



Kerrin Mitchell:

Welcome to the Untapped Philanthropy Podcast.

Tim Sarrantonio:

We're your hosts, Fluxx's Co-founder Kerrin Mitchell and Neon One's, Tim Sarrantonio. We've spent our career learning how to leverage technology and data in the social sector to better connect and serve our collective causes, constituents, and communities.

Kerrin Mitchell:

In this podcast series, we profile leaders, public figures, philanthropists, and industry experts to explore the fascinating intersection of funding, technology, and policy. We're here to analyze the most formative topics and trends that shape the present and future of philanthropy.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Welcome to today's episode of Untapped Philanthropy. It's honestly not every day where we can speak to someone from an organization that has long inspired my own understanding of generosity, yet today is that day. Alex Amouyel is the president and CEO of Newman's Own Foundation, a private grant making foundation whose mission is to nourish and transform the lives of children who face adversity. She leads the foundation's efforts to utilize 100% of the profits from the sale of Newman's own products, which I have in my refrigerator, in service of this mission. We're going to learn much more about her work, but Alex, welcome to the show.

Alex Amouyel:

Thank you for having me, and welcome to have this conversation with one of our donors. If you're buying our food products, then that means that you're one of our donors. Thank you so much.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, I can't wait to get into how that works, but before we do that, I'd love to have you tell us about your journey, what motivates you, Alex, and what are you proud to stand with?

Alex Amouyel:

I think my journey starts from a very young age. I think my first memory was I wanted to be a scientific researcher and help with the world of cancer, and that's what led me to university. But then I sort of switched gears and studied international relations for my masters and after a stint in strategy consulting, I ended up first at Save the Children, then at the Clinton Foundation, then at MIT Solve, and finally now with Newman's Own Foundation. And a full circle moment relating to that is that when I was doing biochemistry, I was actually studying childhood cancer. And one of our priority issue areas is working with Serious Fund Children Network, Paul Newman also founded, which is a series of summer camps for kids with serious illnesses such as childhood cancers.

Kerrin Mitchell:

So when you look at this whole spread of where you've come from, you mentioned MIT, Clinton, Save the Children, all of these have the thread that have pulled you through to where you are today. Tell us a little bit how you arrived to Newman's Own. What compelled you? What motivated you to kind of stand with them and how has that really influenced your approach? It is such an interesting background and



also Cambridge, by the way, very impressive. So all the fun things that brought you to who you are today, how has that sort of amassed into something that tells the story of what you want to see pushed forward for Newmans?

Alex Amouyel:

Well, to quote Steve Jobs, the dots tend to make more sense in hindsight than they do as you go forward. So I'm not always sure that the thread was very apparent to me, except in so far as I'm a person who wants to learn new things, do good in the world, be of service, use my superpowers in the best way, and as I chose different jobs and careers, that was the sort of questions I was asking myself. But I do think that looking in hindsight children has been a very common theme of this and a more broad aspect of that and what I would call my personal mission is sort of twofold. One is really working on the quality of opportunity and that everybody, no matter the zip code of the birth, their race, their gender, their class, their abilities, has the opportunity to realize their full potential. And two, I'm particularly interested in working on innovative structures and financing and solutions that can really change the systems. And if you put those two things together, Newman's Own Foundation work, which whose mission is, as you pointed out, to nourish and transform the lives of children who face adversity, but also this incredibly unique business model that we have, which is really different way of doing business, a different way of doing philanthropy. Those two things come together quite nicely.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, and that's actually a great transition into one of the things that I know many people listening are going to be curious about because people know who Paul Newman is. They may know about the foundation, but they probably don't know how it works. So you folks are taking a really different strategy than most foundations. It's going to be 100% impact driven. Maybe could you help define that? What are the key benefits and also challenges to that type of business model?

