

Ep. 110 Philanthropy Series: Share Our Strength's Billy Shore

Alex S. Jones [00:00:00] From the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, welcome to Policy 360. I'm Alex S. Jones, and I had the pleasure of sitting in for you, Kelly. I'm a journalist. I worked for The New York Times. Most recently, I was director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. I've teamed up with Policy 360 and the Center for Strategic Philanthropy and Civil Society to bring you this series of podcasts about philanthropy. My guest today is Billy Shore, whose passion for nearly 35 years has been to make sure that kids do not go hungry. Indeed, the organization he founded is named No Kid Hungry. Simple idea, right? Of course, no child should go hungry in this nation of overwhelmingly abundant food. But the reality is that some kids do go hungry every day. Billy and his sister Debbie founded an organization, a very unusual organization, actually, in terms of philanthropic enterprises called Share Our Strength. I'll get to that later. But it's the parent organization of no kid hungry. One of the realities of philanthropy is that it is packed with idealistic, committed people who want to do something good for the world. But then they find that the problem they hope to solve can be overwhelming. Taking on child hunger was a daunting concept 35 years ago, and it remains so today in many respects. So, what works? What Billy and Debbie came up with is something that is all but unique in the world of philanthropy. What he has learned not to do is probably more important as what he has learned to do in these 35 years. He has had a huge challenge and remarkably, he is now at least on the threshold of meeting that challenge in a profoundly satisfying way, I would think. Billy Shore, welcome to Policy 360.

Billy Shore [00:02:07] Thanks, Alex. Thanks for having me.

Alex S. Jones [00:02:08] How? First of all, how did you come to this mission to relieve, if not eradicate, child hunger?

Billy Shore [00:02:15] Well, we came to the notion of ending childhood hunger in a bit of a roundabout way. We started the organization motivated by the famine in Ethiopia in 1984 and thought we were gonna be doing international work. We quickly got focused on the needs in, in the U.S.. 1984 was the middle of the Reagan administration. So there were a lot of budget cuts and homelessness in the United States, a lot of hunger issues. And we decided that we needed to focus here. And then about 15 years after making grants to all kinds of hunger organizations, food banks, soup kitchens, advocacy organizations, we realized there was an opportunity to actually not just feed people, but to solve a problem. And that that problem with childhood hunger. And that it was solvable that we had the resources in this country to actually end childhood hunger. And so we kind of put a stake in the ground around that.

Alex S. Jones [00:03:08] Well, let me make sure I understand. Share our strength was focused on ending hunger or at least relieving hunger in abroad, broadly defined. But when you narrowed your focus to no kid hungry, it was a slightly different refinement of your original mission. Am I correct about that?

Billy Shore [00:03:26] Yeah, that's right. I would think of it. We think of the no kid hungry, of no kid hungry as a campaign within share our strength. So it's a campaign that will, like any campaign, last a certain amount of time. It's lasted 10 years so far, and it's probably got another five or 10 in it. But it's part of the broader organization of Share Our Strength.

Alex S. Jones [00:03:42] The thing that makes share our strength all but unique and perhaps it is unique. I don't know is that instead of Billy going around and asking people for money so he could try to relieve hunger, he found a different way to generate the money that he wanted to use to facilitate ending hunger and then child hunger. Talk, if you would, about the sort of strategic plan that share our strength, really embodied that name reflects what is I understand it was your concept.

Billy Shore [00:04:18] That's right. The idea of share our strength was that everybody's got some particular strength to share, some gift to give some innate talent that could make a difference in the lives of others. And the truth of it was I was terrible at asking for money. I'm still terrible at it. I've there's not a day in my life where I've done it or done it well. And so we realized we had to come up with some other way of generating revenue. And really what we decided was to ask people not for checks, but to share their strengths. So we asked chefs to cook at food and wine benefits and we would sell tickets to that and turn that into revenue. We asked corporate sponsors to be part of that and we would turn that into revenue. And we went from a two thousand dollar cash advance on a credit card to start to today, about 85 million a year.

