

Santiago: Hello, hello and welcome to the Sleon Podcast. Today we have a special guest. They're one of my clients. It's the National Children's Center based out of Washington, D.C. I've been working with the NCC for the past couple of years, and they've been a great client, great organization, and we've got the President with us, Patricia Browne. Hey Patricia.

Patricia: Hey, how are you?

Santiago: Good, good, very much good from our end. Hope all is well. So, tell me about NCC. What is the mission and vision of your organization?

Patricia: Well, NCC is an organization that is actually celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. It was started in 1958 by a small group of citizens in the Jewish community, and they wanted to create community-based services to avoid putting their children and family members in the horrible institutions that existed back then. Since then, NCC has evolved. We're no longer just children: we actually service the entire span of life from infants to senior adults. We have group residential homes. We have adult day programs. We have employment training services, and we have early learning and early intervention for about 200 babies.

Santiago: That's awesome. What is the history of NCC?

Patricia: So, as I said, we go back 60 years and we've actually been going through our archives recently as we prepare for our anniversary, and we have uncovered letters from President John F. Kennedy recognizing us for the opening of our organization, letters from President Richard Nixon. On the day of the grand opening they close off the streets in the city and the streets were lined with chairs and podiums of people giving speeches and welcoming addresses. It was a really big deal, so NCC was really on the cutting edge of community-based services back then, and 60 years later we continue to provide those services and opportunities to the citizens of the District of Columbia and the surrounding suburban area.

Santiago: Can you tell me about some of the people that you serve with?

Patricia: That's pretty hard. There's so many great stories. One that comes to mind in our adult world is a young lady named Nonja Tiller. Nonja is in our residential program and she's an artist, and recently in the last couple of months one of her pieces of artwork was selected by the Academy of Medicine for their pop-up art gallery. She did a painting on healthy food choices. Nonja describes her time with NCC as "living in paradise". She sees it as an opportunity to really live her best life, and an opportunity to be independent and to pursue her dreams. So, Nonja writes children's books as well, and we're working to help her to self-publish one of her books, and her dream is to become wealthy and to become the major donor for NCC to give us some of the money and to continue our mission and to continue her life in the area of publishing and painting. So, we're really excited about her. And then when I think about the children—when you're dealing with children that are medically fragile, especially their many concerns that become a problem for the parents, and we have a set of parents who came to us after they had to make a very difficult decision for one of them to no longer pursue their career. They had

twins that were born at 28 weeks. They were fragile. They couldn't just leave them at an early learning center, and so the husband who was a firefighter said, "I'll stay home and be with the children, so we'll just have to be a single-income family". Someone referred them to NCC. They brought the children to us. The children are thriving, they're progressing. But the best part of the story: The Dad is back to work. He works at a firehouse that's just a mile up the road from the center, so if there's any issue he can come visit, but they now have a dual-income household. And D.C. is an expensive place to live, so we're really excited about that.

Santiago: Yah, when I lived in D.C. back in '08 and '09, it was very expensive and it was challenge, but you guys provide awesome services. Why is the work of NCC so important to our community?

Patricia: It's important because in a lot of respects, the work that we do is part of a civil rights movement, and many people in the community are not aware of that. But there's actual legislation called the Olmstead Act that requires persons in the disabilities community to be fully integrated into the community. And it's not a good thing to do, it's not a nice thing to do: it's a right. It's a right and it's a privilege, and they deserve to be able to enjoy the community just as we all do. So, NCC provides an opportunity to do job training. We also do travel training. We have programs that take our individuals into the community and give them an opportunity to explore. If they want to do Zumba, they should be able to do Zumba in a class that's Zumba, not a class for persons with disabilities. So, our mission is to help them to build their best life, to provide the quality services they require, and to make the community aware and help them to embrace not disabilities, but people with various abilities.

Santiago: This year marks the 60th anniversary of NCC. What's in store for your employees and the people you serve this year?

Patricia: We are so very excited to be celebrating our 60th anniversary, and this year, in my mind, is about celebration of many, many years of accomplishments and success. It is also about community awareness as I shared earlier. We want everyone to understand that diversity and inclusion is not just about sexual preference and racial and ethnicity and cultural differences: it's also inclusive of the members of the community that we serve. So, we're going to celebrate, we're going to make aware, and we're also doing a massive major appeal for new donors to help us in this mission financially. As you look at the news, you hear all the stories about Medicaid caps and potential changes in that world. The persons that we support are very dependent upon Medicaid funding and many of the federal funds that are available, so we're going to be looking and reaching out to corporate sponsors and donors and private donors to help us to continue this great work, to make sure that everyone receives everything they need to live their best life.

Santiago: What events do you have planned for this year?

Patricia: Well, we're still working through that, but there's talk of a 5k. We're planning a huge benefit gala in October that will be designed to reengage, recommit and to commit former

donors and current donors and again to celebrate, to fellowship, to bring awareness and to ask for support.

Santiago: Where do you see NCC in the next 60 years?

Patricia: In the next 60 years I want us to be cutting edge. When I think about early learning and learning intervention, I want us to be the premiere site in the city in the nation's capital. Today we are fully accredited as an agency as in a center. We are inclusive, meaning that we support children with or without disability so that children can learn together and grow together and teach each other. We want to be the model that others from around the world will come and aspire to be. In the world of adults, I look forward to visions of smart homes and leveraging technology that enable persons with disabilities to be even more independent than they are today.

Santiago: Of all my clients, my Mom was really like, "wow, this is an awesome organization". It's one of the organizations that she spotted, "oh NCC, that's amazing what they do in the community and everything". How can someone learn more about NCC and your cause?

Patricia: Well, the best place to go is our website: nccinc.org. And you can reach out to any of the leadership members that are posted on the website, and they'll be happy to share more information. Also, opportunities to engage people in the community that want to volunteer, and certainly people that want to help support this great goal and great mission financially.

Santiago: Well, I really appreciate you guys coming onto the podcast. Any closing words?

Patricia: Well, you know, I just think about my journey in this organization, and it has just been such a humbling experience for me. I grew up in a household with my parents both in human services, and I would hear the stories of the people that they worked with, the challenges to give them the services that they deserve. And in my corporate life which is where I spent most of my career, on the side I always was the person to pull together social and civic opportunities for non-profit work. And so, I think I'm one of the few people that's managed to take their passion and turn it into their career, and that's what NCC is for me. It's a passion to be a voice for people that are sometimes without a voice. It's a passion to see little children come in in braces, and wheelchairs, and leave us walking. It's a passion to see people like Nonja with dreams and visions of being an artist and an author, and to work very closely with them and to help them to realize their dream. So, I'm very humble to serve and it's a great organization and we look forward to doing even greater things in the future.

Santiago: Patricia, thank you very much for coming on the podcast, I really appreciate it.

Patricia: Thank you, have a great day.