Alex Amouyel:

Yeah, absolutely. So people often, when I say I work with Newman's Own Foundation, people do often tell me, oh, the salad dressing, yes, or popcorn or I love the salsa, whatever it is. And then I tell them that the foundation owns the food company and so all the profits and royalties we make from the sale of the products go to the foundation and then that supports our mission. And they're like, wow, you should put that on the label. And I'm like, we do put that on the label. It's on all of the products. But it is confusing and I think it's confusing partly because there's so much emphasis from different corporations on the good that they do and they give 1% of their profits away. And there's buy one, give one models and a whole series of things, which means that the marketplace is flooded with what some might call greenwashing initiatives and others might also, there might be some really good things among that as well.

But I think that that confuses consumers and thus sort of dilutes a little bit are our vision. But to be very clear, we are very, very different in that we're not a corporate foundation. We're a foundation who owns a corporation and the money that we make doesn't come, or the money that we give out as grants doesn't come from a rich person and it doesn't come from a big endowment. It comes from the consumers who buy the products. And then the year after, whatever profits we've made given we give them away plus or minus a small reserve fund, which helps us with the cyclical nature of being in food as a business.

Tim Sarrantonio:



And I think that's kind of the fascinating part. I mean guilty slightly. I knew that of course you folks do things beyond that and that's how you manage it. But I brought up the salad dressing first. But it is kind of fascinating. What is the history? Why did they actually choose to do it that way originally?

Alex Amouyel:

It's really fascinating and interesting. I mean, I would say Paul Newman was ahead of his time on many things and he was obsessed with salad dressing as far as I understand. And he made it himself back in the seventies and I guess the eighties. And I'm French, so I can say he sort of made a sort of French Italian sort vinaigrette type thing. And supposedly he would even make his own salad dressing at restaurants. He was, I dunno how much all of this is true. This is what I've read.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I think let's keep it going. I love these stories.

Alex Amouyel:

But one Christmas he decided to make a batch of salad dressing with his friend Hotch, Eddie Hotchner who was very close to Hemingway, a side comment. And supposedly by February, all their neighbors were asking for refills from the salad dressing. So they decided we should sell this stuff, we should bottle this stuff. And they invested \$40,000 of their own money to get this started. They had lots of troubles finding a bottling company, finding various things, but then in the first year they made \$300,000 of profit and it kept going and they were pretty surprised about that, how successful it was. And Paul basically said, let's give it all away. He didn't feel comfortable. It seems keeping the money and especially with putting his face on the salad dressing, it seems, I found a clip in our video archive where he really talks about his discomfort with celebrity and how it was okay if he was going to do it for good. And so our very first motto during those years was shameless exploitation in pursuit of the common good.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I mean, that's an amazing phrase first of all, and I love the story and I want to get off the salad dressing right after this last question. We got to talk about the real work that you're doing, right. But I'm going to ask, do you have a particular favorite And then we could stop talking about salad dressing.

Alex Amouyel:

Well, I definitely probably will go to the balsamic vinaigrette basically.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Classic.

Alex Amouyel:

But I'll make a confession. As a French person, I do tend to make my own salad dressing.

Tim Sarrantonio:

See, this is sort of why I was asking because we are getting to the real stories here. So I love that.

Kerrin Mitchell:



I think it's fascinating how fascinated you are about salad dressing. Tim, I had no idea you had the side of you. I love it.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Here's the thing, just real quick as an aside, and then I want to talk about the work, obviously. But when I was a box boy in high school, all I would do is I worked at a high-end place. We would just stock Newman's Own. That's it. And so I just was used to every single part of the sku. And so this is part of where my love for your organization comes is at a very, very positive association growing up with, I think that does lead into the long-term thinking and impact on what he was trying to do here is that he understood the power of celebrity. It lean into that.

Kerrin Mitchell:

It was an early play into that where to me, to me, it never felt like something...

Tim Sarrantonio:

Way ahead of everyone else.