Alex S. Jones [00:05:06] Well, let me we're going to look at this today in two different ways. We're going to start with where the money came from. Then we're going to get to how the money was spent because that 85 million dollars is pretty much all been spent trying to alleviate the question of hunger and then child hunger, correct?

Billy Shore [00:05:24] That's exactly right.

Alex S. Jones [00:05:27] The thing that makes this so fascinating in terms of the philanthropic world is that this is not a model that anybody else was using, nor did anyone else think would work. Basically, it was not asking rich foundations or rich individuals for money. It was going out and creating a brand that would have inherent value to people in the food industry who would then basically partner with this organization so that they would get the benefit of the organization's goodwill. And and it's sort of sense of mission. And the organization would get money. Talk, tell the, tell the Pans story. That's the one that I think captures exactly the way this guy, Billy Shore, was out, you know, hustling.

Billy Shore [00:06:17] Well, when you when you start something new, you have the playing field to yourself, at least for a little while. So you're right, this had not been done before, at least on the scale that we were doing it. But the idea was to see if we could be a nonprofit. That instead of distributing wealth, which is what I think of as foundations and philanthropy doing, and it's and it's very important that they do, I'm not knocking it in any way. But instead of distributing wealth, could we, or redistributing it. Could we actually create wealth? Could we be a nonprofit in effect that that made money? So if you think of nonprofit as a tax status, not a management philosophy, you know, you'll get where we're coming from. And so also, there just wasn't enough charitable resources around. There wasn't enough philanthropy to actually solve the problem on the scale that it existed. So we started to look at these innovative, entrepreneurial ways to generate revenues. One of them, when you refer to the, the PAN story, is we work with thousands of chefs and restaurateurs around the country, probably some 20000. And so companies that market into the food industry tend to be very drawn to us. And one of those companies was Calphalon Cookware, which makes pots and pans and other types of anodized aluminum kitchen implements. And the CEO of the company named Dean Kasprzak, came to me and said, let's let's form a partnership. We make pots and pans. You're trying to feed people. Let's do something that would give our company some some sense of greater

meaning and purpose. And they proposed and I didn't understand it at the time, but they proposed that they license our trademark on our signature food and wine event, which was called Taste of the Nation, and that they give us five dollars. They they they renamed their two (unintelligible) and the taste in the nation pan. They give us five dollars every time they sold one. So I thought, go knock yourself out. That sounds like a crazy idea to me. But you're the pot and pan salesman, so go for it. And you know, what I didn't appreciate at the time was he had a very sophisticated marketing sense of how to do that, do this. We ended up in a contract in which we were contractually obligated to bring chefs into department stores around the country and cook with calphalon pots and pans as part of the promotion. And they started really just flying off the shelf. When you do that, the competitors have Calphalon get moved to the outer aisles. Calphalon gets the center of the store and they ended up selling quite a bit in their first the first year we did it. And we did probably do this with them for five or six years. But the first year I remember them giving us a check for about three hundred and sixty thousand dollars at their headquarters in Toledo and a big check presentation with one of those big oversize checks that everybody feels silly holding. And the part of it that was interesting to me was as we walked off stage, the CEO, Dean Kasprzak, said to me in a kind of a stage whisper, he said, If we're giving you three hundred and sixty thousand dollars, can you imagine how much we made? And, you know, they'd made a lot more. And that was exactly the relationship we wanted to have with them because they had a vested interest in keeping the partnership going. You know, nonprofits and businesses always talking about partnerships. It's supposed to mean that both sides get something of value. So the fact that they were getting something of value meant that they would keep coming back to us with ideas on how to grow the partnership. And by the end of the six years we were getting six hundred seven hundred thousand dollars a year from them. So it was a good example of how you can be a nonprofit and actually create wealth, not just redistribute it.

Alex S. Jones [00:09:48] I want to go back because this is this is a really important moment in the story that Billy Shore's success with with dealing with with this issue of childhood hunger in America. But when he started the idea of trying to get the food industry to support it, he didn't know any chefs. He didn't know. The food industry, he had no basis for saying to them, you know, give me money so I can, you know, build a network of chefs. But if you would tell the story of trying to crack that, you know, that wall of indifference among the chefs community that you were trying to sort of enlist to provide the money that would allow you to solve this problem?

