



### INTERVIEW WITH KARI PARDOE – OCTOBER 10, 2011

*Our State of Generosity*, a project of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy (JCP) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), in partnership with the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF), Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA), Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC), and GVSU Libraries' Special Collections & University Archives present:

An interview with Kari Pardoe on October 10, 2011. Conducted by Kathryn Agard, primary author and interviewer for *Our State of Generosity*. Recorded during the Council of Michigan Foundations' Annual Conference in Kalamazoo, Michigan. This interview is part of a series in the project, *Our State of Generosity* (OSoG). OSoG is a partnership of scholars, practitioners, and funders from four institutions – the Johnson Center; CMF; MNA; and MCSC – that collectively form the backbone of the state's philanthropic, voluntary, and nonprofit infrastructure. OSoG's mission is to capture, preserve, analyze, and share the developments, achievements, and experience that, over a period of 40 years, made Michigan a State of Generosity.

**Preferred citation:** Researchers wishing to cite this collection should use the following credit line: Interview with Kari Pardoe, 2011. "*Our State of Generosity*," Johnson Center Philanthropy Archives of the Special Collection & University Archives, Grand Valley State University Libraries.

Abridged: The following interview has been edited to assist readability. Extraneous verbal pauses and informal personal conversation not related to the topic of Michigan philanthropy have been deleted. Footnotes to the transcript have been added clarifying any factual errors in the memory of the person interviewed.

Text of the interview questions are as asked. Individuals interviewed have had the opportunity to add or edit their answers in order to provide their most accurate answers to the questions. For these reasons, the edited transcript may not exactly reflect the recorded interview.

Kathy Agard (KA): [00:01:00] How did you become involved with Marshall Community Foundation and the YAC [Youth Advisory Committee]?

Kari Pardoe (KP): Actually, it's, I always think, a funny story in that my dad served on the community foundation board and so when I was getting into high school (that is ninth-grade for us) he asked if I would consider serving on the YAC so that we could do something together. I said "Absolutely not, no way" and just kept saying that over and over again; he brought this up multiple times. Finally after about a month and a half of him pushing I just said, "Fine, I will do it just to make you happy." So I applied, got on and then it just took off from there.

(KA): Why did it just take off? What appealed to you?

(KP): To be honest, it was once I got in and I got to see that I really had a youth voice. I had the opportunity to say *here's my opinion* [00:02:00] and we got to really make change in the community. A lot of times young people don't get that opportunity to make change – but also to voice their opinion and then to do it with money, that was the big thing. A lot of times as a young person you can say what you think, but adults may not listen. And because we had money, then that translates into power essentially, and so they really did have to listen because they wanted something from us that was valuable to them; so we were able to give our voice and tell them what we would suggest for the project and how we would go about doing it.

(KA): How old were you and how long did you stay on?

(KP): I started when I was 13, so a freshman in high school, and I stayed on... ours is through senior year of high school so I was 17... And then got on the MCFYP committee when I was 14 and stayed on that until I was about 22, when I started working at CMF.

(KA): What kinds of things did your advisor do with the YAC to make you feel empowered as a young person?

(KP): She was, what I consider, [00:03:00] one of the best advisors that I've seen. I know that I am a little biased about this a little bit, but she was so great about empowering us to do everything. And she would just sit back and she was there to really be an advisor, to provide transportation, to provide her home for us to have something at the holidays, but during the meetings what she would really do is she would just let us have the conversation and then all she would say is, "Did you ever think about this?" She would pose the question and step right back, and if we decided to answer the question and go for it, we did and if we didn't, that was okay and she didn't say anything more. That was just the great part; it was the probing question and if we bit and took it, we could and if not, we could just move on and continue on the path that we were at. And she was very supportive of our decisions. Especially being in a small town, it can be very political about who is funded and who is not and she was always supportive going back to the board explaining why we chose to approve a grant [00:04:00] or why we decided to deny it and would explain it to the board, outline it so that they would then continue forward with our recommendations.