Kerrin Mitchell:

...that was overtly in your face, like it's me, Paul. Which is funny because sometimes with celebrities you're like, all right, great, I get it. You're running this cosmetic line, blah, blah, blah. But with him, there was something that was a humble, and then part of it's just the brand itself. I agree, but there's something about it that I believe in the voice.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's drawn. It's not his face. It's drawn.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Right, exactly. Exactly. And there's something about the voice, the structure, and to your point, Alex being able to publish onto it, saying, this is what we stand for and who we are, that value, that benefit, that was so clearly a part of the business model, even from a bottle of salad dressing was something that was very clear. And I think part of that is you look at these key strategies of how you pull that together from branding to partnerships to whatever it be, you have a number of things that you are doing and innovating around them. And they were sort of in my, maybe you weren't the first mover, but I remember as a kid thinking this is one of the first times when I saw that, I was like, oh, that's cool. He does that. And it registered for me at a young age. So I guess I call that out because I'm curious how you start looking at those strategies, whether it be, like you said, if it's partnerships, structures, marketing, how you go in and engage that public is really interesting. Can you share more about how you've come into this role and it's something you're now innovating on top of what struck you as exciting and what are you kind of moving forward and saying, these are the ways that we're going to continue to evolve this incredible brand that is so unique?

Alex Amouyel:

Well, so first of all, I have to thank Tim again for not only being one of our donors as a consumer and purchaser of the products, but also helping to put this our dressing on the shelves. So I have to thank you twice for being an intimate part of the story. And secondly, so thank you so much for this question.



One thing I'll definitely note and say, and this relates actually beginning to our unique structure. When Paul died in 2008, technically how we were struck, he gifted the food company to the foundation because initially he had both. And then he would write personal checks from all the profits. And when he died, he gifted the food company to the foundation. And that was actually heavily discouraged at the time. There was a law in Congress, which meant that foundations shouldn't own more than small states and businesses that was around trying to avoid tax evasion in different ways.

And so we had an IRS exception, and then legislators supported our model and passed only in 2018 the Philanthropic Enterprise Act, which allows a foundation to own a for-profit corporation under the right circumstances. And that actually means that the foundation and food company have to be quite separate. And there's two boards of independent directors and I report to the foundation board and then the CEO of the food company reports to the food companies board. And then the food company reports to the foundation because we do own it, but I don't get involved in, let's say the marketing, the product innovation, all of these parts of the food company that has to be kept at length. So that's just sort of partly to answer your question about the bits I don't take care of, but the pieces around coming into my role now a bit over a year and a half ago, what I really wanted to look at and innovate around was the central question of how we can use our resources in the most impactful way in service of our mission.

And there were a lot of sub-questions which resulted to that, which is how do we know that we're having an impact? Who are we funding and at what amounts and why? What are resources beyond the money that we give out? And a number of other questions. And that's how I've really set up the team, which I recruited over the last 18 months, but also the processes and systems. And so the innovation really is about how we do philanthropy and how we allocate the donor, the dollars in a way that's more open, transparent, power shifting, collaborative and impactful. And I'm happy to talk to you about any of those adjectives.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, exactly. Because over 18 months, what are you proud of accomplishing so far in that time? Especially when it comes to kind of sounds like you're trying to almost democratize some of the understanding around what the work is happening and how people can even be part of it. So what are you really proud of in terms of moving toward that vision?

Alex Amouyel:

Yes. I think you hit some of this really well in the head when you talk about democratizing or certainly decentralizing and power shifting. And that also is a parallel to where our money comes from, which is the consumers who buy our products and wanting to be able to be more open and transparent and have more people get involved. So for example, this year we launched our inaugural Food Justice for Kids prize, which was an open call for nonprofits, tribes, and schools to apply for funding around food justice for kids, unsurprisingly, perhaps. And we received nearly 500 applications to this. And in the end, we selected 12 organizations to receive initially in year one they'll receive \$50,000 and then year two, they have the opportunity to get another 50,000 and then they can join our portfolio of current grantee partners. But to do that, again, it was an open call.

