Kerrin Mitchell:

Welcome to a very special episode of our podcast. Tim and I were thrilled to attend the 2023 Clinton Global Initiative's annual meeting in New York City. We had an incredible opportunity to speak with some of the most inspiring individuals and organizations making real world impact through their commitments to action aimed at tackling some of the world's most urgent problems.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Since its inception in 2005, the Clinton Global Initiative community has made impressive impact. Over 3700 commitments to action have been initiated, benefiting more than 435 million people across 180 countries. These aren't just vague promises. They are concrete, measurable action plans aimed at addressing global challenges. CGI plays a crucial role by fostering partnerships, offering technical assistance, and spotlighting successful models that can be expanded on a larger scale.

Kerrin Mitchell:

So our next guest is actually a dear friend of mine. Funny enough, and I love when we run into people that we actually know at these conferences because it adds this whole element of fun. This one was a real surprise to run into anybody. Well, we just talked literally, I don't know, two weeks ago she came and visited me in Hawaii. That's like this is the level we're actually real friends.

Natalie Byrne:

Last time I saw you...

Kerrin Mitchell:

She went to my 40th birthday..

Natalie Byrne:

Barefoot, on a beach.

Kerrin Mitchell:

On a beach in Mexico. So fun news. Natalie Byrne is here and Natalie is obviously not just someone who I care deeply about, but she is actually an interesting voice. Someone who's been around CGI for over 10 years, helping people tell their story, understanding how you look at something and say, what's the real impact? Get the jargon out of play. What are the actual things happening? Why does capital need to get there? So Natalie, do you want to do a little "Hello listeners, I am Natalie, hear me roar?"

Natalie Byrne:

Okay. Well, it's really fun when you know somebody, and by the way, we're going to make this as PC as possible if you're hanging out with us on the beach...

Kerrin Mitchell:

We're not swearing.

Natalie Byrne:

Yeah, we're not swearing. No. I'm Natalie Byrne. I am the founder of Blank Space an impact strategy firm that works with brands, founders, funds, foundations on what they're doing and then how they're telling the world about it. It's really looking at what we can do to make a difference in a real way, using our capital, using our products, using our supply chains, how we show up in the world, and then really thinking about what we do to create movements around this. Industry has a lot of power, marketplace is a lot of power, and we're at a time now when it's not really about being responsible or doing good. It's like what's the business of the future look like?

Kerrin Mitchell:

So Natalie, when we look at all these commitments to action that are basically coming through CGI, we have people all over the map in terms of nonprofits here. We have venture funds, we have foundations, we have a number of different folks that are here. And you represent, by the way, a lot of them. What are the kinds of things you're telling them to prepare to say? What are the actions that come of CGI? What are the aspirations that you hope they get to bring forward?

Natalie Byrne:

Okay, I love this question because so much of getting them to come is the prep. Everyone's like, why are we going to this? Is this a political conference? I don't understand. And this is actually one of the few spaces that I find that people show up at all different levels from all different places in the world, all different expertise and backgrounds, and they kind of leave it at the door. It's a place of learning. And I don't know if you can really understand that until you step through it, but I always tell anyone that I'm working with, pay attention to who you're pouring your coffee next to. There might be a Prime Minister on your right. There might be an activist on your left saying hi. Ask them what they're doing. It's a place where people come and they let me, how do I put this?

You let go of what you know to learn what you don't know. To say, what am I missing? Or as I would say, given my company's name, where's the blank space that I don't see? And what ends up happening are these really unique collaborations that I see move things forward in a way. And CGI has changed over the years. We've had different iterations of the conference, but I still just see it as a great gathering of, you have bipartisan connections and conversations. You have people who are competitors in the marketplace. You just have a lot of diverse ideas and people are ready to hash it out, to think about how we can all move the needle forward.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think that's such an astute observation as first time goer here because you get distracted by the celebrity in some way.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I mean, it's exciting.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's exciting. Was I only a room with Liev Schreiber? Yes, I was in a room. It was very cool. Did I send a photo while I was taping him talk? Yes. Did I have questions queued up? Absolutely. Did I feel that I can ask them, remains to be seen, right? But I think that's what's been so fascinating is to almost immediately even in that discussion with that panel, I wanted to talk to people other than him.

Natalie Byrne:

Exactly.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And he wanted people to talk to people other than him. He was very adamant. This is the only good part about celebrity is people for some reason listened to me when I opened my mouth because I was in My Little Pony, the movie. Yes he was. And he was the Storm King and he was fantastic, but he was there to spotlight. Well, he spotlighted the work of a US company from Michigan that we're going to have on after, because there's so many interviews that we didn't get to do. Solar panels in Ukraine, saving kidnapped children, and just overall focusing on the need for protecting that as a beacon of democracy around the world too. That's what I got to hear about. Not some movie, not some spin. So that's such a great, great shining light on what you're doing.

Natalie Byrne:

I'll add this. People use the word hope or inspiration and it sounds kind of fluffy, but in this space you have a lot of people who spend every single day heads down on very hard topics. Maternal health, mortality, hunger. You have people who are on the front lines of, I mean we just had 30,000 people in Libya go missing because of floods. We're talking about climate resilience in a way that's actually affecting huge populations and who's on the front lines. So people are spending every single day feeling very alone, very much like who cares. And then you come here and you realize that we're all working on these different issues in our different places. And whether you're in a company or again, you're in a funder, you're in a nonprofit or you're working for a huge, very big foundation, or you're the governor. I had a very awesome conversation with Governor Newsom this past few days. It's like, how are we thinking about being a tribe? How are we thinking about all of our little pieces adding up and working together? And I think that's what matters, whether it's here in this space or just in general. That is something I think the world needs to hear more of today.

Tim Sarrantonio:

One of the things that I am greatly concerned about that I've witnessed is the encroachment and appropriation of philanthropic messaging points of positioning of even outright using nonprofits to cover for either at its best marketing, at its worst, at distraction from something nefarious. And I have a concern that this is only going to get worse as the media landscape changes with so many different things, it's going to be harder to parse out what's real, what's authentic.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And those problems are getting more and more complex. So the answers become more and more nebulous as things go on too.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And that kind of leap frogs from CGI into the larger issue because everything's so nuanced and interconnected here, everybody's very hyper cognizant that if they're talking about Black mothers not being able to get healthcare access, that it is explicitly being talked about and connected to climate change in many different ways. That nuance disappears the moment you go to market. So how can consumers be on the guard for this and what can business leaders do to navigate this in a ethical way?

Natalie Byrne:

Well, for the first time in history, we are asking CEOs to be activists. Only a few years ago I would've told any of my clients the advice would be like, please don't say anything Now. Not saying something is actually making a very large statement. So we're in a time when as a head of a company, you're very much being asked to step up and speak for the values of your organization, your brand, the people that work for you, the regions you operate in. And this is why the work I do, I am not only just so passionate about it, it's so needed right now because it's really about doing the authentic value work ahead of time. And to your point, sometimes I get a call because there was a wrong turn made and that's okay. I actually don't believe in cancel culture in the sense that we say, okay, you made this wrong move.