(KA): Did the money that you gave through the youth grants make any difference for kids or young people in Marshall?

(KP): Absolutely. It provided so many activities. I think the biggest thing is people consider Marshall to be a very upscale community, and one of things that I got to see is we adopted a family. As a YAC, we utilized some of our money but then also some of our personal money, and that really was one of the turning points for me that got me to realize that this is something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Because I was able to chair the committee that adopted the family, was in contact with the family and when we went to deliver it walked in and saw just dirt floor and saw this family had nothing, and so we donated everything out. The minute we walked outside their house we looked at each other [00:05:00] and said, "What do you have in your pockets?" We all pulled it back out and went shopping again, and so to me that was one of the pieces.



The other is we started a program for the fourth-graders in our community and it was all based around the book *The Sneetches*. So we actually acted out with the fourth-graders, read the book and had them see that it doesn't matter what we look like, where we come from, how much money we have, that we all need to be a community and help each other. Then we brainstormed with the kids what they thought the needs were in our community and then they wrote mini-grants for a hundred dollars and actually then carried out their philanthropic project. What was neat is to see these kids get excited and realize that it doesn't take that much money to truly make a difference and impact the community. The great thing, one of my favorites, was that they wanted to do a project but didn't have enough money, so these fourth-graders figured out a way to raise the additional money to then have a bigger benefit for the community.

(KA): Did it make any difference for your peers [00:06:00] as you are thinking of other people that are on the YAC with you, any special story or impact that you've seen as you talk with them later as alumni that you can now chat about.

(KP): Yeah, I think definitely with the YAC is that, we go back to it, and it was that leadership piece, that you cannot get that anywhere else. I mean when I talk to people... I was very fortunate to get to go to Central Michigan University on a leadership scholarship, and in talking about the program most people had no idea what it was that we did. People are always fascinated about it because again, you're empowering those young people to really become leaders and to make those decisions. If I could take it a step further and look at MCFYP committee (the statewide Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project), those committee members... it's transformed everyone's life. If I look at the people who have been on it, especially in the last ten years I would say, 10 to 15 years, almost all of the people that have been on the committee [00:07:00] are committed to doing something in philanthropy. Whether it's their volunteer time or a lot of them are going into the field now and so I think that's the powerful piece to this. I always thought I would be running my dad's printing business. That's what I had grown up since I was little thinking I would do, and it has completely changed the direction that I wanted to head in. I really think that we are seeing that happen; but it is also now a part of our culture, it is a part of who we are. When I'm looking for places to volunteer, for places to work at, I want to see that culture so that I can continue to do things that are important to me.

(KA): Kari, can you pinpoint what was transforming about it?

(KP): I think it was seeing the impact you have on the community and on individual people. Many times, I think we sit in a chair in a board room at meetings and you [00:08:00] say yes to something and you grant out the money, but you don't always get to see that connection and that true impact. By YAC, the way it is developed is that you're really out there with the community and you get to know the grantees even a little bit better, I think, especially growing up in a small town, for me I got to really see the fruits of our labor; essentially, where I got to see how the money impacted a child or an organization and the difference it was going to make and what would happen if we did not provide that.

(KA): Was MCFYP a successful investment of money from Kellogg?



(KP): Oh, the best thing they ever did. Absolutely. It is that project that will never go away, because the way it was set up and it is going to continue to impact young people's lives forever and really make us be philanthropic and make us be the citizens that we need to be, the well-rounded piece and that is what everyone's looking for now. If you look at college applications, when they're trying to recruit people they don't want just the "A" students anymore. They are okay [00:09:00] with "B" and "C," but if this person has all of this experience (giving back, helping others, serving on boards), that's what they're looking for. I think that is becoming the trend now, and this project just provides that platform to move to that next level.