Billy Shore [00:10:33] Well, we had this notion that, you know, chefs would be responsive to this issue, but there was no reason that they would be responsive to us, in particular because nobody had ever heard of us and nobody certainly ever heard of me. And so it was it was really hard, kind of hard rock mining to chip away at until we got some chefs to get involved with us. I worked in politics before. One of the people I knew from that was the Steve Wozniak who invented the Apple Macintosh computer, and he donated a computer and a printer and we sent out a thousand letters. This was back in 1984. So,

Alex S. Jones [00:11:04] This is Dot Matrix printing.

Billy Shore [00:11:05] This is Dot Matrix printing one one a letter every few minutes. And we're talking about regular mail, no Internet or anything like that. Right. So this is a long process and we're sending out these letters and nothing's coming back, like literally nothing. And I just can't believe it. And I'm waiting days and days and days and I keep going up and kind of confronting the mailman and harassing the poor guy because he hasn't delivered our mail, but he has, there just wasn't any. Anyhow, long story short we

sent out, and I guess this is what entrepreneurs do, we sent out a second thousand letters, right. That defies all reason. Nobody answered the first thousand, but we sent out a second thousand and we got one donation from this incredibly iconic and important American chef named Alice Waters at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. And she with her check, she included a note that said, let me know what else I can do. And I called her up right away. And I said, how about you sign the letters because nobody answers mine. And she did. And she signed a letter and we got 50 or 100 chefs who donated and said they wanted to be part of it and kind of grew it out from there. But today we have about 25000 chefs and restaurateurs involved with us. And I think, you know, a lot of the industry really sees themselves being involved in a lot of important community issues. But this being their core.

Alex S. Jones [00:12:20] Well, this is one that clearly makes sense for them in one respect. But it was also a real challenge to figure out a way to do it. I loved your story also about the way you sort of found chefs in various places who might be willing to help. Aside from the Alice Waters network, by the way, if you got one response, that was the one to get.

Billy Shore [00:12:40] That was exactly the one to get it. It couldn't have been better than that.

Alex S. Jones [00:12:42] But the story about going to the newspaper restaurant critics, I always loved that one too.

Billy Shore [00:12:47] Yeah. I think we I think we did this once. Then we realized just how kind of lucrative or it could be, which is we talk to a newspaper critic. I think the first one we talked to is this wonderful woman in Denver named Pat Miller. And she told us, well, here's some chefs I think would be interested in this. And she mentioned a man named Noel Cunningham, another man named Jimmy Schmitt, who's a great restaurateur. And we went and talked to them. And we said Pat Miller said, we should come see you. You might be able to help us. And he said, Pat Miller, the restaurant critic, she wants me to do this? And I said, well, I think so. And they said, well, of course, you know, we're going to do anything Pat Miller wants. And then we realized we literally spent the next couple months looking up restaurant critics at major American newspapers and asking them what chefs we thought we had to talk to and then going to the chefs and kind of reverse engineering it.

Alex S. Jones [00:13:32] Bear in mind now that we're talking about a number of years ago and now this has been built into a, a genuinely very significant philanthropic effort that has got now a set of somewhat different challenges. And I want to devote just this bit of time still to the generation of the money that you have used to try to solve the problem you were trying to solve about the moral question now of the of the corporate partnerships. You created the partnerships, but you've created partnerships that come with their own issues. Much of your organization is volunteer. You have a moral issue that is at the heart of what you're trying to do. And you have some corporations and institutions that some people would find some of their practices, maybe not consistent with what you do. How do you look at that as a problem now? How do you square that circle of having the money to address from these partners your problem without sort of compromising who you are?

Billy Shore [00:14:40] Yeah, well, I think it's I think it's an area where we all have to really do a lot of soul searching and and constantly kind of touch back to what your your values are. So teaching and meeting with a group of Duke students earlier today, there were a lot

of questions about share strength as a partnership with Amazon. And we have a partnership with Wal-Mart.

Alex S. Jones [00:15:01] And what do they get from the partnership? I mean, you know, what does what does Amazon and Wal-Mart get from a partnership with no kid, you know, hungry.

