

## **The Inclusion of Nonparents: Critical, Universal, and Overlooked**

### **VoiceAmerica 00:05**

Welcome to New Legacy Radio with Christine Erickson. Are you someone who doesn't have children by circumstance, choice or chance? This show is for our collective community. Are you someone who influences policy, DEI initiatives or media narratives? Learn how you can co-create inclusive, equitable policies and environments for people without children. Now, here's your host, Christine Erickson.

### **Christine Erickson 00:30**

Welcome, everyone, and thank you for listening to New Legacy Radio. I'm Christine Erickson. I'm the founder of New Legacy Institute, which was created to bring together our collective community of people without children to create meaningful change for us all. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the land on which our VoiceAmerica Studio is located, and to name it as the people of the awesome nation. I also want to take a moment to acknowledge my home studio here in California, which is on Chukchansi Tribal land, and we acknowledge those people. Today on our show, we will address the topic of nonparent inclusion and the critical impact and ramifications for that in our society and in our personal lives. We will be speaking with Karen Malone Wright and Laura LaVoie of The Not Mom. And I am going to give you a brief introduction of these two wonderful women that we have with us here today. Karen is the founder of The Not Mom, Karen is childless by chance. And she is determined to end barriers between women who once dreamed of motherhood and those who never did. She started The Not Mom to be the welcoming resource she never found herself. Laura LaVoie is the childfree half of The Not Mom team. She's a freelance writer living in Asheville, North Carolina, and most of her professional work is blog writing and content creation for small businesses and marketing companies. Welcome to both of you. I'm very grateful to have you here today.

### **Laura LaVoie 02:12**

Thank you, Christine.

**Karen Malone Wright** 02:13

We're happy to be here.

**Christine Erickson** 02:15

Thank you. So where would you like to start? Would you like to tell us a bit about how The Not Mom started? And how did you come up with that name? How did you two find each other? What did this journey look like, Karen?

**Karen Malone Wright** 02:29

Well, I'll give The Not Mom part. And let Laura talk about how we found each other. I started The Not Mom in 2012. And just realized we're approaching our 10th anniversary this Mother's Day. I'm an only child who always wanted to have kids because I was always lonely as a child, probably. And so I watched all the shows my generation did like the *Waltons* and *Eight is Enough*. And I dreamed I was gonna have like seven or eight kids. But life laughed at me. And I married at 35. And it was a mistake that didn't last longer than four years. But then I found the love of my life. And we'll be celebrating our 30th anniversary next year.

**Christine Erickson** 03:20

Oh, congratulations!

**Karen Malone Wright** 03:22

Thank you. But unfortunately, about four years after we married, I was diagnosed with type two diabetes. So I was already in my 40s. And the doctors said, Well, you can still try but you are now considered at the highest risk possible. And you'll have to come in instead of like an every month visit, you'll come in every week for nine months. And you'll take different medication and by the time they finished the speech, I was still on the table on the tissue paper crying. And as I've learned since I started The Not Mom, um, that happens to a lot of women where for some reason they literally hear a door slamming, you know, I mean, you thought you had time for whatever reason and suddenly you don't. The internet at that time was full of chat

rooms. It was sort of new, and there were chat rooms for infertility or for IVF. But I really couldn't find anything that fit me. And ultimately, when I did find them, they were so siloed. And I wondered well, what about the women who never truly did? It seems rare, but I wondered about the women who never wanted children. And the more I did research, the more I realized how much the two ends had in common. They just didn't see it for themselves. So I hoped The Not Mom could get them to do that.

**Christine Erickson** 04:42

Beautiful. Thank you. And how did you two start working together? How did you meet?

**Karen Malone Wright** 04:51

It was all Laura.