So essentially you can never move forward again. You can never learn. Yeah, that's goodbye. Now you do something really bad and you should probably be grounded in the corner for a while. But also let's think about what we can do to create a branch. So whether you're coming to me because you're starting a business that you want to have impacts right from the beginning, maybe you're creating a product that's disrupting an at its core because it's sustainable like we see in consumer goods now day in and day out. Or you are a very established company that's thinking about how they can do better or whatever it is, right? You have to start by knowing who you are. I call it your brand DNA. Why were you founded? What was the beginning? What is your origin story? What was the unique thing in the marketplace that made you emerge?

What is your why? Right? And this is very basic brand work, but what is different is that we're tying it to morals, ethics, values and creating a different type of a mission statement that is driving the conversation of the company in the marketplace in a way where it doesn't matter if you're launching a moisturizer or you're launching a new granola bar, it's your bigger why. So once you've established that, it's very easy to navigate the landscape of weird political things that are hitting you because you already have the foundation of who you are. And if I back up to any of your brand geeks out there, I love this stuff. A strong tribe is very evident. People who love Nike, they love Nike, they have swoosh everything. People who love Apple, they put freaking apple stickers on random things that aren't even Apple made, like their car.

Harley Davidson is one of the best tribes ever created. Everyone knows who they are, they wear it with pride. Patagonia is a brand where if you actually have a hole in your fleece, they want you to send it back. They're going to sow it and resend it to you because they don't want you to buy another one. So you end up getting this brand love and connection based on values and tribes and community that it lasts a lot longer than anything else. The other thing you're mentioning is when brands are just operating on marketing campaign, let me make a really good Super Bowl commercial that's going to tug at your heartstrings and tie into something that's trending. So we saw a lot of this around the BLM movement. We see a lot of social media things that came out, people jumping on movements, but it didn't tie to their work and it actually backlash in a big way. People would say, well, let's look at your management. What is the makeup and diversity of that management team? And is it reflective of this social media post? It feels pretty much like you are taking advantage of a moment to be trendy. So doing the work ahead, then your social media manager knows who they are and what they stand for on these things and they can be really authentic and make it a lot easier for your marketing team to execute in those moments.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Performative actions are exhausting and do more harm than good. We want to also avoid handing a Pepsi to a cop during a protest perhaps. Really bad image. I think that's exemplary of when the guardrails, even SNL made fun of that where if you saw that, the director was calling up going, this is this

great commercial. And people were like, don't do that. Don't do that. Please don't do that. And I think we don't have enough of that sometimes with some of these big splashy campaigns. But what's interesting is that when you kind of even take it into smaller businesses trying to navigate this, this can happen. If you see the cake shops and all these types of things, understanding your values and doing it in a way that is building it in an inclusive and equitable way is very key. We've had a lot of conversations about the space itself that you operate in. So how can companies make a more inclusive space for these conversations? Because at the end of the day, you might just have a CEO, I just want to sell a granola bar. I don't want to have a position on X, Y, and Z, but they're going to have to because they're people. So how do they navigate that part?

Natalie Byrne:

Well, that's really going to be who survives. Companies that are..

Tim Sarrantonio:

The market will decide.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Right.

Natalie Byrne:

Yes. In the next 10 years, that's who's going to make it and not. And the point you're making is so important. This has to come from the top. Not to say that there aren't so many movements that are being started in companies from really smart people who are fighting to say, hey, this is important and making these impact things rise. You need a CEO who's committed to this. It's the first thing that people notice and it's a very good way to get out to this point in your career. So I think that being able to say, Hey, I could use some help with this. Call me. I love working with people who are maybe in the dark on this and want to learn. You build teams within your team. This doesn't need to be one person. This isn't just one person at the top has to feel alone. And there's also ways that the board should be involved. This is a whole ecosystem. I actually get really irked when people talk about the evil corporation, like companies are made of people. It's like a city. Let's talk about the whole ecosystem and how it can work for us.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And honestly, when you look at change, I mean culture change can take a year or two years, three years to happen at a grassroots and rolling upward. But the truth is from the top down, you can make that happen much quicker. You can go in like Darren Walker did it Ford and just turn the knob and say, you know what? We're going in this direction. This is how we're going to operate. This is how we're going to talk. This is the lexicon, this is the structure, this is the brand. And I think it's a really interesting thing is that top down really does matter. And that's kind of what I think CGI has done to bring it back to why we're here. I mean, they're starting to give language to people that is actually helping a lot of leaders here connect the dots that maybe are sometimes harder when like you said, you're in your place where you're putting your head down and you're just trying to get the impact through giving better words, better structure, better connections.

Natalie Byrne:

You just made a really important point, and I don't want you to skip it. The importance of narrative and words matter really. Words matter.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Words matter. They do.

Natalie Byrne:

And thinking about the being thoughtful about them, spending time on who you are and what you say. And to your point on leadership, being able to decide what their language is, I just think that that's so powerful.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Welcome back. We are continuing our interviews with commitment makers here at the Clinton Global Initiative. This time they've given us the glass box.

Kerrin Mitchell:

It's very fancy. Compared to the other locations which are side corners, this is quite fancy for a quite important order.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So what we're going to continuing crossing our fingers that the audio's stellar. And so we have two stellar guests with us though. Very excited. Why don't you folks introduce yourselves because just the accent alone is going to entice people.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

So I go first. Yeah. So my name is Kyran O'Mahoney. I'm the Chief Technology Officer for the National Account for the Blind of Ireland. And I'm also CEO and founder of a company called Inclusion and Accessibility Labs.

Chris White:

I'm Kyran's boss,

Kyran O'Mahoney:

I actually, I knew you were going to say that.

Tim Sarrantonio:

We can put show.

Chris White:

So I'm the group chief executive, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland. We're the national body for rehabilitation support for Cradle the Grave people for 55,000 people sight loss in the Republic of Ireland. And I'm a board member of Accessibility, Inclusion and Accessibility Labs with Kyran, who is the talent here in the building.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And what brings you to CGI?

Chris White:

So I came here last year and I was blown away by the people that I met and the can-do commitment to action. So we all go to conferences and events and I just thought what was unique from my experience from being at CGI was this, let's go and do something. And I know the theme this year is keep going, but actually it's one of the bug bears of my life where we do go and talk a lot and actually everyone goes and says, well, our commitment to action is to go and talk about it again in a week's time. So from our perspective...

Tim Sarrantonio:

Let's continue the conversation.

Chris White:

Yeah, I'm like point and direct. Let's go and do something. So that's how we've changed. Over the last 10 years, I've been chief exec of the NCBI. We've done a huge amount of really innovative, groundbreaking things by not thinking too much about it to be honest. Just like let's give it a go. If it doesn't work, we'll try something else. But let's not get bogged down in too much strategic thinking of management consultants doing this, that and the other. Let's just give this a go, give it a crack and see how we get on with it. That's my motivation.

Kerrin Mitchell:

How long have you guys, were you there from the beginning? 2014, right? Or so is when you guys got started?

Chris White:

2014 is when I took over at NCBI. Kyran's been with us since 2018.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

It 2019. Yeah, 2019. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Where did the work when you were joining, where was the state of the problem? What was the problem then and what have we seen?