Billy Shore [00:15:09] Right. So at Amazon is a good example. They're building distribution centers around the country. So they're going into new geographies with physical plants and employees. And I think they want to create a philanthropic footprint. They want the communities that they're going into to know that they're good corporate citizens. And so they've asked us, you know, could they sponsor and be involved in building out school breakfast programs in these communities where they're building these new distribution centers. And we figured out how to do that and what that would what that would cost to really have an impact. They've been very generous in supporting it. And as we were talking with the students about it today, some of the students were raising the question of, but what about the wages that Amazon pays its own employees? And if they're not paying them well enough, is there something you can do about that? And that's something that we had thought about as well. The same is true with Wal-Mart and probably any company. There was somebody in the class today that said companies are going to, you know, basically let market forces dictate what they pay their employees. And you may not always find that satisfactory. So you do have this kind of, you know, moral dilemma of we're trying to feed more families. And is that job made harder or easier by the companies that we're we're partnering with? I think at the end of the day, you know, we've certainly resolved that in terms of believing that. It's made it easier that we can't control everything or influence even everything that a company does. But if they're willing to make a significant, meaningful impact in the community, we're we're eager to facilitate that.

Alex S. Jones [00:16:41] So, Billy, when did you shift the focus from hunger generally to children's hunger in particular?

Billy Shore [00:16:48] Yeah, so I'm going to say in two thousand and eight.

Alex S. Jones [00:16:53] When the market when the economy took a nosedive?

Billy Shore [00:16:56] Well the economy took a nosedive, that wasn't that didn't have that much to do with it. And Obama was elected and that actually didn't have that much to do with it. But it had a little bit. But we had been making grants to hundreds of other community organizations, and...

Alex S. Jones [00:17:08] You were making grants from these partnerships...

Billy Shore [00:17:10] Right.

Alex S. Jones [00:17:11] Using the money that the partnerships brought?

Billy Shore [00:17:13] That's right. And we were funding food banks and children's hospitals dealing with malnutrition and advocacy programs. But we'd been thinking about something that the writer Jonathan Kozol said, which was to pick battles that are big enough to matter but small enough to win. And when we thought about that, you know, because there's so many things we all care about, there's so many things we want to do globally: famine, climate change, immigration. There's all these issues that we all care

about. So we, we, we really drill down on in our space. What's big enough to matter but small enough to win? Where could we actually have a decisive play, a decisive role and have a decisive victory? And we realize that kids in the United States who are hungry on a chronic basis that was, that's a manageable number. That's not hundreds of millions. That's, you know, millions. And that we could we could actually address that and solve it.

Alex S. Jones [00:17:58] Well, okay. Paint a picture for me of the of the status of childhood hunger in 2008. How big a problem was it and what did you see out there as you were sort of path to solving it?

Billy Shore [00:18:13] Yeah, well, there there aren't a lot of great measures of childhood hunger there are measures of poverty, there are measures of food insecurity, which is kind of a socioeconomic measure. One of the things that we used was the number of kids in the country who were, by virtue of their families low income, were getting a free or reduced priced school lunch. And it turned out to be 22 million of those in 2008, maybe maybe it was 21 million at the time. But that number has been relatively stable. And what we found to be a enormous opportunity was that the 22 million kids who were getting lunch were also all eligible for breakfast. But at lunch they were already there and easier to feed. And at breakfast they had to get there early. Which logistically was impossible for many of them. And there was the stigma attached to be the kids who were not on the playground. But were going into the school early to get their, their free breakfast. And so what we realized, though, and so only nine million of the 22 million were getting it, but all 22 million were eligible. It was bought and paid for for twenty two million. So an incredible opportunity.

Alex S. Jones [00:19:16] Bought and paid for by the American taxpayer?

