

# Transformational Engagement where Community Comes First

*With an Approach that Supports:*

Trust

Authenticity

Constructive Dialogue

Repairing Damage

Community Building

Culture of Belonging



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# Transactional

One time volunteer event that produces an emotional experience/benefit primarily for the volunteer

Minor act of charity OVER learning larger issues/activism

## vs Transformational

Service designed to educate/dismantle harmful systems

Rooted in empathy

Partnership against saviorism, pity, racism, and power

Recognizing and honoring innate worth of community





## Volunteer/Nonprofit Centered vs **Community Centered**

Volunteer preference vs **true impact**

Flourishing personal or institutional growth vs **community growth**

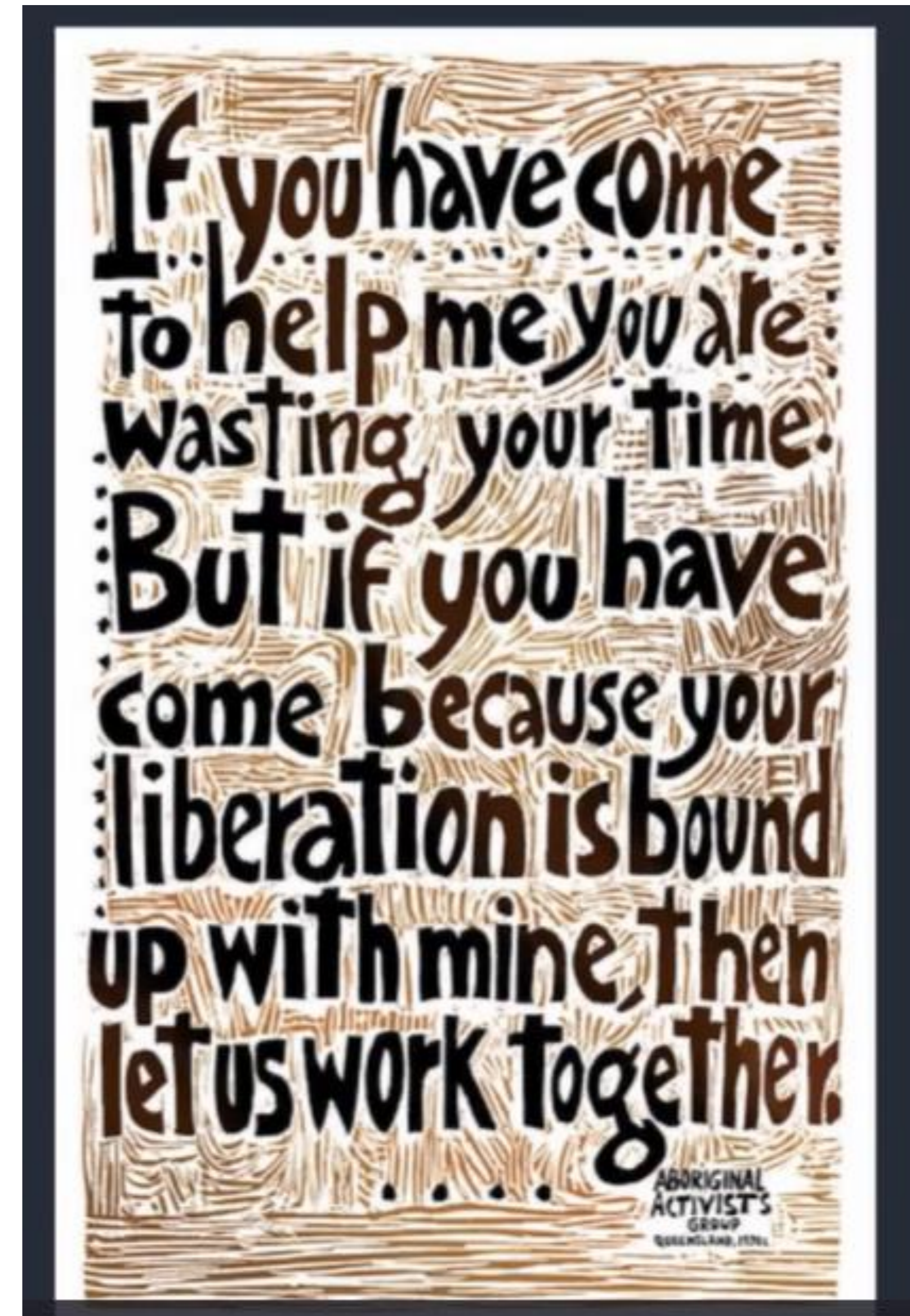
Strategy benefits nonprofit in power vs **transferring power to community**



**Reality:** There are mechanisms that work inside volunteerism that create unhealthy power dynamics and saviorism and perpetuate negative narratives around those on the receiving end of good intentions.



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# INTERNAL ANALYSIS

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- **United Way is a force that connects people to a cause. We can say to supporters: “If you partner with us, you are partnering with community. We know the challenges and the barriers. Here is how you can fit into the community plan to uplift.”**
- **UWS have approx 600 annual volunteers serving transformationally ~ 16% of 3,600+ volunteers**
- **Diversity - Our volunteers are diverse; they mirror our community demographically but...**
  - **Equity – We know they don’t share lived experiences with those we serve, because there is not equal access to volunteering & volunteering less prevalent among ALICE households**
  - **Inclusion– We are missing voices. Majority of volunteer strategy is created by homogeneous individuals**



- **We created harm when volunteering was used for marketing gains, fundraising gains**
- **We used power to burden our community with inconvenience or upkeep**
- **We praised volunteers for “meeting a community need”, even for transactional service**
- **We twisted to meet volunteer comfort, desire for recognition, corporate social responsibility**
- **Volunteers have offended community (whether or not intentionally)**



# NEXT STEPS

# Transformational Engagement where Community Comes First

*With an Approach that Supports:*

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# Trust, Authenticity, Constructive Dialogue

*Focus on healing, growth, relationship building*

- Listen, open the conversation; escape echo chamber
- Create inclusive platform to convene agency leaders
- Redistribute power by asking questions
- Partner with the dream and the need will also be met
- Expect movement at the timing of trust
- Circle back to assess impact
- Extend Gratitude



# Repairing Damage

## *Focus on internal system change*

- Question status quo/watch for centering, find patterns
- Stop harmful behavior- hear, acknowledge, and halt
- Remove photo ops with giver/receiver dynamic
- Resist saving language: “partner and support community” rather than “help those in need”
- Protect community comfort first, then meet volunteers’ needs



# Community Building, Culture of Belonging

## *Focus on transformational volunteer opportunities*

- Create experiences that change hearts
- Be honest about community challenges
- Encourage deeper learning with trainings, orientations
- Connect service to true impact, continued service opportunities
- Share your DEI statement
- Share feedback to groups about how their project was received by community
- Invite community to participate in projects, acknowledging grass-roots efforts



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**THANK YOU**