Kyran O'Mahoney:

Well, actually I don't even think when I joined the National Council of Blind in 2019, I don't think people really understood what the problem was or that there was a problem. And just to give you some context, my background isn't in the public sector or the charity sector or the NGO or nonprofits. I worked in technology for many, many years and I grew up in Ireland with site loss. So I actually used to go to NCBI as a service user or someone that looked for rehabilitation by support. So technology for me throughout my own personal life has been a huge enabler. And when I joined NCBI, I think even in NCBI at the time, we knew that technology could be bigger and we were trying to define what that is. But I

think how this has evolved specifically in tradition, this initiative that we've set up together, myself and Chris called Inclusion on Accessibility Labs, is that technology is an enabler for all people with disabilities.

It's not just something for people with site loss. And the more organizations that we talk to around Ireland and then internationally and now in the United States, when you talk to all of the people that directly support those with disabilities or people with disabilities themselves, technology is always the biggest enabler. So Chris and I really wanted to do something in this space to see how can we do something at a global level because the other huge benefit of technology is it scales globally. So we started looking into it more and more and the one thing that constantly came up over and over again as we talk to people with disabilities is how they're excluded from the digital world. And that's, we said, this is something we really need to find a solution for this because there's 1.3 billion people globally with a disability. Of the top 1 million websites, less than 2% are accessible to people with disabilities. And just to restate that, less than 2%, so for effectively one in six people, they're excluded from the digital age. And we said, frankly, that's not good enough. We need to do something really big in this space. And that's one of the reasons we're here with the Clinton Global Initiative as well.

Kerrin Mitchell:

When you talk about this idea of an inclusive digital revolution, what are just our listeners if you will, get a sense of some of the projects that typically you'll run against? What are the types of things that you've seen be really successful to ground this conversation.

Chris White:

Well, I'll start and provide all the expertise after I give a general flavor of things. So we do things like we've done a digital day in a life. So somebody with a site loss, just general, they get up and what do they do? They check their Facebook accounts not accessible. They'll try and use their banking app or their banking, try and log on to how much money they've got or don't have in the bank. Banking app is not accessible. Website's not accessible. They'll go and say, try and order some food. We're just coming out of that covid thing where you had to be having your food delivered from supermarkets, not accessible. Trying to go, okay, well I'm going to try and look for a new job. We looked at 629 different recruitment agencies in Ireland. Not one single one was digitally accessible. And then you wonder why people with disabilities are not in employment.

You go through that journey of your day that we all take for granted. It's second nature. It's not even something that you consider. And then when you look at the individual steps that somebody with disability has to go through to participate equally and with a level of equity in that digital life that we all lead, you quickly realize every step they make is a barrier that we, through our own lack of thinking, no one's actively going to discriminate against people with disabilities. It is lack of thought. They are being excluded time and time and time again by that simple thing of thoughtlessness.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

I've worked in, as I mentioned earlier, I've worked in tech for many, many years across large organizations and ran teams and teams of developers. And as I said, I grew up with site loss and I've never spoken to or led a team of developers or engineers and said to them, let's not make this accessible. If you were to say to an engineer today we're going to complete this product or this feature or whatever, and we want, one of our criteria is to be fully accessible. No engineer ever says no to that. But what tends to happen is over projects get time constrained. And the accessibility features go from version one to version 1.1 to oh, we must get to that. Oh, well, there's a new feature that X person

wants. And ultimately then as we were talking just before we came in here to record, is that what tends to happen is everyone is always about to fix it.

And we have talked to literally thousands of organizations and people are responsible for products and websites and so many people. Yeah, well, I'll look at that when I do the next thing. And part of being here today in Clinton Global Initiative is number one, we're making our commitment to action around making the world digitally equal. But what we really want to talk to as many people as possible for them to make their own commitment for their own digital property and say that it's okay to not be aware of it, but it's not okay if you are aware of it and you choose to ignore it. And that's the most important thing. So I think being at a platform like Clinton Global, and it is a global problem we've checked is that you can actually say, listen, I know this is not talked about, but so many people with disabilities are just being left behind and it's good enough.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Well, it's such an interesting time right now. We're at an inflection point. A lot of new technology is being rethought, LLMs are out. You have all these things innovating everywhere. And to your point, leaving it out once again is it's an opportunity for us in this point of reinvention to actually show up.

Tim Sarrantonio:

What's interesting, just to build on that and then queue it up for getting into more of how this comes alive too, the conversation we had earlier with GitLab, CEO talked about she was focusing on artificial intelligence and how speed doesn't necessarily mean good.

This is one in particular that I think that technology companies, they prioritize speed over accessibility.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

I have a wonderful example of that I was asking, I won't name the company just for, because they're a global tech entity, and we were talking about generative AI and natural learning models and all those wonderful things. And they were kind of joking and they were saying, well, we looked at blockchain that really didn't really come to a lot, but a lot of people got very focused on it and now it's very much generative AI. And I said, well, you guys do know that your user management as in the ability to sign into your platform, which is probably the first thing they did 20 years ago, is not accessible to people with disabilities. And there's always that...

Tim Sarrantonio:

You're automatically locking out a bunch of people.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

So as wonderful as generative AI is or developing a new model that's out there for that, if users one in six and actually latest research says it's up to 40% of people that interact in the digital world need some level of assistive support, because don't forget that 1.3 billion people may have registered with a disability, but not everyone wants to identify as someone with a disability. They may just have dyslexia or a different type of...

Chris White:

Could be temporary.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

It could be temporary. That's a very good point. So the latest research says that up to 40% of people that interact with a product, a piece of technology needs some level of assistive support. So can you imagine sitting down as a product owner in an organization and say, you know what? Let's just go 60% of the way. We're going to exclude another 40% of our potential customer base. That makes a lot of sense. And what I'd like to emphasize here is that, and particularly to the audience that are listening today, as someone that now understands digital accessibility at its most basic level, it's not a very complicated thing to fix. Could you assign one sprint as part of your development cycle to make sure that you can release digital accessibility and increase your potential audience by 40%? That's a no brainer.

Chris White:

Really good example of that. The Kyran would be in Ireland we did, obviously we've all been through covid. So Covid Tracker app was produced by the health service by the government in Ireland. They produced it for everybody and blindness and social distancing is a difficult thing anyway, but we were asked to look at the app for Covid 19, the government released it was completely inaccessible and Kyran and his team worked with it and actually got it up to an internationally best practice standard. And then that was sold by the development company that we worked with across the world.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

And actual fact that the one released in Ireland was the third in the world. And it was then, as Chris mentioned, it was used as a template. We even did all the accessibility testing for the Arabic version as well. So in terms of a global impact, this is exactly what I think speaks so well to Clinton Global, is that because a company, and actually it was a wonderful engagement because the very first time we were in a phone call with the development company that we're working on the Covid Track app, one person showed up and it was like an engineer. It was like, just go fix this accessibility. And by the end of the sequence as the development cycle, and they're going through their final fixes, there was about 70 developers in the call going, wow, I've always wondered how we fix this. This is actually brilliant.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Well no, it's real because to your point, being able to do it, I mean upfront in some of these new technologies, what a great opportunity to get it in at the very beginning. The origin story of each new technology has this sort of idea of it. But to your point, I think we do tend to overcomplicate things in light of this perfect solution. And I'll say Fluxx, the company that I obviously am a part of, I feel like you want to do it a hundred percent, but even 80% is better than zero. Whatever it is, there's always a step you can take. And I think that's...