Billy Shore [00:19:18] By the American taxpayer. These are entitlement programs that were started, by the way, in 1946 when generals and admirals came back from World War Two and they said to Congress and to Harry Truman, you know, our troops were not strong enough by the end of the war. After five years of war, we'd wore out our troops and we had a lot of unhealthy, malnourished soldiers. And we need to start feeding them better in schools. That's where actually where the school lunch program came from. So the American taxpayers with bipartisan support said, yeah, let's start feeding kids in school. And those programs have continued to this day, but they're lopsided. And so we realize that as important it is for kids to have lunch. It's also arguably even more important to have breakfast first meal of the day. How are they going to concentrate that type of thing?

Alex S. Jones [00:20:03] One of the things that's been so fascinating is the sort of step by step evolution in what you recognize were the roadblocks to achieving, like, for instance, school breakfast. And one of them you just mentioned, coming early, which was a stigma or the stigma of being singled out for the need of having a complimentary lunch or breakfast, especially. Talk about this solution to the breakfast problem.

Billy Shore [00:20:31] Yeah. Well, as you mentioned, there are lots of roadblocks. And I feel like our, you know, main value add as an organization is just to keep knocking them down. So for breakfast, when we thought about the most accessible way for kids to the most efficient way for kids to have breakfast, it was to move it from the cafeteria to the classroom, to first period or but grab and go between first and second period. But everybody related to the school system objected to that idea almost violently when they first hear it. Teachers don't want to clean up spilled milk and their their union contracts says they don't have to. Janitors don't want to pick up trash in a different time, and their

contract says they don't have to. PTA worries about instructional time being diverted. And so we had to overcome all those obstacles. They all sound manageable and they are. But somebody has to be willing to pay attention to them. So our, our job was to kind of go into the classroom and say the teachers keep teaching. We'll clean up spills. We'll, you know, we'll we'll get the trash out of here until they saw the value of it and then said, no, this is something the school system should do.

Alex S. Jones [00:21:38] So you were using your money to basically augment the money that was already there for these breakfasts. But were not being served. So you would make it basically your business and your money to clean it up and facilitate it and give them additional cafeteria or cooking areas if need be and so forth and so on like that. I mean, it's a really interesting role for your organization because you weren't actually providing the food.

Billy Shore [00:22:11] Right.

Alex S. Jones [00:22:11] You were providing the means by which the institutions, the schools, would actually use the money that the federal government had made available. But they were not using to feed these children.

Billy Shore [00:22:22] Yeah, you could probably think of it as, you know, modernizing the infrastructure of the schools, because, you know, the most typical thing we'd hear is we can't feed kids in the classroom because, you know, we don't we would have to have carts, insulated carts, on wheels to transport the food from the cafeteria to the classroom. And we'd say, OK, so we can provide those carts. And they'd say, we can't you know, we can't do it in the classroom because, you know, when we tried it, kids spilled milk too often and we had to change the carpet. And we're like, OK, we'll pay for a new carpet. We'll do that. We get it. And it's not about the carpet, right? It's about the kids. So...

Alex S. Jones [00:22:56] You, you kept browbeating them by saying, yes?

Billy Shore [00:22:59] We just kept saying yes, exactly.

Alex S. Jones [00:23:03] One of the things that you came up with that I found particularly fascinating was the way you coped with the stigma issue, because the idea was, I think in most people's minds that here, OK, you've got breakfast served in the classroom, but some kids get breakfast or need breakfast or are entitled to get breakfast because of their status in terms of poverty and other kids aren't. And so the ones that are getting getting breakfast may feel uncomfortable, even embarrassed, whatever, may not even want it, because it singles them out. How did you deal with that?

Billy Shore [00:23:40] The simplest way to deal with it is just to make it universal. And, you know, most of our schools in the United States, most of our public schools are unfortunately, I think so segregated by income that you don't have many schools left where some of the students can afford breakfast and some can't. The government has kind of come up with a policy, which is a very good one, that says if 70 percent of the kids in a school are low income, feed 100 percent of them and don't go to all the expensive of screening out the 30 percent who may not need it. And those 30 percent are probably pretty close to needing it anyhow. So in almost, almost all the places we work, breakfast is universal and that really completely takes away the stigma. It's also so much more civilized than in the cafeteria. I went to public school in Pittsburgh and you had to keep your head low because things were flying across the cafeteria trays, apples, whatever. It was a

dangerous place. And so this is a much more communal way of of kids eating and enjoying their meal.