(KA): Your mom and dad are still in Marshall right? And you were involved in community foundation itself and the community. Did it make any difference the fact that there was a challenge grant and in what way?

(KP): Absolutely. The difference it made is that it really helped to grow the overall endowment for the community foundation and really raise awareness about the community foundation, but also this youth piece. Unfortunately, I will say, coming from a small town that change is hard there. It still is, I think, a little bit in that it is a lot of the same people involved who were doing this at the start-up and so to expand and involve young people really was a transformational thing for that community. To think about how could young people serve on boards [00:10:00] because it was always – you know, again, and I hate to say this – the "good old boys" who served on all the boards, who did everything. And they are great people, amazing, amazing people, but it's imperative for the success of the community to start engaging people at a young age because then they're going to come back after college and be the ones that are going to get engaged. That is what we are seeing now, is that some of the YAC members that are back living in Marshall are starting to get involved again in the Community Foundation and on other boards; they are chairing fundraisers, all those things and that's what you want to see.

(KA): Were you a part of the press to get youth votes? Tell me the story how that evolved where young people could have a vote.

(KP): I think a great example is, I had the opportunity to serve on the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project board when it was all adults – so that was when the board was giving out the money for the challenge grant for the community foundations. And it was great that I could serve, but [00:11:00] I didn't have a vote. It was almost, in a sense, a token thing to have a young person on the board because it was the right thing to do. So really I got to see firsthand what it meant to be able to voice your opinion, but then really not have that firm vote to make a difference. As a result of that and many other things, House Bill 5906 started. So we had the opportunity to, at the summer conference, present to the representative and to several other people and testify and say "Here's why we think this is important, here's what this can do for young people, but also for the organizations," and really show the benefits as to why adults need to engage young people in this process. From there then we were able to testify in Lansing and get the bill passed.

(KA): Is Michigan still the only place that allows young people to have a vote?



(KP): It is, in a sense with a bill. There are other things... Actually in Ohio, I just had this conversation last night, their legislation is written in such a way they [00:12:00] just found out that they can serve on the boards, but they can't go into contracts. So that is the only time that they can't vote. But I think it is starting, that continuing to move that trend forward, for people around the United States.

(KA): How did you get to CMF and tell me what you learned from that experience.

(KP): Well, continuing on actually was serving on the MCFYP committee, I was still serving and during that time became the Mawby intern, during college. I had the opportunity to put on a conference and plan it. Then during that next summer, I was interning in DC and Rob and Donnell brought me back to help assist as a staff person. It was at that time that we went and had – of course, [00:13:00] over ice cream – a conversation and they asked if I would consider coming back to CMF after I graduated (I was still in college, I still had a semester to go). And so I started working part-time during college, that last semester, and then started officially that January. I worked for CMF, there, about two and one-half years; I was a program associate working with the community foundations and the youth advisory councils. For me, I felt like I had the best of both worlds because it was clearly working with my passion with young people and doing what I grew up in and what I really knew. But then I had the opportunity to start to really learn the integral pieces of the community foundations, how they work and operated, how it impacted the young people. I really got to have some great opportunities to work on national and international work for community foundations during that whole movement when it was really starting to grow and take off. It was just such a neat opportunity and experience that I could never get anywhere else. [00:14:00]

(KA): Then you went to MNA?

(KP): No, then I went to the Detroit Pistons to manage their Pistons Palace Foundation. I had the opportunity to actually intern at the Detroit Pistons in college and with Isiah Thomas' foundation, so I had already had some experience with foundations and professional athletes. For me, the neat thing was is that when you get behind a brand like that, or a person, everyone wants to get on board – especially in the good days (which I was there in the good days, thank goodness); but it's an easier way to get other nonprofits and foundations to collaborate with you for the betterment of the community because people want to be attached to that. So that is the neat piece about it. But it was, unfortunately for us at that point, the foundation [00:15:00] was not something that was at the forefront of the work and it was more of the community stuff. It was a one-time hit, by that meaning you bring in a player, they'd talk for 5 minutes and then leave. For me, going back to my roots, it felt like I was not having that long-lasting impact, where a grant you could see the fruits of that labor for a long time. So I decided I needed to get back to something where I could help to make change, systemic change that was going to last for a long time.