Chris White:

Perfection is the enemy of good.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And I think that's something that we all have to remember as technologists too, because this is, to your point, an omitted population until that's even handled.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So on a practical, because our audience is a mix of individual nonprofits, technologists, things like that, let's talk to the technologists explicitly, okay, because make sure my product owner hears this. Okay, Anna, this is for you and Nolan as well. But what does it look like in practice? Because some of the times people might, I always think, and it's not accessibility, but the terrible hack, when people would say to us, oh, can you make the forms that you have bilingual? And people would go, oh, we'll just throw a Google translate on it. That's a hack. How do we avoid that? What is kind of your playbook for making this come alive in a really practical way?

Kyran O'Mahoney:

I think that the first thing I'd always be cautious of is that there is organizations out there, commercial organizations who have basically come up with tools that say, if you put our tool on your website, it will fix your digital accessibility. Do not do that If they're saying that that is a case where you can put a plugin or...

Tim Sarrantonio:

You mean that little circle widget doesn't solve everything?

Kyran O'Mahoney:

No. It really does not. There's actually a petition signed by, I think it's over a hundred thousand people. I could be wrong on that, but with people with disabilities said, please don't use that because it actually breaks the assistive software that we need. There is a couple of companies that, I won't name people by name, but people with disabilities tend to hate them. We're taking a different approach. So to the product owners here on the call, on the podcast that are listening, to the Scrum Masters, to whomever's, what I would say to you is there's a set of standards that's out there. It's called the WCHE standards. It's well known. They are hard to interpret, but there's companies that exist like Inclusion and Accessibility Labs that are founded by people with someone with a disability, that are led by people with disabilities, that employ people with disabilities, that are supported by a wonderful organization like the National Accounts for the Blind who want to make things better.

So what we say is, our mantra is we want to make the world digitally accessible, one website, mobile application at a time. How do we do that? We offer advice, we offer services, we offer all those things that makes it easy for people who are managing teams that they want to just get the product out the door. We will show you how to get it right from the start. The second thing is we're actually looking to apply the likes of generative AI and machine learning to look at the context of a website. And that always tends to be the piece that's missing from a lot of these tools because you cannot contextually interpret something. Lemme give you an example. So let's say a lot of the tools that exist such as those little plugins will say images missing alternative texts. So for someone who is blind, when it gets to that image, it will say image, no alternative text, which means nothing.

Or it might say image of two people, but it could be the Clinton family, you know what I mean? Or it could be anyone. It doesn't, doesn't really tell you much. But in this age of generative AI where you can use machine learning and all those fun things. So what we're looking at is how we can actually take a lot of those standards and make them simple for people like product owners and things of that. So we're creating our own algorithm around that that will use machine learning, that will lose use generative AI But as I said earlier, really look at it from the perspective of someone with a disability. And there is multiple types and there's multiple standards that are out there. But if you set yourself a goal in any piece of product design to say, I want to make this the best experience for everyone, and it's

understanding what the everyone is, that's real inclusion because that 40% that I referenced earlier, they perceive things differently.

They understand things differently, they operate products differently. And a product should also be robust enough to be used by everyone. So what we're doing is we're looking at our own tool and our own technology very much from that perspective. So rather putting an icon on the webpage that effectively doesn't do anything and breaks stuff, we're actually going to say, well, if we look at this website through that perspective, how can we create a good user experience for people with disabilities? And isn't that what inclusion is? Because it includes people that don't need assistive technology, but also the people that do. And that's our approach from iLabs

Chris White:

And we've developed our own software as a service that actually checks continually, really gives a really interactive experience of how accessible your website continues to be because it continued to change on a daily basis.

Kerrin Mitchell:

That's fascinating. What's the SaaS? Tell us a little bit more about that.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

Yeah, so we've been working on, so first of all, the engine that I described there is really the core piece around how we look at it, but it actually grows bigger than that because if you're constantly looking at websites, so as I mentioned earlier, my background is more in tech. So what I would've done is worked on in companies where efficiency was incredibly important. So we've created this beautiful engine, but it also runs incredibly efficiently. So we can literally check a website in real time for accessibility issues that could be generated and then provide an alert to whoever's responsible for that website. So a big problem as well is that you would have people uploading blogs every day, news content or just generally maintaining a website. Any one of those changes could cause a disability or an issue from a digital accessibility standpoint.

So our tool actually monitors for that and says, on X date, here's an alert, here's the type of disabilities that have been affected. Here's the standards possibly that you may have, may have, they call it a violation of the WCAG. And we also then, which is so, so important, we say, well, here's the standard, here's the disability type that has been affected, but also here's the exact way it needs to be fixed to create a good user experience for people with disabilities. And that's the distinction that we have. So we're hoping to be ready with the first version of ours, which by the way is fully digitally accessible by the end of...

Tim Sarrantonio:

We would be surprised if it wasn't.

Chris White:

And we'd be very disappointed.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

In a little bit of honesty. Those little blue icons aren't actually digitally accessible. But by the end of Q1 next year, we want to continue growing this technology out. And that's something that we're actively looking for at the moment.

Chris White:

It's understanding that authenticity piece as well though. So we are coming from the sector, we are part of the sector. We're not selling into the sector. We are actually part of it and actually developing a tool that will be valued and used by the sector and pointed to the sector. And we've had some great conversations here at Clinton Global about why that's really important to our community and actually represent it.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Well, it's mission driven, values driven. It aligns well. I think that's the thing is that you're speaking a language where is built for and by the people that champion it. So that's brilliant. And I think that really that's the thing that resonates when you talk about CGI, the idea that the storytelling is a part of it, but it's backed up by, to your point, like quantitative structures that show that these things are important to drive.

Tim Sarrantonio:

The commitments and the action on the commitments is what's really...

Chris White:

I think it's also the quality of the people here. So you've got some really, really clever committed,

Kerrin Mitchell:

The Pope.

Chris White:

... driven people. Yeah, my wife. So I think that gathering - our boss as well, but that gathering of those that commitment, action, energy brains drive is powerful.

Kerrin Mitchell:

If you were to wave a magic wand, what would be the outcome maybe a year from now that you would say, I'm glad we went to CGI, because we, tell me what the vision is.

Chris White:

So I think the vision for us would be that digital equality comes right up the agenda. And I think for being at CGI this year, and it's been amazing as if they have last year as well, but for actual disability to get on the main stage, actually having some really high profile commitments to action that are there. With Chelsea, we talk about health equity and the importance of that. Digital equality affecting everybody. It underpins everything. It underpins everything in the digital age, it underpins everything. The direction that we're going in. We're not going backwards. Digital is the root of the journey that we're on. So I

would think in a year's time, Kyran on a main stage with Matt Damon saying water.org is the most accessible NGO in the developing world will be a great statement.

Tim Sarrantonio:

You heard it here first folks.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

Yeah, I think my wife would really like that picture, to be honest.