We used this platform called justfund.us, which is a common application portal, to try and limit wasting time for our nonprofits. We held application information sessions to also help the potential applicants as we went through. And then I didn't score a single application. We delegated a lot of that work to an advisory council made up of community leaders from all around the country, heads of foundations, indigenous leaders, a number of people, so that it's not, if you will, we're not sitting in our ivory towers



saying, and you get the money and you get the money and you get the money. But it's really a community of people with lived experience and expertise that are helping us select the most promising grantee partners, in this case. We also had a public vote opportunity on a platform called Grapevine, which is all about giving circles, but we sort of created a community fund in that, and I think we're the largest of them giving circles, but we're not really a giving circle in the traditional way. We've taken their platform and made it into something a bit different that we're calling community fund, but through that we held a public vote as well to allow people, again, to have the input and to be able to select some of the winners as well.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yeah, and it's interesting hearing about some of the technologies like Grapevine love the work that they're doing over there.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And justfund.us is so incredible. Absolutely. What they're doing I think is a really special, unique niche that I'm so happy you connected with them. That's amazing.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So how, as you're leaning into this work, where does the role of technology like that play as well as you identifying, I think we need to maybe do our own things or explore different partnerships, especially with the unique structure that you have, how do you prioritize even choosing where to put your focus on what technology can do for you?

Alex Amouyel:

I mean, I think we have a small team, and in total were seven people, including myself. When I was at MIT Solve, I had the team at the end of 40 people, so it was quite a lot bigger. So I think for all the decisions that we're thinking about is indeed, how are we using the limited resources that we have in the most efficient way? And everything that we're using for operations is not then being granted out, if you will. So we want to be very lean and diligent around what we do. So I think in selecting something like justfund.us and Grapevine, it's really, well first that justfund.us is a nonprofit and built by foundations and for foundations to try and really limit waste around people spending hours putting out grant applications. And I support that in and of itself, but also I think it's a great platform for then our grantee partners to potentially find additional funding. But again, it's what's going to be the most efficient for us and for our team, but also, again, respecting the values that we have around being open and transparent and decentralizing some of our grant making and getting members of the public who are interested involved, such as through the use of Grapevine and those types of technologies. So I think driven by efficiency and values.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I mean, in some ways it's interesting, and those of you who are listening right now, the timing of this is two days after the election in the US right now. So when I think through the idea of impact and structures and telling stories and the importance of technology, it's actually in the data itself that things become really important, especially right now when people are starting to wonder what does the future look like in transitions and blah, blah, blah. And you look at a model like Newman's that is going to be driving forward information, I guess in my mind that data's role and impact is super essential right now.



And I guess in that sense that I'm curious to learn more. And Tim, you have a lot of thoughts on impact and data. What's your gut on or what questions kind of arise for you right now?

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, especially as it relates to Newman's in particular, I'm fascinated given Paul Newman's role as somebody who worked in visual storytelling is kind of a weird way to put it. I guess he was in movies.

Kerrin Mitchell:

No, it's absolutely correct.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, and that has even started to translate into the ways that you go to the website, for instance, and there's a fascinating little thing called the Generosity Index, and it has a visualization of data on some things that you folks have done. How has data helped translate into that storytelling piece, like those types of components? You have a very inviting website to learn about these types of things. So I know especially with your background, that's a really effective way to get things in front of people. How are you thinking about the visual storytelling piece?

Alex Amouyel:

In several ways. And I would say you have not seen everything yet because we have a number of plans for 2025.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yeah, you've only been there 18 months. Let's be real about that too.

Alex Amouyel:

That you haven't yet got to see. That I think would make me even better give you an even better answer to this question than I can now. But I think what I'll say for now is one of the people I hired who's absolutely an A team member is Dr. Christina Chauvenet. She's our monitoring, evaluation and learning officer. And really she spent a lot of time trying and I think hopefully succeeding to really do a co-created bottom up approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning for our grantee partners. So rather than sort of taking it saying, here's the application form and here are the reports and these are the indicators we want to collect. At the beginning of this year, she hosted listening sessions and then design sessions with our current grantee partners to understand what they would like to know about their impact and how they can build evidence of impact for themselves, but also for foundations like us. Because to get to first, obviously that's good for us and our knowledge of what's working better, what's not working as much, where should we double down, et cetera.