Alex S. Jones [00:24:41] Of course, you then come upon problems that you didn't even suspect existed. Like, for instance, the one you were talking about as far as how the schools in Boston provide meals to kids.

Billy Shore [00:24:55] Yeah. And in Boston, we've found out that for almost the last 15 years, all of the school lunches in Boston were actually made on Long Island in New York. They were frozen. They were stuffed on a truck. And, at some weeks later, they showed up in Boston where they were allowed to thaw and serve to the kids. There were no kitchens. The Boston public schools have very old physical infrastructure. All the schools were built in the nineteen, you know, 15, 1920, 1930. And so one of the things that needed to be done was to build kitchens so kids could have the benefits of scratch cooking, not have their food shipped from Long Island. So now it's all, you know, locally sourced, and...

Alex S. Jones [00:25:38] I can imagine what those lunches must have been like. When you are looking at the impact of what you have now been doing in this process since 2008. What do you see?

Billy Shore [00:25:53] Well, I see things on on a couple different levels. One is with, you know, individual kids. We see them literally being healthier. We see them attending school more. We can count their attendance. We can measure their test scores. A lot of these things have improved as a result of better nutrition. We also see, I think, an increasing sense of those who are not doing this, who have looked at the results, at schools that have and said, well, we should be we should be feeding our kids better as well. We want these same results. So there's this kind of growing movement and probably the most important thing we've seen is that kids who are poor and kids who are food insecure, which is kind of a socio economic measure of financial stress on a family, they need not be hungry just because of kids poor doesn't mean he or she can't have three meals a day. We've been proving that they can. And so ultimately, as a society, we've got to tackle poverty because the, it creates terrible stresses on families and children and food insecurity. But at least now, for the first time, we're seeing kids who they may be poor, but they're no longer hungry. And they actually have a chance of doing well in school, paying better attention, of succeeding and breaking out of the cycle.

Alex S. Jones [00:27:10] So if you're poor, you don't have to be hungry. If you're hungry, you are almost certainly poor, however.

Billy Shore [00:27:16] That's exactly right.

Alex S. Jones [00:27:17] But talk about, if you would, that place in California you were describing.

Billy Shore [00:27:21] Yeah. So we visited not very long ago, El Monte, California, which is a town maybe 30 miles, 45 minutes inland from Los Angeles. Very poor community. Seventy five hundred kids in the school system. Twenty five hundred of the seventy five hundred are homeless. Ninety seven percent of them are 98 percent on, you know, at the poverty line. So getting free lunch and very high percentage of their parents are undocumented. So these are this is a combination of factors that would dictate that these kids would be hungry. But the good news is they're not hungry. They're still poor, which we ultimately got to fix. And their parents are struggling. But these kids are getting breakfast

and or breakfast after the bell. They're getting lunch in and they're in this after there's an after school supper program as well. So kids getting three meals a day have a chance of kind of breaking out of this cycle.

Alex S. Jones [00:28:14] One of the things that I think people might find perplexing is the fact that this money was there and that the governments of the various states, which really are the ones who administer this, a lot of this simply either didn't know or didn't care enough to take advantage of the fact that this money was there for feeding their own children and feeding their own children with products that were from their own farmers and from their own grocery stores. If you would, talk about the process, because this is something that I think this is really an underappreciated aspect of what you do. Again, if you listen to this so far, you know that this is not an ordinary kind of philanthropic enterprise. It is not handing money away. It is basically seeing that money that's there is used well for this for this genuine mission that even no matter what you are on the political perspective, nobody I can imagine is against having, you know, no no hunger for little children. But in fact, the money has been there. And until you guys came along, a lot of it was simply dormant.