**Laura LaVoie** 04:54

Yeah, it was fairly random. 10 years ago I started... I quit my job and I decided to do content writing to be a writer full time. And as I was starting out my career writing, what I was discovering was, especially at the time, there was the huge, huge market for, quote, "mommy blogs." And every brand and every agency was looking for Mommies to write, you know, reviews of shampoo or whatever. And it was annoying to me, as somebody who didn't have children, did not plan to have children, had no interest in having children, that somehow as a professional writer, I wasn't qualified, to write these topics, you know. I would see the listings for women's topics, and everything they wanted was Mother's stuff. And I'm like, but I'm still a woman. I just don't have children. So it was out of frustration that I just started Googling, like, Where are the people like me? And where can I find an audience or, you know, somewhere, I can write about my experience as someone who chose not to have children? And, you know, 10 years ago, I was 37. So I was nearing, you know, nearing 40. And I knew that I wasn't going to have kids. So I couldn't find people that like me, kind of like Karen, just a different type of like me. So I randomly Googled any combination of words I could think of including "not mom." And I stumbled across The Not Mom, which was brand new, fledgling website. And on a whim, I just emailed

her, and I didn't even know what I wanted out of it. I just like you, you're speaking my language, or at least near my language. And I think a day later, I got a phone call. It was Karen and she's like, I am so shocked that you emailed me, I had no idea that somebody was out there looking for what I was doing. And we had a conversation, we struck up a partnership, and I came on board.

**Karen Malone Wright 07:10**

Christine, I think this is gonna be your next question anyway. So I'm just gonna roll with it. There were so many things that, you know, made it wonderful when Laura reached out. And the first was, I had just begun to figure out how much work I was taking on myself. I had. I had no staff, no money, God knows. But more importantly, what Laura allowed me to do was to quit pretending I knew everything. And so overnight, The Not Mom was able to offer voices that were different. Because at age, I'm 20 years older than Laura. So that was great. B if you haven't noticed, or you're not watching video today, I'm black, Laura's white. 3 geographically, you know, Laura had lived in different cities than the cities I had lived in. And right now I'm based in Cleveland, Ohio, and at the time, I think she was just kicking butt in Asheville. But also, Laura never wanted a child. I mean, when she was a little girl, she knew, "nah, that's not my dream," as opposed to me who would line up my baby dolls, and you know, roll and I'd be one of those little kids with this fake stroller and a baby down. So there were just so many things, that that made us a great partnership to share our differing and yet similar voices with the world. And it's been great. And I hope, no matter what happens to The Not Mom, we'll be friends forever.

**Christine Erickson 08:46**

I imagine you will. Thank you for sharing that. It's such a beautiful journey and a coming together. And I think, you know, in the space of some of the things we're trying to do with the Institute and see ourselves as more of a collective community. It's such a beautiful testament to what works in that diversity or those differences, you know. Rather than that separation, or even the separations that we experienced as women for all kinds of reasons, you know, and unconscious biases of, you know, past things that aren't always

ours, that we're not aware of. You know, the patriarchy is strong. So, yeah, I really love your relationship just as a testament I think not only to the work that you have done together but where we can go forward-looking. So thank you for sharing that with us today. I really appreciate it. And what have you learned most from this journey or from The Not Mom journey? You know, what would you like to share with people today about your experience in the organization?

**Laura LaVoie 08:46**

Absolutely!

**Karen Malone Wright 09:53**

Well, I think. (Laughter) I've learned so much. You know, one thing I learned is that Laura and I, as we couldn't, well, first of all, the internet changed, obviously, and social media came around. And so suddenly, we began to see that, what I refer to as silos where there were websites or blogs for women who never wanted them and blogs for women who did once want to be a mom. We began to see this sort of mean girl, what we call mean girl language coming out, that didn't used to be I mean, well, there were no sites, but they didn't used to be on the net. And all of a sudden, you know, we're hearing about moms and their crotch fruit. And you know, this and that, well, obviously, on my side of the chart, because I wanted kids that really upset me. But more than that, both Laura and I were like, most of our girlfriends are moms. I mean, so like, why would you be that mean? I just, and so that's when we began to set up our own policies, that we wouldn't allow that in our space. You know, you need somebody else's site, if that's the way you feel about children and the women who have them. It's one thing to feel out of place, or you don't fit in, it's another to almost build a wall to make sure you don't fit in.

**Christine Erickson 11:17**

Absolutely. Great distinction.

**Laura LaVoie 11:19**

Exactly.

**Christine Erickson 11:21**

Yeah. Do you have anything to add?

