

From the KVSC Studio at Saint Cloud State University. This is MINNovation, a higher ed podcast for innovators and educators. I'm Sarah Clark, Director of Online and Distance Learning at Saint Cloud State University. And I'm here with my co-host, Chris Stanley, who is the Director of Educational Technology Innovations at Saint Cloud State. So, today we are recording this episode remotely using clean feed. Normally we are in the studio at KVSC on campus, but today we're recording remotely. And that's really exciting Chris, like we're trying something new. We're being innovative and creative. It is and it kind of reminds me of some of the reasons that podcasting came to the forefront anyways, right? It's taking advantage of new tools and new ways to get the message out there, especially in the time of a pandemic and the need to consider options for distance and not being right next to each other. So it is, it is a great another tool in our tool chest and a way for us to keep going and getting that word out. I also really appreciate the flexibility of our guest today. So, you want to go ahead and introduce our first guest. You bet. Dr. Sheila Moriarty is an associate professor in the social work department. She has been at Saint Cloud State University since 2008. Her interests include working on poverty issues, anti-racism work and projects on campus and in the community that impact poverty and homelessness. She created a project called Bridge to Community Resources five years ago to create basic needs solutions for students on campus. Welcome Dr. Sheila Moriarty and thank you for being with us today. We also have a student intern panel joining us today, so I'll go ahead and turn it over to them for introductions. Hello, my name is Carson Uselman, I'm a Master of Social Work intern here at Saint Cloud State and I am with the BCR team. Hi, I'm Diana Kuhl. I'm also a Master of Social Work intern, here at BCR. So, that's part of my team. Awesome. Awesome. Well, thank you again for being here with us today remotely and your flexibility and moving to a remote recording style today. We're really excited to continue conversations around sustainability and specifically your efforts with students and community sustainability. And I've learned that BCR must be short for a Bridge to Community Resources. Right, Dr. Moriarty? Yes, sir. I bet that's a little shorter than saying the whole thing every time. So, thank you so much for being with us. We know that you were a practicing social worker before you began teaching. Can you tell us a little bit more about that? Yeah, I practiced for about 20 years before I started teaching full-time. And I primarily worked with runaway and homeless adolescents and did some Peace Corps, did some work at a county, did lots, like 17 years at a crisis center, which is a really long haul, did some work at North Minneapolis high school. And so, I really enjoyed all of that work. I thought it was important work. And I felt like that would really bring something to my teaching. And how has that experience influenced the way you teach? Well, I have stories, from practical experience. And I also have a sense as to, I think, what it takes to do good work. You know, because in that 20 years, you know, I just remember the process of starting and I remember the process of where I transitioned from being okay with what I was doing. Okay, in the work that I was presenting to where I was really proficient. And where I also really paid attention to the fact that even though I burnt out and I stayed, that I was able to find joy again. So that, I just feel like all of those lessons, really are something you can bring to the classroom and impact your students. Yes so, I totally understand what you're saying about having that practical experience and

those stories to share with your students. And I wonder then for Carson and Diana too how your experience in the BCR has influenced your learning experience, if you're willing to share that? Yes. So, I think that interning here, BCR has been a great experience. Specifically, when you're in social work, I think a lot of people think that it's a lot more one-on-one work or working with small groups of clients and such. But my time here at BCR has been a lot more of what we call macro, and it focuses a lot more on community work. And I just really think it's a valuable asset because not a lot of social workers have a macro educational opportunity like this. So, to be able to involve myself in the community through projects like Project Connect, which we'll talk about a little later. I think it is a really unique experience and I'm very grateful that I had the opportunity. Yes, I'd have to agree with Carson. The experience as an intern here at BCR has helped me learn a lot more about the bigger issues instead of just the small one-on-one client situations. We get to learn more about student needs and policies that may either help or hurt getting them the resources that they need, and I look forward to using it in my practice once I graduate. I think Carson, you are right. I think in my own mind, I kind of had that preconceived notion, if you will, that social work is, is very much that one-to-one. And so that the concept of the macro is a little new to me. So, I appreciate hearing more about that. Can you tell us a little more, Carson and Diana, the specific hands-on things that you've been doing through Bridge to Community Resources? Yes. So, I mentioned a little earlier that we did an event called Project Connect. I'm sure maybe some of you have heard of it. It is an event at the convention center here, right in Saint Cloud, where we have a bunch of providers and different resources available for individuals who are in the area that are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. So, I mean, there are different, I guess you could say, resources. There's haircuts, there is clothing like, like clothing for free pickup. We, at Bridge to Community Resources, fundraise, and bring basic needs kits, which value all around 25 dollars. And this year we brought 420 of those. In doing so, we had to do a lot of fundraising to get the money to create these bags. So, that was a really big part of my fall semester here. Other than that, we've been really working on creating a PowerPoint now to present to different classrooms. Regarding bridge to benefits, which is another resource that we use here, which allows us to show to the students what resources they have available to them and that they qualify for, such as SNAP or energy assistance, things like that. So that's another project that I've been working on and that we're, we're going to hopefully start to roll out here in the next coming weeks to the campus. And we've also been doing, we staff the Husky Food Pantry. And so students who are looking for maybe culturally appropriate foods or just something to get by during the week. And we fill those orders every Tuesday and Wednesday, and then they can just come and pick them up whenever. Wow, that's really impressive. You guys are doing some extremely meaningful and impactful work on campus and within our community. That's really awesome. And we know you have been awarded a Multi-campus Collaboration grant to support student living sustainability. Can you tell us more about that work? Yeah, we have a student's, it's a program called students living sustainably. And we got a nice grant from the Multi-campus Collaboration. And that's a sort of grant you get when you pair with another school. And we're pairing with SCTCC. And the project