Billy Shore [00:29:27] Yeah, it's it's almost. On one hand, it's almost hard to believe. On the other hand, it's almost too good to be true to think that there are literally several billion dollars sitting in entitlement accounts in the federal government that are expressly authorized to reimburse for school meals. And so and what it points out, what your comments really underscore for me, Alex, is that there's a subtle logistical issues which we've discussed here in terms of how we move breakfast from the cafeteria to the to the classroom and so forth. But there's an underlying political issue, which is that the reason that these dollars haven't been spent and the reason that nobody's demanded that they be spent on behalf of these kids is because kids themselves are both vulnerable and essentially voiceless. They don't have the access to elected officials as we know. They don't make PAC contributions. They don't hire lobbyists. They don't they don't vote. So we're we, in effect, you know, kind of self-appointed ourself to be their their advocates and to go into governors offices and to say and it's and it's really not even lobbying in the sense that we're not trying to get governors to change a law or do anything different. We just want to make them aware, which they're often not almost always are not even aware, good governors, good public servants, that these funds are available for these kids. And that's just a statement about the political pressures of our times.

Alex S. Jones [00:30:54] Can you give an example like the Colorado one that I think you mentioned?

Billy Shore [00:30:58] Yeah, I'd say that, you know, the best or least the first experience that I had with this was with a very good governor in Colorado named Bill Ritter, who was a moderate Democrat who had been a Peace Corps volunteer. And he met with us and we told him that 40 states, Colorado, ranked forty seventh lowest in the 50 states of the percentage of kids who were involved in these programs. And he said, well, what's that mean? And I said, well, it means it's harmful to these kids in all the following ways. But it also means you've left about one hundred and sixty million dollars in Washington. That can only be used to feed your kids to buy bread from your bakers and milk from your dairy farmers and eggs from your chickens farmers and, you know, all the rest. And he was just shocked. He was stunned. And he said, how could that possibly be? And he looked at his staff person to see if it was right and she said it was. And I remember him saying, why do we need this guy in the blue blazer, meaning me, to come here from Washington and tell us that how can we not know? And the fact was that they they didn't know. And he said,

what do we have to do to to turn this around? And they didn't have to really do all that much. He had to say from the governor's office and send out a communication to school superintendents that we got to enroll more kids in school breakfast and the federal government's gonna pay for it and Share Our Strength is going to pay for part of it. And they did. And they you know, their, their their rankings improved. But, you know, they probably moved up 30, 30 spots in the statewide list.

Alex S. Jones [00:32:23] You know, one of the things that you have done too that is very uncharacteristic of many other philanthropies is that you have made a public declaration of your goal of what success will be, which is to eradicate child hunger in the United States by 2030. Now, that may not seem like an insignificant thing that you simply have said. That's what we want to do. That's our goal. But in the in the world of philanthropy, setting specific goals like that is very unusual and very feared.

Billy Shore [00:32:55] Yeah, I'd say culturally they make people uncomfortable. And I would say including, you know, we've certainly seen this with a lot of the organizations we work with, but we've even seen it internally. And we have, you know, quarterly meetings where we go over our performance at share our strength. And people have a lot of anxiety about whether we're going to hit this goal, what it means if we don't hit it. And, you know, I think people are not used to, given the sacrifices they make to do this work in the nonprofit sector and how well intentioned there are. They are. They're not always used to being kind of cross-examined on their performance or judged on their performance. But, you know, my view is the more you care about these things, the more you want to know how you're doing, the more important it is to know where you stand and not for the purpose of, you know, chastising anybody, but for the purpose of, you know, being agile and making better decisions and reallocating your resources so that you're you are hitting your goals. And so that's what we've done.

Alex S. Jones [00:33:51] Are you going to be able to do it, 2030?

Billy Shore [00:33:53] I think we are. I'm actually feeling pretty good about it. We, you know, initially tried to do this by 2020. And we got very close and we realized that we needed more time, but we also felt like we had earned it. So even 2030, I feel like we're giving ourselves a little bit of a cushion and there's gonna be plenty of other issues. I mean, as you well know, hunger is not limited to kids alone in the United States. There are seniors who are hungry. There are veterans who are hungry. There are all categories of Americans who are who are struggling on low incomes. And so we still got a lot of work to do. But I think we'll be able to solve childhood hunger.

Alex S. Jones [00:34:32] Well, this begs the question, is your model something that would lend itself to the larger question, not just child children hungry, but Americans hungry, as you say, elderly people, people out of work in various other categories of people who are just simply poor, don't have it and don't have enough to eat?