**Karen Malone Wright 11:23**

Oh well, I just would say that, over the years, people, Laura and I, again, sort of at the same time, but we didn't know it, we were both dreaming that we could have a real-life conference or something to get these women together. And we made that come true. Somehow, in today's world, they call it we manifested it, again, with no money. And with very few sponsors, because the sponsors of the world, the brands are afraid of that mommy majority, as well, I understand that my background is marketing and public relations, I understand it. But I have to say that once I got interviewed with a great story in The New York Times, which sent a photographer to my home to talk about our work. And the whole story was based on advertisers overlooking this market of women who've got discretionary income, we're not saving for college. And it helped explain that brands know that women without children, the aunts, and the godmothers of the world, who love children, and have children in their life, which, you know, not all childfree, women love children, but a whole lot of us do, or we work professionally in pediatric jobs. We're the ones spending a ton of money on those kids. You know, it's not so and so who buys the iPad when mom can't afford it, you know, those kinds of things. And yet, they're just not dealing with us. So, um, I gave the New York Times and they printed it my very favorite example, which is paper towels. I get so annoyed by paper towel commercials where there's always a little kid, always, always, always.

**Laura LaVoie 13:14**

You know, I spill things too.

**Karen Malone Wright 13:17**

Well, you know, at the time, ABC's Scandal was the top show. And I kept saying if Olivia Pope, who had no children, spilled red wine on that white couch, she'd use a paper towel. And yet nothing, nothing really has changed. But what I learned, going back to your question, was that when you

get the two types of women without children in a room together, the wall comes down, cannot be locked in a hotel together for three days and not acknowledge, "Gee, your boss asked you to work on Christmas Eve, because you don't have kids. So does mine." And things like that began to come out. And the women began to connect in an organic way. But then when the conference was over, and we got back online, both Laura and I noticed our numbers were going down, because online, you can click off as soon as you think, "Oh, that story is not for me." Yeah, so we'd love to have another, you know, real-life event or something real life, but it's hard to do when the sponsors aren't behind you.

**Christine Erickson** 14:25

Yeah, absolutely. Laura, were you going to say something?

**Laura LaVoie** 14:28

Oh, well, you know, it was, I think, as far as I know, we were one of the first groups to really kind of do this. I guess the best word for it is intersectional childlessness. You know, that childfree and childless women, you know, we do kind of have the same life experiences, even if our pathway there wasn't the same. And but now we're here now we're in our 30s 40s 50s, etc. And we're dealing with the same things. We're still buying paper towels, whether we have children or not. So you know, we're doing, we're doing all of these things that it's going to be more similar than dissimilar in our lives in general. And it was important to us, I think, to bring the communities together, so that we could see that because, you know, on the level, like what New Legacy Institute is doing, and really trying to push these, these ideas forward, we can't do that if we're not intersectional, we can't do that if we're not together, because you'd have childfree women on one side and childless women on the other and they'd be fighting each other. Instead, we should all be talking to whether it's legislators or business managers, or, you know, CEOs or advertisers doing that together is going to get us far further than trying to do it separately.

**Christine Erickson** 15:56

Yeah, all that energy in the same direction, and we don't have to be the same. You know, our stories and journeys are, are acknowledged, no one is trying to minimize that in the process. But how do we really see each other? You know, we are a huge, gorgeous community of diversity, by necessity and desire, right. I mean, what, where does the community of people, and/or women without children, not touch on life experience?

**Karen Malone Wright 16:26**

Well, I think another thing that I've learned over the years, Christine, is that, you know, unfortunately, or fortunately. But more and more, Laura and I have talked about involving men in our work, like The Institute is, you know, doesn't really see gender. so many times I've seen, I've heard stories from men about their workplaces and how they are treated. The same stigma follows men, that, you know, "oh, you're not a dad, you know, you don't have to rush off to soccer practice," or "are you really gay and your wife....?" I mean, literally, I mean, they have some stuff to face as well. So we've certainly learned that.

**Laura LaVoie 16:26**

Right.

**Christine Erickson 17:09**

Mm hmm. Yeah, that's a great point. And to your speaking of, you know, moving forward and collectively, both from where you started and where you are now. That was part of my thinking in The Institute too. It's like meeting the world where we are our community, but also the world. You know, we have generations coming up, who are going to be facing some of the same things that we did or differently based on their values, their experiences, and their language is different. They're coming into the world with a, you know, different lens on differences and diversity and inclusion. And we need to be there too.

**Karen Malone Wright 17:50**



That's a really good point. Because I think a lot about how 10 years ago and I know Laura joined me on this one 10 years ago, I don't think there was a word childfree. Laura, do you?