is all about trying to bring vital information to students, who are at risk for not making it through their college experience. And so, we're targeting freshman and we're targeting students who identify as BIPOC. We're targeting students who are first generation, who identify as experiencing poverty. And what we're doing is providing a 5-week workshop, and every week we are talking about a different set of resources. Anything from renting 101 to community resources, campus resources, mental health, budgeting, different things that we think would be useful for students to know in order to help them be successful. And in addition, each workshop that they attend, they are eligible for a 50 dollar gift certificate. So, if you attend all five, you get 250 dollars worth of gift cards to target. That's really awesome. I'm a first-generation college student myself, and I wish that I would've had those resources going through my first year. Just the basic things like renting 101 and budgeting, those are really important things and can be very high stressors and take away from your focus on succeeding academically. So, I think that, that's just really amazing work and I can really relate to what you're doing in that area. Dr. Moriarty I know you had mentioned it's a collaboration with the St. Cloud Technical and Community College, SCTCC right? Can you talk more about is it with their students' services or are students involved or just a little bit more about that collaboration? That collaboration is specifically we're working with a wonderful case manager over at SCTCC named Catherine Paro. And so, she's, our counterpart. And we're right now we're trying to recruit students for sessions. We've got sessions that start in February, and we've got sessions that start in March. We're trying to get students into these workshops and trying to really involve them in this sort of information. And then what has been the impact on the students who are, who have these needs? We're still, we're still sort of correlating that data and looking, taking a look at analyzing what we have. And I mean, I guess what I can say so far is that students are generally pleased with the experience. They're certainly grateful for that access to gift cards. And we see that is sort of not just an incentive, but sort of a start. You know, this is, we're giving you this and this is a start for you to be able to, you know, get a leg up and stay in school and not get overwhelmed and know who you can go to and what resources there are in the community and how you can rent an apartment successfully, and manage your money successfully. And your mental health and self-care, which is so crucial, for students. And I'm sure there's also like a social connection piece there too. You know, they're meeting other students who might have the same struggles and they're sharing the same resources, and you know that alone I can just be so positive for your mental health. Right? And, starting to build that emotional support system, which is also challenging for new students and, and really students at all stages of their academic journey. Absolutely. So social justice is inherently interwoven into your work on campus and within our community. Can you tell us a little more about your vision for expanding social justice advocacy and activism on campus? Well, I think we really want to sort of formalize the idea that, I think social justice is really a big part of the future, in this country. As social workers, it's one of our mandates that we are connected to social justice issues and, and we work with marginalized clients. And so, that's always part of what we do. But we're not always encouraged to invest in issues that don't affect us or our clients. And this is about growing global citizens. This is about