(KA): Tell me about graduate education and philanthropy and how was the experience of becoming one of the few people in the country who has an academic degree related to philanthropy.

(KP): It was such a great experience and I started it right-- I graduated and three weeks later started my Masters. Because I knew for me that I had to keep that [00:16:00] momentum going, just because this work can consume you on a day-to-day basis, and so I want to just get this out of the way. But I felt it was



so important to do, to take my work and my personal life to that next level. The great thing about working for CMF is all the connections, but also it was near Grand Rapids so I was able to do this and work full-time. What was neat was really seeing how the nonprofits and philanthropy world was coming together with people from the program and how could we all work together and talk about it in different ways instead of it being, *“here are the foundations and here are the nonprofits and let’s go on a separate track.”* It was all together and really looking at those relationships that I still have with a lot of people. So when we are trying to work with schools in Grand Rapids, I can call on my colleagues that I went to school with and say, “Can you help do this?” I think that is a neat part of that program that a lot of times people separate out, and so to have that piece was amazing

(KA): [00:17:00] And then you went to MNA. Tell me about that experience.

(KP): I have been there over five years. I am working with what is now called The LEAUGE Michigan, which comes from a lot of different things but really the main thing is from Learning to Give. For us, that is our bread, our meat and potatoes; it is everything – Learning to Give. What we are trying to do right now is to engage K-12 educators and students and integrating service, service-learning and philanthropy education. We are working... We have ten staff across the state that are working with me on a day-to-day basis to be on the ground, day-to-day, to support the teachers and students integrating this and really helping, just like YAC, how we were able to transform lives. I am seeing that with this program, that we are able to take young people who never had experienced philanthropy and really giving them a taste of it and helping them to see that this can be a part of their entire life – [00:18:00] it doesn’t just end when they graduate either. It is now moving into college and then they’re looking again at their careers and make what they want to do in the future.

(KA): Then you just went on the Commission.

(KP): I rolled off the Commission. I was on the Commission for nine years so I was term limited, but I started when I was a freshman in college. It was a great experience. It was very similar to the MCFYP board. When I started, it is just in a room with all of these people who have been really the drivers and the visionary for Michigan philanthropy. I had the opportunity to sit around the table and just listen to them and really hear where they are hoping to go, what their recommendations were. It was just an experience that not many people have and one that I will always truly treasure. The neat thing really was when I got on the commission; it was right at the start of the time where they were forming a national association. [00:19:00]

It had been formed for a little bit, but the piece that they were really starting to look at was young people and how could young people – youth commissioners, as we were called – really be a tool for them and actually utilizing them in the right way so it wasn’t tokenism. So I got to play a major role on the national level in developing a white paper, running trainings for commissioners (so adults) on how to engage young people; also then for the young people is, “What does it mean to be youth commissioner? What is your role? How do you take this seriously? What are the steps you need to take?” The big piece that tied in, is one of the recommendations were for every Commission to have a youth council underneath them, so we modeled it very much after Michigan and what I had been doing. So that was just neat to help see





that grow. When we started I think there were about 20 youth commissioners, when we were done with this push over a couple years, we were well into the 80s at that point; so it was definitely a huge growth. [00:20:00]

(KA): Now that you are stepping into really senior leadership roles, why do you think it works in Michigan? What have you seen that you want to model?