**Laura LaVoie** 18:04

It was just starting. I mean, I think that the childfree community had coined it frankly, it was coined by Tallulah Bankhead. So she was the first person to ever say, "I'm not childless, honey, I'm childfree."

**Christine Erickson** 18:18

And when was that?

**Laura LaVoie** 18:19

Oh, goodness. When was she?

**Karen Malone Wright** 18:21

Either the 30s or 40s.

**Christine Erickson** 18:23

Oh, okay. Yeah, I've been trying to remember. Yeah.

**Karen Malone Wright** 18:26

Famous classic actors.

**Christine Erickson** 18:27

Yeah, because we discussed that on our episode with Joan Eisenstoedt, too, because the childfree movement or that language and how it was defined, I think it was childfree by choice and parent. Yeah, it was by choice and parent. Yes. And, um, you know, they, yeah, they acknowledged the people that came before too, but that that movement really took off, but it was in that direction around choice. And, and then with Laura Carrolls kind of continuum of some of those things like International Childfree Day, and I think it's in so many corners today as though it's been newly coined.

**Karen Malone Wright** 19:06

Well, I think that the challenge is that childfree media allows stigma to follow that word. I mean, if we want to just wrap stigmas into one word, slurs, if you will. Childless means "Oh, I feel sorry for you. I almost pity you." Childfree, you're just like sailing on the Bahamas and spending your money. Whoopee! Whoopee! And it was Time Magazine in like 2014 that did a cover story called The Childfree Life and to illustrate it, they showed someone floating in a pool, you know, sipping on a martini. That alone I think did more harm to the childfree community than a lot has because it really stuck. You didn't have to buy the magazine and read the story to get what they were implying.

**Christine Erickson** 20:12

Yeah. And I think that's also so interesting what we touched on a minute ago, you know, in terms of inclusion or diversity. There are conversations about this in both sides around well, if you don't have children, then you must have money, or you must have this lifestyle, and which emanated from those types of things, right. But, yeah, you must hate children, like there are a lot of requirements for the media, you know, and yet, I still see the media misusing the terms, you know, when they do is that they use it interchangeably. And also, just the assumption is that there is only one, you know, economic class, within our community, there is only, you know, one color of voice, there's all of these things that take the lead in that and then get kind of funneled through childfree more than childlessness. Unless it's misused in the article about the childfree, the experience our community from what I've seen. Yeah, it's, it's such an override or bypassing of so many layers of human life, our lives as a community and those experiences all around. It's really unfortunate.

**Karen Malone Wright** 21:26

Well, I would like to think and I'd love to hear Laura's view. I would like to think that, you know, change doesn't always come fast, it rarely comes fast. And those stereotypes have existed for so long, that if a country and you know, and that's the other thing, Americans tend to think we're the only ones around. But if you've always thought of, let's say, Italy, as a country, where it's very Catholic, everybody has not only one child, but probably several. You know, people are just stunned when I give them the current statistics of how many women without children, you know, in its historical

levels, not just in America, but in countries like Mexico, Italy, Ireland, and those numbers aren't being driven because all of a sudden, women are more infertile, it's because more of them are choosing it.

**Christine Erickson** 22:19

Yes, yes. Yeah. Japan, Australia, Germany. So so many countries, it's where the statistics are growing even faster than here.

**Karen Malone Wright** 22:30

There are a bunch of news stories that I haven't posted yet that came out last week about Australia. They're at a record number of younger men getting vasectomies, who aren't even married.

**Christine Erickson** 22:41

Wow, interesting. Yeah.

**Karen Malone Wright** 22:43

That may come from some of the climate changes. One of the assumptions that the scientists are saying is that, you know, between the great fires Australia has suffered through and COVID, and whatever, that there are more men, you know, deciding, maybe this isn't what I want to do.

**Laura LaVoie** 23:03

Yeah, and it's interesting that you bring that up, specifically, because in the wake of those articles coming out. I had a fair number of people, specifically childless women, kind of get a little paternalistic about it and be like, "well, these kids don't possibly know what they're doing. How would any doctor let them have this procedure when they haven't even lived long enough to be able to make that decision?" And I'm like, Well, that's exactly what the childfree community has been fighting for, is that we, we do know our bodies, we do know ourselves, and we do know our decisions. So you know, there are still some significant differences between the childless and childfree community.