Kerrin Mitchell:

She'd frame it.

Chris White:

Cutting your face out.

Kyran O'Mahoney:

I would just be cut out one side, but for me, I would certainly echo everything Chris had said. I think that sometimes people will say to you, well, we know what the problem is, we know what the solution is. We're trying to be the entity and the organization that drives awareness and drives the solution. We have a solution that's there. And really for me, and this might speak to your audience still, what we're saying is that scale is the thing that we want to bring. We're going to need support and scale to us at the moment is we can have the most amazing product in the world. We have the most amazing piece of technology in the world, but if no one knows about it, we're not achieving our commitment to actions. So people who are listening today, I'd love you to reach out to us, whether that's purely to use the tool or to offer their commitment to say, we are going to start this journey with you. We are going to make sure that our products are digitally accessible, or if there are ways that they can support us by bringing this product to market in a quicker fashion, we would love to have conversations around that as well.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, we're very thankful for you joining us here, and we'll make sure to include that on how to follow up with you folks in our show notes as well.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Thank you guys today for your time. Thank you very much. What a great chat.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So we're continuing our commitment maker conversations here at the Clinton Global Initiative. And so from our little corner of the Morgan room, we're excited to introduce to you Ellie Britani of the GitLab Foundation. Ellie, tell us who you are and what brought you here today. We're going to start with some basics.

Ellie Bertani:

Well, first of all, thank you for having me. It's a real pleasure to be here at CGI and to spend time with you. I've heard a lot about your podcast and I've been following you, so thank you for having me on. As you said, I'm Ellie. I lead our foundation, the GitLab Foundation, and we are relatively new player. We

were launched almost exactly a year ago with a mission to increase people's lifetime earnings on a global scale. And what that really means for us is focusing on economic mobility and helping people achieve a living wage for themselves and their families so that they can improve their lives and the lives in their communities. A few things to know about us, we bring this commitment to life by focusing on everything from education to employment on that spectrum. So how can we improve training, educational outcomes, employment and systems change to create economic development and mobility opportunities for people primarily in the US, East Africa, and Latin America.

Kerrin Mitchell:

As you look at this amazing commitment to action that I know you're coming here and we're able to announce yesterday, which is very exciting, $10 million. Tell us a little bit the genesis, the intent, the vision around this.

Ellie Bertani:

Great. So our commitment to action is really focused on the use of emerging technologies such as AI, but also things like cloud computing and advanced data science to support nonprofits, social enterprises and partnerships to drive economic mobility and opportunity. And we've left the commitment fairly open. That could mean a lot of things to a lot of different groups. We are really interested in creative ideas and partnerships in particular between technical experts and nonprofits that may not necessarily have that expertise to explore new solutions, be it in education and training, job matching, career pathing, or really sort of out there ideas, things we may not have thought about that people may want to bring forward and test and learn around. As part of this commitment, we've actually already launched this year a $2 million AI for Economic Opportunity Fund. We launched that in July. So our commitment is an extension of this over the next three years, and we're very excited that just last week we closed our first round of applicants, have over 200 applicants with all sorts of interesting creative ideas and how we might test and use AI to drive economic opportunity.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So I know you're still in the applicant stage, but is there at least one or two that you can share that really caught your eye.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Or trends.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Or the trends? Yeah, because we've de anonymize it, right? We got to aggregate.

Ellie Bertani:

We got to aggregate, protect the innocent.

Tim Sarrantonio:

After we're putting in the privacy controls. We understand the black box and how it was designed, all that type of stuff. Is there something that kind of draws that out? Yeah,

Ellie Bertani:

Yeah, I'll give you...

Tim Sarrantonio:

We're interested.

Ellie Bertani:

I'll give a couple of examples, one that I can talk about publicly and then one that probably I should protect the innocent and wait until we get a little further down. So as part of our work, we have formed an AI for funders roundtable. For funders who are really interested in AI for economic opportunity and workforce development. We have 40 funders at the table exploring different issues on a monthly basis and bringing in experts. Recently we had the chief engineer of Khan Academy come and speak about their recent launch of Conmigo, which is an AI-based tutor that has been trained to use the Socratic method to train and teach students as part of their ongoing coursework in Khan Academy. And it was fascinating to hear how they had developed it in partnership with OpenAI, who also partners with us and really get down the nitty gritty of how the training occurred, what data sets they used, how they thought about doing it in a responsible and de-biased way.

And one of the questions we asked them when they came into present was, what would it take for this to be a public good? What would it take for this to be free? Because right now they have to charge for the platform that's only $11 a month for users, but that's a cost, that's a barrier for many people that they hope will use it. And so I think that's an example of the type of innovation that we would love to see expanded and be available to all. And I think there's a real role for philanthropy in being some of those initial de-risking dollars to help push it out and hopefully achieve a sustainable run rate where they can give it for free to anyone who might want it.

Tim Sarrantonio:

What's really exciting about what I'm hearing here, that's part of a larger trend that we're seeing is also the baking in at the ground floor, even in the education on the ethical components on how this is built. Maybe we're finally all those years of history channels, how it's made just playing and people watching it as paying off, and they actually care about how things are put together. But with this in particular, it's critical.

Ellie Bertani:

It's critical.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's not just a fun thing that you're trying to figure out and go, oh, I wonder how my phone works. It's like, no, your phone could manipulate your world now.

Ellie Bertani:

Right. And we've seen, I think a lot of the challenges and concerns of unleashing technology at such a rapid pace without understanding the potential downside. We saw it with social media and all the negative effects. And so I believe and hope that philanthropists, policy makers, those who invest in and care about the public good, have learned from some of the mistakes or challenges and are trying to get on the front side of it. We've certainly heard a lot about that here at CGI this year, the session where we announced our commitment to action, really, I thought thoughtfully addressed a lot of the potential

concerns. I worry about the pace of innovation and can policymakers get ahead of it, but I have some hope hearing some of the conversations here. But yeah, no, you're right. It's incredibly important that we think about bias and safety and privacy, how the data sets are developed, where the data comes from, how the AI is trained on those. There are a lot of implications that need to be thought very carefully.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And when you look at where GitLab can play in bridging those gaps or the technological disparity, obviously concerns around causing even more disparity to exist by virtue of building models around potentially bias sources, all the things that we all know about, where do you see some of the bridges starting to occur maybe in the funds that you're trying to put forward? Or do you have some theories or theories of change rather?

Ellie Bertani:

Well, I'll talk about how we intend to mitigate the risk. So as we're receiving applicants into our fund, one of the things our fund is requiring is an articulation by applicants of what they see as the potential risks and then their plans to manage or mitigate those risks. So we're trying to address it on the front side, showing an awareness and driving an awareness that it's something that has to be planned for. We also have an advisory board that's made up of technical experts as well as policy experts, academics, as well as funders who will be evaluating those plans and also identifying are all the risks covered. So OpenAI and our partnership, they're bringing their engineering team as partners for the winners in particular, but also in assessing are the plans addressing the needed components and are they realistic? So it's a little bit of how we're thinking about it. I think there's a lot more work to be done. We do believe in the opportunities though that the technology presents. I'll say there are significant risks. There's also significant upsides. We believe in learning by doing in a contained environment, experimenting, trying to understand the downstream implications. But I really fundamentally believe that unless you're working with the technology, it's really hard to understand it and to understand what the implications could be.