Billy Shore [00:34:52] Yeah, I think I think it does. You know, the same federal funds are not available in terms of all the child nutrition programs, but there is federal funding for the SNAP food stamp program and for the the WIC program for young moms. And fundamentally, I think people know that this is a solvable problem. We have no shortage of food in the United States. You know, everywhere else in the world where kids are hungry, it's because of war or famine or drought or abject poverty. Here in the United States, it's because of our lack of attention to program and a lack of ability to connect kids to programs that could actually change their lives and in a pretty powerful way. So, yeah, we

have no shortage of food. We have no shortage of food programs. It's it's a solvable problem.

Alex S. Jones [00:35:36] Well, it's a solvable problem as long as there is a facilitator or a catalyst like you who basically says, you know, the money's there, the food is there. Now we just got to make the system work. It is so heartening to think that there's actually some problem that we can get together and solve in this country these days.

Billy Shore [00:35:54] I know it's you know, it often seems like there isn't. And I think, frankly, that's one of the reasons that we have had so much support come our way. People want to be part of solving a problem.

Alex S. Jones [00:36:03] Before we end, I want you to talk briefly about your efforts to to build consensus around food policy. When you were working with a group of other people on the Republican and Democratic sides, but you came together as a group, 10 people on both sides of the aisle and agreed that you were going to make it a consensual kind of thing. And it worked.

Billy Shore [00:36:28] Yeah, that's right. Congress back about five years ago now, created a congressional commission on hunger. There were 10 members. Five of us were appointed by the Democratic leadership. I was appointed by Nancy Pelosi, for example. Five appointed by the Republican leadership and the 10 of us had widely different views and we'd been told repeatedly that nobody was going to pay attention to anything we said unless and it was possible nobody would pay attention. I think we said period, but they certainly wouldn't be pay attention unless we were unanimous. If we were just like everything else in Washington where half said one and half said another. And so we we just we banged it out. We locked ourselves in a room for a couple of years, literally. We went and did hearings around the country and we had lots of conversations with each other so that we could kind of get past our labels. We didn't have the political pressure on us that elected officials have. So we could, you know, we could compromise. Nobody was pressuring us not to compromise, which is the unfortunately, the state of play today. And we actually got a set of recommendations out that were unanimous in that I think helped protect the the SNAP food stamp program, argued for increased investment in the school meals programs. And I think we'll, you know, ultimately have played a role in ending hunger.

Alex S. Jones [00:37:40] I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that Billy also has his own podcast called Add Passion and Stir, which, as you might expect, involves conversations with chefs, including people like one of my favorites in New York, Marcus Samuelsson, who runs Red Rooster. He's Ethiopian-Swedish.

Billy Shore [00:37:58] That's right.

Alex S. Jones [00:37:59] And runs the best soul food restaurant probably in the city of New York.

Billy Shore [00:38:02] He calls himself a Swedish opium. We just had him on a couple weeks ago. He was fantastic. And he's, you know, deeply committed to these issues. But we're always looking for where chefs intersect with community, whether it's on food policy or whether it's on foreign policy or health or education. Marcus is just a superstar.

Alex S. Jones [00:38:23] On that happy note, I want to say, Billy Shore, thank you so much for joining me today. Billy Shore is founder and executive director of Share Our Strength, the parent organization for No Kid Hungry Campaign and chair of Community Wealth Partners, a for profit consulting firm that provides strategic consulting to help leaders and communities solve social problems. And be sure to check out his weekly podcast, as I said, Add Passion and Stir, which brings together high profile chefs and change makers to talk about the central role food plays in social justice. You can find out more at our website Policy 360 dot org. Next time on Policy 360 podcast, we shall continue this series with a conversation with Tom Tierney, the co-founder of Bridgespan Group and coauthor with Duke's Joel Fleischman of Give Smart. He's particularly focused these days on getting the nation's ultra wealthy families and individuals to give more. And it isn't easy. I want to say again, you know, this has been a pleasure to talk with you, Billy. And until next time, I'm Alex S. Jones. Thanks for joining us.

Billy Shore [00:39:39] Thanks.