But all the other people that they might be fundraising from, and especially if they're trying to get to the next level in terms of funding, will be asking for this sort of evidence moving from a pilot or proof of concept to something which has true evidence of impact. So she spent the past year working with our grantee partners to build this, and then we are going to be coming out with what is currently called a dynamic impact report. But we are really thinking through how to bring it to life instead of a boring 40 page PDF that nobody reads of how to bring this to life on our website and through various case studies. So that it's again, something that showcases the incredible work of our grantee partners, but also shows some trends within the portfolio that we host. The three priority areas that we have are nutrition,



education, and school food, indigenous food justice, and then supporting serious fun, which is the network of summer camps that Paul founded back in the day. But when we look at nutrition education and school food, for example, as a portfolio where we have about 25 grantees, really what are the big wins? What are the gains? What are the trends at a policy level, at a community level in different geographies when it comes to ecosystem building? There's a lot of great things that we want to be able to showcase the results and the learnings and how this all adds up.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Makes sense. And as you look then, there's so many structures we've gone through today and you're looking in the future, and let's say you're 18 months in, you're looking out a year, two years, five years. If you had a magic wand, what would your future look like? What would you want to see evolve? What would you want to see change so that you can live into that space that you know that the foundation could be in the lives you could sort of change of children in that area? What would you use your magic wand for?

Alex Amouyel:

Well, I can tell you that the latest USDA report, which came out shows that we're now at one in five children in the United States who live in food insecure households. And that number is going in the wrong direction. It had improved significantly as a silver lining of the pandemic in the sense that there was a lot of money given to families and school meals were made free during that time. And with that money, families were buying food for their kids and were able to access school meals for free. These pandemic benefits have expired and school meals are no longer free. And except in a few states who passed those at state level, which means that the numbers on childhood hunger have shot sort of right back up. So if I had a magic wand, I would say you get free books in school, you get free math classes, you get free bus rides to school, you should have free school meals and not only, and you shouldn't have to go into school lunch debt or not get food because you're worried that your parents cannot afford it. And then those should be healthy, they should be plant forward, they should be locally sourced, and they should be made from scratch. And in doing so, no kid, every single child in the United States has access to food that is healthy and culturally relevant, but also that allows them to build lifelong habits around healthy food and allows them to pay attention in class, which really impacts their educational attainment and so many more opportunities in their lives.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, I mean, you folks are doing so many different things. Obviously we could have a lot of different discussions, but we're going to actually shift into some rapid fire questions to kind of round out our conversation. So what we usually do here, and we're going to keep doing that, is to ask a simple word association game, Alex. So we're going to throw out a word and then you should respond with the first phrase or word or idea that relates to your work. When I say that, does that sound good?

Alex Amouyel:

Yep.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Awesome. Okay. We'll go easy for you. Impact .

Alex Amouyel:



Nourishing and transforming the lives of children who face adversity.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Awesome. Partnerships.

Alex Amouyel:

Everything that we do with our grantee partners, our advisory council and peer foundations is about working together.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Awesome. Future.

Alex Amouyel:

Optimism that we can ensure that every child in the United States has access to healthy food and develops lifelong healthy habits.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And because we just got to ask, salad dressing.

Alex Amouyel:

The alchemy of two delicious ingredients that, or two or more delicious ingredients that parallels the alchemy of our business model as the best of for-profit and nonprofit business.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I'm so happy you went that direction. That's what I was hoping that you were going to do. So that is fantastic.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Fantastic. Well, thank you so much, Alex. It was absolutely wonderful chatting with you today. And tell us, our listeners rather, where they can learn more about the amazing work you guys are doing,

Alex Amouyel:

You can go to our website, newmanown.org. You can follow us on LinkedIn, and you can also sign up for our monthly newsletter where you would be the first to know of open grant applications and learn so much more about the incredible grantee partners that we have.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Perfect. Thank you so much for joining us, Alex, and we just appreciate everything you guys are doing. Thank you for having an inspiring model. Tim, any final thoughts?

Tim Sarrantonio:

No, we're really thrilled that you were able to join us and Alex, just keep doing the amazing work that you're doing and we'll be here supporting.