Tim Sarrantonio:

One of the things that the work that I, in particular and why we have a podcast together, is that I focus a lot on the small to midsize part of the nonprofit sector. Now, the nonprofit sector alone, if you count healthcare is 10% of the entire labor force of the United States. So I'd be interested to hear for a lot of, especially small to mid-sized organizations, 97% of nonprofits are making under 5 million in revenue. They're using three to five different data sources alone. And when we come up with our grand plans to give back and stuff like that, it was very emblematic what I saw where we had this big idea. And then one of the very first support tickets I saw right after thinking about all these things that we want to do is I don't know how to log into my system. So the point I'm trying to make or question I have is how can we support populations that either don't have access because of just the physical spaces that they're in, rural areas, so the digital divide, but then also people who have access to these things to not be scared shitless of them and to actually be able to, yes, we can curse on the podcast, but that's the question is digital divide people who have access but are just really unable to know how to begin with this. Where do you see things going on the education piece here?

Ellie Bertani:

I'll say, I see there are a lot of leaders in the nonprofit sector, and I'm thinking first and foremost about Jobs for the Future, which is one of our key partners that are really focused on AI education as part of the solution, not just for the public, but in particular for nonprofits, their leaders bringing that expertise so that the nonprofit sector isn't left behind.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Because if you solve them, you actually can use that as a benchmark for a lot of different other types of missions and verticals and business types and things like that.

Ellie Bertani:

I also have a lot of hope that a lot of the scientists, the computer scientists who are doing this kind of work, who are building the models, who are experts in machine learning and the computing power that we're using here, a lot of them seem to come with great concern for an alignment trying to address these issues on the front side. I'm really sort of inspired. One of the speakers yesterday, the computer scientist I think really brought that message home. They're being very thoughtful about the risks and trying to head them off, and there's a huge concern about the monetization and will that overshadow all of the good that this technology can provide us. But I'm optimistic often when I hear the scientists behind it talk about it and how they're thinking about it and trying to get ahead of it.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Well, I mean something that is very interesting, it's obviously with OpenAI coming in and making it open source it, it's not like this just showed up overnight. This has been going on 2015, 2016. Some of the investments remained barred, things of that nature were the thought that Google had, the reason they delayed so late, and obviously this, I'm just saying for the listeners, is because they were trying to be thoughtful and how they approached it. So I think the truth is now that it's in the power of the masses, how do you then have governance, whether in structures? I mean, can governance exist? I don't know. But how do you have structures that help?

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, I believe so, yes.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I think you can. But governance in the form of government will be slower than perhaps industry based and things of that nature. So I think that's the thing that's super interesting is how do we, especially in the social sector, take that and again, put our best practice forward. Fundraising AI, you guys are doing some of this, right?

Tim Sarrantonio:

We're doing it on the Fundraising.AI side where...

Kerrin Mitchell:

So he's fundraising and foundations.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yeah, I'm more on the individual giving side. And so the ethical and kind responsible artificial intelligence framework applied to the nonprofit sector, but we need that for everything. We need that nuance. So the data scientists have guidance to know what's happening for people that are actually going through these situations. We've heard from several healthcare, actually the panel where we first got introduced healthcare, it's several people. Huge opportunity there. And they were very intentional. Everybody there on pointing out, that was the very first set of questions that people came at them with.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And a lot of it was higher ed. And that was actually very interesting to me too, that that was a lot of the endowment structures that are in place, that are funding VCs that are funding, it's almost all the way upstream. You're seeing it all the way down to the nonprofit.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, what's interesting is there's a book by Amy Webb called The Big Nine, and it talks about how the convergence of tech companies, government and higher education, and it's not good. And the issue is that the third sector, the social good layer around it is, I think what was missing.

Ellie Bertani:

Or is mature, right?

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's the accountability step. Because if I'm Harvard or MIT, and my money's tied up in all these other things that have all this weight of history behind it, that it's very hard to undo that, even if there's a lot of evidence that shows even like, well-intentioned standards are very difficult to rip out and change. It's very expensive to change that. And so that's why it's important we get this right now because those standards are going to be very, very difficult to undo later on if they're done wrong. We saw that with social media for instance. There was no standard. So you could see either way, you have to find this delicate balance. Now, I'll get off my monologuing, but when you hear that, what's been your observance on that convergence of all these different actors coming together?

Ellie Bertani:

So a couple of things. First, I continue to be concerned about the speed, the pace where the private sector could quickly leave behind the public and social sectors, both in terms of expertise, well, mainly in terms of expertise. I'm optimistic insofar as the big companies are coming and asking for regulation. How rare is that? That doesn't happen. So there's a level of...

Tim Sarrantonio:

I hope it's not PR.

Ellie Bertani:

I don't think it's, I don't think it's,

Kerrin Mitchell:

I think they understand the gravity of it.

Ellie Bertani:

There is not much to gain there.

Tim Sarrantonio:

You know I'm the downing Thomas here.

Ellie Bertani:

That's okay.

Kerrin Mitchell:

No, I think they understand the gravity of it, but I think that the reality too is even if it is for PR, it's still happening, which is in a myopic way, like thank goodness.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So okay, worried about the pace, but why do you not think it's marketing spin? What's showing us that it's real? Because easy for Elon Musk to say something and it's like you roll your eyes.

Ellie Bertani:

I mean, I love another example of an industry that has come asking for regulation in the last 30 years. It doesn't happen.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, wait a minute. Let's see. Car industry? No. The healthcare industry, no. Okay. I think that's a good point.

Ellie Bertani:

And I think, again, I think it's being learned from past mistakes and some of the personalities are different. I don't know. It's surprised me too, but I think it's really important and I'm grateful that it's happening. I worry that our politicians aren't steeped in this and don't have the expertise, and I have to assume and hope they're surrounding themselves with bright advisors who can help see the path.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, you're here.

Ellie Bertani:

Well, thank you. They haven't called me yet, but when they do.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, that's why we're doing the podcast

Kerrin Mitchell:

I thought you and Chelsea had dinner last night. It's alright.

So tell us a little bit about where this vision goes. So you've got the 10 million commitment and to the degree that obviously there is a longer theory of change your playing out. Tell us where you want it to be in five years or what that sort of outlook is.

Ellie Bertani:

Yeah. Well, because we're a relatively new foundation, we're very much in learning mode as well. So for us, I think of it a bit as this is a great bet to make. We think the implications are huge, the time is right, it's a moment of action and we want to be part of that learning experience. So it's a little hard for me to know where it'll be in five years or in 10 years.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Or six months for that matter. I'm sure with the world...

Tim Sarrantonio:

We didn't know what anything was going to look like in 2023. The fundraising.AI initiative only blew up in April because of Chat GPT coming out. So it is a little hard, but you've got to make some sort of...

Kerrin Mitchell:

More of like a general sort of directional notional.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's hazy, but what does a bright future look like?