growing citizens that really care about the community around them. Let me give you an example, if I could. Last year, with a different set of interns, we got a call from Harry and Mary Fleegel and they in, Saint Cloud have a Lincoln Warming Center. So basically, they have a center where people can come and get warm. And they can stay overnight, but they don't have beds. They have, I mean, they have sleeping bags and they have chairs. It's not a regular shelter. But it's an important place because these are people who have, not made it at other shelters, and maybe at the point of having no choice but to sleep outside. We know tonight it's going to be 20 below. And that's just not sustainable. And so, they have this wonderful center for, you know, sort of the ones who don't fit anywhere else. And they needed showers. And so, some students put together GoFundMe page, combine that with some publicity that, we were, that the Lincoln Warming Center was getting at the time. And we, and the organization is called Homeless Helping Homeless. And we were able to raise almost 8 thousand dollars. And they were able to build not one but two showers. And so, we see that as a big win. Absolutely, that's a big win. How can we learn more about supporting those types of initiatives in our community? Well, for that project we used GoFundMe, and it coincided with a lot of publicity they were getting from the community, and they were able to insert links. And so, we got a lot of community support. You know, for Project Connect, we have to raise a lot of money, because we're putting together 420 bags that are each worth 25 dollars each. And so, we get some, we get some donations, some wonderful donations. But we also do things like, make t-shirts that we sell, social justice t-shirts. We make, oh we have a wonderful, this year it was a virtual silent auction where we were able to make close to 2 thousand dollars. We had an event at, Beaver Island Brewery called Tending for a Cause, where we were able to collect some tips for two hours and also, we sold pizza. So, we were able to make the most of that event. And then we had another GoFundMe page. And so together all of those efforts really help us, to be able to make an impact because when we go to Project Connect, this is a large event. There's 40 to 60 service providers there and lots of different opportunities, and things for clients to do when they come in. But we also provide all of the volunteers, and their social work students. And they do the intakes, and they help people. They help answer questions for people and help people walk around and people who are overwhelmed. And then we've got this really neat bag that has not just the regular things, the soap and the shampoo and so forth. But we put in a mini flashlight, we put in a 10 dollar gift card. We put in all sorts of things, rain ponchos, inflatable towels, different things that we think that people will really benefit from. It certainly sounds like through all of the projects and all of the work and all the volunteers that you're engaging on campus and off-campus that there's definitely a need and a capacity for something like a social justice institute. While we would like to think so, I think, you know, a big class on campus is democratic citizenship. And the intent of that class, I mean, most students take it. And the intent is to train global citizens. And I think now more than ever in the midst of the pandemic, we've become so isolated. And it's really important for us to think about how do we impact other populations that may not be as fortunate as we are? This is a time of how we come together and make it work, for people who are experiencing homelessness and/or anti-racist efforts or things like that. We created last year an anti-racist website for

students written by students. And you know we really want students to take advantage of that. And I am really proud of the research and work that people, students, the interns did on that. And I want to say that it's important for me to say interns because I try not to make decisions without them, and I try to elicit as much decision-making from them as possible. I want this to be student-driven, driven. I want them to feel like this is something that they own as well as I do. And so, we do the best we can to make collaborative decisions that are non-hierarchical. I mean, on that note, maybe it would be interesting to hear from our interns, you know what Carson and Diana, what do you think you would like to see initiated from a social justice institute? Well, I mean, honestly, I think that I could just make it as simple as making Saint Cloud State specifically a welcoming environment. I mean, it's really unfortunate when you have as diverse of a town as Saint Cloud, but the overwhelming majority of people say that it's not necessarily a welcoming place if you do identify in this diverse population. And ultimately, I think if we are able to create an institute on campus where we are able to make a difference. And students come to this town and feel welcome and feel that, you know, their needs and their, their, I guess hardships, you could say, they matter to us and we're all going to work together to, to hopefully, help this, these students out. And not just have a presence on campus, but it would be great if we could have a presence in the greater community of Saint Cloud as well. Maybe working with marginalized populations out there, such as the collaborating with the Women's Center or the women's shelters around town or having a booth at Saint Cloud Pride and things like that just so that we can advocate for ourselves and for the marginalized populations, that do exist here. And one of the things before you go onto your next question that I want to clarify is that Saint Cloud State University already has an amazing amount of services and supports for students. So, our intention is never to, compete or replace. Our intent is to always collaborate and enhance. And I think, you know we've been able to do that. And we've been able to do that from a student perspective. So, it's students providing resources to students. And we think that there's a connection that can happen in that way that can be really useful. Absolutely, I think going to, back to your piece on collaboration. You know, we've got folks on campus like Dr. Tracy Ore with the Community Garden. We've got Dr. Daniel Wildeson, the director of the Genocide in Holocaust Center. And there's just so many and the Multicultural Center, and we've got the C.A.R.E. group and there's just so many groups on campus where I think a collaboration could be formed to really help propel initiatives, that could come out of a social justice institute. Absolutely. So, thinking about that and thinking about those partnerships and the other things that come, what kind of creating and building something new? What do you think is needed to create and sustain a social justice institute on our campus? Well, we've been seeking and writing grants because what we want to do is become part of the footprint on campus, is that we don't want to be a project that just fades. And so, we want to build some infrastructure. We want to, we want to sort of build a sense that this is an important part of our Husky Compact. And that it fits, it fits the University's vision for our students. And with the interns, we'd like to sort of expand our ability to incorporate interns. And one of the things I think really comes out of this is really helping them become more independent thinkers. And to really pay attention to their own