(KP): I think the biggest thing is, is that Michigan has figured out a way to start from the ground up, and that is with engaging young people. I think that's one of the biggest pieces and of course where my passion is. We are engaging these people in kindergarten to help them start to understand philanthropy and that they can start giving back. I think that is one of the strongest pieces that we have, that a lot of states and other countries don't have that. [00:21:00] A lot of times it is something that you teach once you start your job and you're moving into your new community and you want to look at how, "Oh I should start to give back and help others." By us starting down here, we are just building this whole base of really great citizens.

I think the other pieces are state associations that have been started in our organizations. To have the vision that several people did, especially Russ Mawby, to think about all these different pieces from the Council of Michigan Foundations, to Michigan Nonprofit Association, but even the Volunteer Centers of Michigan and Campus Compact. All of these state organizations play such a key and the great thing is here, is that we all work together. Again, that is something that's so unique, when you talk to other states and you say, "Well can you just work with your Campus Compact, don't you have a Volunteer Center State Association?" Most people don't. So that's truly been a result of the leadership in Michigan, is that they see the connections [00:22:00] that we should all be working together and – just like the nonprofits and the foundations, again, like in Grand Valley went I went to school – that model is set up here so that we don't run away from each other but we say "Let's get around the table. Let's talk and figure how we accomplish this together." That's I think the key to it, is you have to be able to put aside your ego and say, "Yeah maybe my program isn't the most perfect but I can offer this," and then work on it together.

(KA): What advice would you give to another state or country about how to build that type of ethic of cooperation? Can you pinpoint those behaviors or what do they do that makes that happen?

(KP): I think the biggest thing is respect, is that they all truly respect each other as leaders. Even though if we are going in different directions at times, they all come back to each other; it's that communication. So I think it is respect in communication [00:23:00] and again, putting aside those egos and the things "Well this is what we do." Well that's great, but how in this economies of scale right now, how do we work together for the betterment of the state? I think those are some of the key things and that we are always constantly thinking about each other, so it's not like we are in a silo (which a lot of times happens in nonprofits and foundations). We are really looking at, "Okay, for the state of Michigan, what can we do? What do we need to do and who needs to be at the table?" Most the time we will know it's not just us. That, I think, that's the biggest piece of it – if they can figure out a way to work together and develop and build those relationships.



(KA): Have you seen a conflict between the organizations ever and can you describe how it was worked out.

(KP): I think that there might be always conflict in terms of wanting to do programming stuff or really looking at policy work. [00:24:00] I think there are times where there are certain things that are very important for the foundations, that may impact nonprofits and vice versa. But again, because of the relationships we have and everyone understanding that we need each other in order to function and operate, I think we again do a good job putting it aside and then putting everyone forward. I know there's conflict, but I think we just work together. A great example is... So The LEAGUE Michigan we do our camp in the summer, modeled off the YAC conference, and so two years ago we did it together for the first time. There were many-a-times where I think both of us, while it's modeled the same, we wanted to do programming different or to do things different but one of us would say "You know what, that's okay, why don't we do it this way for this part" and then the next time when we hit that conflict again then I would say "Okay let's just move forward and do it your way." I think again, it goes all the way back to those relationships [00:25:00] of wanting everyone to succeed.

(KA): Anything that might be helpful to another state or country?

(KP): I think the biggest thing is that we really need to look at young people, but young people in two ways. One is obviously the youth, and to train them. But the other is once we get to people who are in their 25 to 40, as they are calling the next emerging group, is that we really need to continue to mentor them and to look at how do we help them? Because in Michigan we have been truly blessed to have amazing, amazing leadership that is here and I think we have to continue to mold and to help these people to grow so that Michigan can continue in a way that it's been and been developed. So it's going back to [00:26:00] mentoring, going back to not just placing someone on a board, but really giving people opportunities; and I think that's what Michigan does, as well. If I look back at everything that I did, I would never have had those opportunities without key leaders in Michigan saying "Let's put a young person on the board; let's give this opportunity." So if someone unfortunately sitting in an organization and they have been there, they are the founder, they need to help bring some other people up to really groom them and to, you know, get them ready to then take the next task.

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