Ellie Bertani:

A bright future looks like a set of nonprofit leaders and organizations ideally partnering with private sector and public sector because we really believe fundamentally in the partnership model and the cross sectoral model, we

Kerrin Mitchell:

We do too. Actually at Fluxx, our company. Those are our two. We've got government and foundations and the structure of the other is the gaps that need to be offset. I'm with you.

Ellie Bertani:

So we see more of those partnerships forming, more cross conversation expertise flowing in both directions and real tools that are out in the market being applied and used that are helping people increase their incomes and improve their lives, either by helping drive efficiency and growth in really high performing foundation, or excuse me, nonprofits that are using these tools and experimenting and learning how they can be applied effectively or by individuals worldwide who are understanding the opportunities and using them to help improve their businesses, improve their educational outcomes, help them drive higher earnings. So I see AI as a smart bet. One of the unique things about our foundation is we think a lot about return on social impact. We have a very specific way of thinking about that, modeling it, calculating it, measuring it. And we have a hundred x threshold. We are really looking for big moonshot investments where for every dollar we invest, we can achieve a hundred dollars of lifetime earnings for the people that we are helping. And there aren't a lot of those scattered around,

but we think there is high potential in this space. There'll be a lot of failure, but seems to be a smart place to experiment.

Tim Sarrantonio:

That actually was my next question. Who are you looking for? Who are you looking to help apply and participate and stuff like that? Who's a good fit for your vision?

Ellie Bertani:

I think a great fit is an organization. What we're seeing in our applicant pool currently that really excites me is this partnership model where nonprofits big or small are coming with technical expertise. Sometimes it's from university partnerships, sometimes it's from for-profit, sometimes it's volunteer experts who are willing to contribute to the work. Again, I think there are a lot of scientists out there who have that spirit of public good and want to contribute in that way, who have enough technical expertise that it feels like they really have solid ground to stand on, but are really thinking broadly about how AI could be applied. And I think that there's a thousand flowers could bloom from that. It could really look a lot of different ways.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Thank you Ellie, for joining us today.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I'm recording from the Morgan Press room. We have a corner that we've literally scared everybody else away from so we can do our recordings and we are kicking off our first of several conversations with commitment makers at the Clinton Global Initiative. So we're excited. Kerrin, you've been doing a lot of the work to get us ready for today. So what's happening?

Kerrin Mitchell:

So we are chatting with some folks today, many different, obviously change makers in the community, but focusing on a number of the pillars that of course CGI is looking to push. And in that obviously women, reproductive rights, things of that nature are coming the surface as some of the most important things that we can focus on. We're here today, obviously we have some amazing conversations we'll be getting into. One of the most important ones, rising the service around women, reproductive rights. We have with us two incredible folks, Kathryne and Maya are present with us and I wanted to actually have them introduce themselves and tell us a little about your journey as both of you're coming in and looking at these inspiring and transformative opportunities. Some of the realizations you both have is that obviously there's a lack of diversity in healthcare. So tell me a bit about who you are and what brought you here today. Kathryne, why don't you go first.

Kathryne Cooper:

Hi, thank you for having me. I'm Kathryne Cooper. I am a partner at Jumpstart Nova. Jumpstart Nova as a venture capital firm focused on investing in incredible healthcare founders. But you asked me about myself, so I'll tell you, it's not my favorite thing to talk about. I like highlighting other folks who are doing great work, but I've been an investor for the last seven years, two of which at Jumpstart Nova, our venture capital firm, and five of which as co-director of The Consortium for Technology and Innovation in Pediatrics. Longest name ever, but it focused on pediatric med tech. And I'll do my, I guess background in reverse. So prior to becoming an investor, I worked at early stage healthcare startups.

Prior to that I got an MBA and before that I did three years of medical school before deciding I didn't want to be a practicing clinician. And prior to that I went to Stanford and majored in biology and was pre-med. So I like to joke, what do you do with a Stanford degree in three quarters of med school after you decide you don't want to be a doctor? You work in health tech startups and after you do that for a while and you want to think about how do I serve patients on a broader scale, you go into venture and you back those startups that are creating change, including health equity and impact on women and girls for everyone.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Wonderful. And Maya, a little bit of bench warming.

Maya Hardigan:

All right. I will dive in and introduce myself. I am Maya Hardigan, I'm the founder and CEO of Mae. I've been working in healthcare for the better part of 20 years. I started my career in healthcare management consulting. I spent over a decade in corporate healthcare at large healthcare entities. And I think one of the most pervasive learnings from those experiences was a gap in equity in healthcare and also an understanding of the extent to which there were a small few controlling the flow of healthcare dollars to the masses. And I think that we needed more voices to fight for more dollars, more commitment, more services to the masses. And so I had done quite a bit of maternal health nonprofit work over the course of the better part of a decade when I was working in my corporate healthcare roles. Wanted to do something that was a little bit more social impact focused. I think this also coincided with my building and growing my own family. I am a Black woman, I'm a mother of three, and I thought a lot about maternal health inequities specifically for vulnerable populations for Black women. And that was something that I pivoted to change after many, many years in healthcare. And it's really an honor to be doing this work now.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And as we look at those key moments that brought you to obviously your decision to go forward and start really investing more time or money, in the case of obviously Jumpstart, starting a fund to basically make those investments, what are some of those key things that brought you forward that said, I want to start using my capital in this manner, in this way? And maybe Kathryne, you can answer that one.

Kathryne Cooper:

I believe that capital allocation is the most important way to move the needle in terms of investing in early stage healthcare technologies that will be transformative to lives across America and the world. And when I say capital allocation, I mean directly writing checks to founders like Maya that will then go on and build companies that thrive and impact patients on a broad scale. How am I personally motivated by this? So I started my career wanting to be a doctor and also in medical school when I shifted from that into healthcare startups, it was kind of a mind shift. I went from wanting to have this one-on-one direct relationships with patients in terms of their health to then taking a step back on companies that would have an impact on lots of patients. And if I look at venture capital, I've taken even more of a step back in terms of a macro view. But by allocating millions of dollars to these companies, I think we've actually impacted many more patient lives than I would have as an individual practicing physician.

Kerrin Mitchell:

That's wonderful. And obviously Maya, as you looked at partnerships, this is incredibly compelling in terms of its alignment of vision values and such. But tell us a little bit about that partnership with the Jumpstart folks.

Maya Hardigan:

The partnership with Jumpstart Nova for us has been critical, right? And when I think about Mae, we are a venture backed for-profit company. We are also a company that's focused on social impact and we're a mission-driven company. And there's a really interesting dynamic in venture capital where there's very often a push to perform, a push to deliver financially. And of course we have to do those things, but we also have to make sure that we are working with investors who understand the lifeblood of our business and who understand our why and who understand the importance of serving the community that we serve. And so I think Jumpstart Nova in that sense has been a wonderful fit. And I think we're very privileged as a company to have mission aligned investors who are pushing us obviously to perform on the business side, but also pushing us to make that social impact, pushing us to deliver the change that we collectively believe in. And we're really honored to have those sorts of partners.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Awesome. And as we're here obviously at CGI, a lot of these are complex, complex problems requiring complex solutions that are looking at 5, 10 years. I mean, what brings you guys here today? I mean, so actually I'll start with Maya. What brings you here? Why are you excited? What do you see as the opportunity here?