contributions. And how, the most creative ideas, that have happened have come from students, that we've done. The really, the most creative, and I want that sense of leadership to be built, then I want that sense of power to be built in. So that they finish this internship feeling like they contributed to something useful and important. Absolutely, I can see how important and how that is truly part of Saint Cloud State has the Our Husky Compact and how that is kind of essential to, the educational experience we've been investing in for some time. And so, I applaud all of you, right, for your efforts in that regard. You know Dr. Moriarty, as you were kind of talking, at the beginning of our, or our episode here, you are talking about some of the longevity you've had in this space. And I wonder, as we've talked to other guests, my own kind of mental model of what social justice might be or might look like has evolved. And I wonder if you would talk about from your perspective. Has your definition or what you think about from a social justice perspective evolved over the years? I absolutely think it has. I think, you know in the beginning I think it was about doing for others. And I think it's really grown to a spot of doing and empowering. That, just doing something for others is not very effective but doing something alongside others and giving them the power to know that they can do this and so forth is just creating more and more importance. I think that just helps people. And I think I also think with social justice, we often think of projects that we would like to do. And I think over time, we've come to an understanding that this needs to be about projects that need doing. Not just that we want to do. You know, because we sent students out into the community, and they say we would like to do this for your agency. And the agency will say, well, that's fine. Thank you. You know, but what we really need is somebody to come in and do a deep cleaning on, because we're short of staff and do a deep cleaning on, in some of these rooms. And I want people to be adaptable to not just sticking to their own vision of what they wanted to happen, but to really listen to what the, what the community is asking for. Yeah, that's an important statement, I think. I'm curious Carson and Diana, if your again, your perspective on social justice has changed at all, from when you started into this work. I would agree with Dr. Sheila. I mean, she's been in the field and has more experience than I have. But I would have to agree with her statement in regard to, I kind of came into the field of social work wanting to help others. And I didn't really understand the impact that giving others the ability or letting them know that they can do it themselves has rather than me just helping them and providing them with these resources. It's much more beneficial to these individuals. Yeah, I can help you find these resources, but for you to be able to, to access them yourself and, and help yourself is a lot more beneficial. And I have just really come to realize that. And I think that that really is one of the main things that I've seen change within my own definition of social justice. I would also have to agree to that. I knew a little bit more about what social workers did since one of my parents is one. But the empowerment part was new to me. And it is nice to be able to help someone out and do something for them, but they don't get too much out of it. But if you could give powerless or people who feel powerless, the power to realize what they need. You know, choose for themselves what resources they want to get. And then if they need a little help getting those resources, access to those resources, just giving them that and allowing them to just be the leader instead of view. That makes such

a bigger impact on, on, on themselves, their well-being. It sounds like you both had the opportunity to engage in some really high impact work through your internship. And I'm just curious if you feel comfortable sharing, how those experiences maybe shaped or kind of help you define that career path you want to take after you graduate. Well, like I kind of said earlier, I even had the idea of social work being more of a one-on-one career choice and since coming here and interning at BCR, specifically doing Project Connect, really, really helped. Kind of show me that I do enjoy working in a community setting more, so than working with just individuals. I think that it's not that I can, I can almost create a bigger change working in a community setting than individually, just, just with my ability to access the people and provide them with the supports that they need. So, you very much see yourself, wanting to pursue a job or career after graduation, working in a community setting? I think so, yeah. That's where I would go with it. Yeah, and I think that this internship honestly is what showed me that because prior to this experience, I really had little to no community involvement or experience at all in my social work education. As for me, I would also like to work with communities and possibly even macro like to do some policy work. I wouldn't want to run for office or anything like that. I'm not sure I'm quite cut out for that. But I would also like to do some one-on-one work just to have more of an experience with that for a few years and then just do community and macro at the same time. Very cool. Well, I appreciate you guys' kind of sharing your, your visions for the future. And I really do think that your futures are very bright, and you both would be an asset to any community that you choose to be a part of and choose to work in. Thank you. Thanks. Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for all the work you've done for our community. It's clear that it's made an impact on you and on your futures. So, thank you! You're welcome. So, where can folks learn more about getting involved, in the volunteering, whether it's on campus or off-campus? We have a Huskies Connect page, which is sort of our website. We have social media. Carson, can you tell them how people can connect to us on social media? Yeah, so primarily we would use Facebook. And you can find Bridge Community Resources on Facebook. The profile picture features the name with Saint Cloud State in it. So that's how you know, you can find us. And if you click onto our profile, you're able to message us directly through Facebook if you have any questions or inquiring about how you can help too. That would be a great way to get in touch with us. And the other thing is that you can just e-mail me. We'll include the Husky Connect information on our website along with the Facebook information and Sheila's email address. So, check out our website for information on how to get involved with the work that's happening on campus, or to get involved with volunteering on the work that's happening off-campus. Feel free to e-mail Sheila with any questions or if you're wanting more information on how to get involved. Check out the Husky Connect page as well as the Facebook page for more information. Thank you again to Dr. Sheila Moriarty, Carson and Diana for joining us today. Well, thank you. We had a good time. Support for this podcast comes from KVSC studio at Saint Cloud State University, SCSU Educational Technology Innovations, SCSU Online and Distance Learning and of course, from our listeners. Know someone we should know about? Fill out the guest nomination form found

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