Maya Hardigan:

Yeah, I mean one of the things that gets me excited to be here is really just a focus and an emphasis on solution building. And this is something that we as a company talk about all the time and talk about across our community of investors is that in many cases we know what to do in healthcare, right? We have clinically established interventions, we know that they work, we know that many of those interventions live in community. The thing that we don't have as a path to scaling them, right? Very often it's a path to putting them on, really getting them, sorry, can I repeat this?

Kerrin Mitchell:

Totally.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Of course.

Maya Hardigan:

It is putting them on a path to reimbursement. It's ensuring that we have partners and relationships that can help us get to the next stage of the business, always with the goal of getting these clinically established interventions, which in many cases have existed in our communities for decades and generations to more people and to the communities that most need them.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Awesome. What about you Kathryne? What brings you to CGI?

FLUXX

Kathryne Cooper:

So what brings me to CGI? This is my first time at CGI.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Me too.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Me as well.

Kathryne Cooper:

Yes. Us four. It has been absolutely lovely and incredible experience. But for my first time at CGI, which has been absolutely incredible thus far, I wanted to experience the experience. You don't know what you don't know and you don't know who you're going to meet and what you're going to find here. But what I found is an incredible ecosystem of doers and commitment makers. Those folks who are experts in their industry or their domain, but they're here to collaborate and they're here to learn from others. And for us being healthcare investors, healthcare is a team sport. We need partners from healthcare organizations to founders to payers. It takes everyone to make this system work. And then when we look at the lens of health equity, that is a team sport times two, we can't have enough people working on this. And so I'm here to learn and whether it's from the climate change folks or agriculture or other industries, to understand what they're doing and what's innovative and to take some of those learnings into my own work.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So kind of building on the ecosystem imagery that you were talking about, when you're building these initiatives, you always need to take into account different parts of the environment. So as you've been navigating your own journey, what are things that you had to anticipate that you didn't necessarily as you were building this project together? And maybe hearing from each of you what was surprising about this?

Kathryne Cooper:

So I wouldn't necessarily say that anything in particular was surprising. I think with healthcare, you need to understand that for companies to be funded, companies to thrive in the current US healthcare system, incentives need to be aligned. Whether those are financial incentives or outcome incentives for patients or facilities. And so what we really look for at Jumpstart Nova as investors is we say we back incredible healthcare founders, but what does that mean? We seek founders who are very close to the problem they're solving. And Maya as the CEO of Mae is a fantastic example of that because we believe if founders who are close to the problem they're solving, they will understand it in a way that other folks can't. And there are already enough constraints within the healthcare system to build and understanding these aligned incentives. And what Mae has done as a company, especially well, is to connect these systems and make these systems work for all involved, including patients, including reimbursement, et cetera. And I'll let Maya expand on that.

Maya Hardigan:

Yeah, yeah, I appreciate that thought, Kathryne. I think it's an important one. I think for anyone who has been working in healthcare for a long time, as the two of us have, we understand the extent to which

incentives need to align and we also understand the extent to which they don't today. And so what that means is that we're trying to put pieces of a puzzle together or we're trying to swim upstream and it's difficult. And so it is critically necessary that we're thinking about all of those component pieces. What is it that we need to learn from communities doing impactful work? What is it that we need to be doing and saying on the business side to get healthcare payers aligned around the work that we're doing and aligned around its importance. What do we have to be advocating for on the policy and reimbursement side, right? And there's so many different component pieces that need to come together in order for an initiative to grow and thrive and really grow into its fuller potential. And I think that actually comes into play quite a bit with Mae. And I realize we didn't describe exactly what we do, but Mae is a digital first maternal health equity business, but we're pulling component pieces together, doing what we can to do the best of digital education, connection, risk tracking benefits, coordination with insurance plans so that we're really tackling some of those social determinants oriented barriers to care that get in the way of robust maternal healthcare and we know can help drive positive outcomes forward. But importantly, we're also partnering in community and we're pulling in those established community interventions, things like partnership with community-based doulas to make sure that moms have advocacy support, trusted pathways for education, cultural congruency on their care team, bringing it all together so that we can really fundamentally reshape the experience that Black mothers are having and make the outcomes that they're having less disparate.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Is there a story that you're proud of that exemplifies this?

Maya Hardigan:

Yes. We went live with our first insurance partner about a year ago. This was a Medicaid insurance plan. The very first mother whose birth we supported, right? This was a mother again covered under Medicaid insurance. She was pregnant with twins, she was a Black woman. She ultimately worked with us around doula support, around maternal health education, around benefits coordination. When it was all said and done, we helped to coordinate having a doula that she'd worked with in the prenatal period, also present at her labor and delivery. She birthed both of her twin babies vaginally, which is pretty unprecedented. When we told the plan that they said, holy cow, we can't believe that that happened. It never does. But more importantly than that, this mom went through that experience feeling that her preferences had been honored and knowing that she had that advocacy in the room.

And I think what it meant for us on the business side was that we could also go to that plan and say, do you see now where you invest in services for mothers? We can help deliver a better and a cheaper outcome for moms and we can deliver higher quality of care to moms. But I think generally speaking, this notion of having your birth preferences listened to and respected and being seen in in your care, that should be the norm of what all individuals experience when they're going through this particular life stage. But it is not the norm for many women. It's certainly not the norm for a majority of Black women. And so I think that our experience here is really about making that extraordinary experience something that is more normal, something that's more routine and expected for Black mothers. And I'm very, very proud of that. And I think for that to have been the first mother that we took through the entirety of our experience and for her to have had that outcome, I think that was incredibly validating our team in terms of showing us what we could do and deliver if we put our minds to it.

Kathryne Cooper:

As a partner who leads some of our investments with Jumpstart Nova, it was very, very important to me as a fund that we committed to making an investment in women's health. I had been looking for an investment in the space for call about a year and a half. And then I drilled down from women's health what did I want to focus in? And I wanted to focus on maternal healthcare with an outlook to Black maternal healthcare. I'm a Black woman, I'm an investor. There are very few of us who are partners at firms. And I maybe selfishly wanted to back a solution that I thought would help someone like me when I became a mom and the outcomes are abysmal for Black mothers in the US as we've heard time and again during this conference.

And so what could I do in the seat that I sit in as a capital allocator to help move the needle towards having better outcomes for folks like myself or folks like Maya or folks like the mothers that she serves. And after looking at countless healthcare companies with incredible founders, we settled on an investment in Maya. And to say we settled on is an understatement. We're thrilled to have invested in this company. Our investment closed last Friday, so near five days ago. Very exciting. It is the new new, and I think you really, as a healthcare investor, you put your money where your mouth is, the investments that you make and the impact those companies want to have on the world matters. And yes, we are investing for outsized financial returns, but that doesn't also mean we can't focus on companies that we think will drive outcomes in health equity or other places that are undervalued by society at present, but can have both an impact and incredible financial returns. And I think that's something we found in Mae.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Beautiful.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Thank you both for joining us today.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Thank you.

Maya Hardigan:

Thank you for having us.

Kerrin Mitchell:

So appreciative of your time.