**Christine Erickson** 23:43

Yeah.

**Laura LaVoie** 23:44

But again, the hope is that we listen to each other. And, you know, don't jump to conclusions, just because someone is, you know, 24 and wants to have a vasectomy, that somehow they're you know, they're completely off base and off track and too immature to make that decision. And, you know, nobody tells a teen mom that she's too immature to be a mom, you know, you just have to live with it, because that's what it is. So, you know, if a teen mom can decide she's going to have a kid then a teenager can decide they don't want one too.

**Christine Erickson** 24:16

Such a great point. And again, coming back to the collective community and just, you know, values and the diversity that we hold. It's like, if you say, you don't want a child, like, I believe you, like, why wouldn't I believe you? Like, I don't get that, like, I believe you. You know, and if, if you want to have permanent, you know, if you want to have voluntary sterilization, I believe you, and the idea that that access is still being blocked, particularly to women, by doctors, even though it is not illegal is completely disturbing to me.

**Karen Malone Wright** 24:56

Disturbing, but it's understood, I think, Christine, because the lawyers behind the doctors practices are saying, "Oh hell no, if she comes back in two years and wants a kid, and you can't undo that tubal ligation."

**Laura LaVoie** 25:10

But, we've also, learned that that information is a pronatalist myth. That nobody is regularly suing doctors over regret.

**Christine Erickson** 25:21

Right! And also, the just the gender comparison with the access to the vasectomies. Men are not questioned in the same way. Or told to wait or to go back and reflect on their lives. And, you know, they'll, they'll regret it. And so, so for me, you know, coming from a childless perspective, I think, if I'm going to look at reproductive rights, or justice or freedom, it's all of it. It's not just what I think or what is for my personal narrative. And I think that's where not only where the world is, but where we have to keep going forward. And that's why I'm so appreciative of the conversations I've had with you prior. And today, because that's the lens we need on this. You know, if you're impacting someone over here in this way, we're also being impacted somehow, you know, even if it's not directly in your own life, and that that is not good. It is not good. So that's not good. That's my assessment for today. Just like thinking of all the things now. But yeah, and it's why we're going in all these directions. It's not just saying, Oh, you need to include people without children. But we have to look at reproductive rights, we have to look at the workplace, we have to look at public policy, we have to look at medical practices. You know, I've left out a million other things, legal practices, even family court, don't get me started on that. But, you know, just so many spaces where this impacts and with a ripple effect for so many people. That, yeah, I think it's important how we go forward with that. Well, thank you. Thank you for this lovely first half conversation. I so appreciate it. We've been speaking with Laure LaVoie and Karen Malone Wright about the inclusion of nonparents, people without children. And The Not Mom, which has been in existence for 10 years today, or well not today. Very soon. Yes, in May. I'm sorry. And we want to talk a little bit more about that when we come back. And thank you to both of you for all your work over those years. We're going to take a short pause and we'll be right back.

**VoiceAmerica** [27:49](#)

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**VoiceAmerica** [27:57](#)

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**VoiceAmerica** 28:25

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**VoiceAmerica** 28:59

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**VoiceAmerica** 29:27

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**VoiceAmerica** 29:40

You are listening to New Legacy Radio with Christine Erickson. Now back to the show. Here is Christine Erickson.

**Christine Erickson** 29:48

Welcome back to New legacy Radio, everyone. Today we're speaking with Laura LaVoie and Karen Malone Wright. And we're going to continue our

fabulous conversation about The Not Mom organization and how we need to include nonparents. Where would you like to continue or start?

**Karen Malone Wright** 30:07

Well, Laura and I, we're all for talking about the upcoming Mother's Day holiday. We both over the years have done, you know, I think have sort of been surprised. Well, maybe Laura wasn't. But I sort of was surprised to find that pretty much every country on the globe has a holiday for mothers. And as well, they should, you know, I mean, we are not anti-Mother's Day, don't even get started on that kind of trolling. But what happens I think, for childless women is a real melancholy. And over the years, almost every Mother's Day season, I will get an email from a man married, or not, who says, "What can I do to help my girlfriend or my wife? She's, you know, she's just crying. She doesn't want to leave the house." Well, I'll tell you she doesn't want to leave the house, because everywhere she goes, they see boobs and they go "Happy Mother's Day!" If you say, "Oh, I'm not a mother," then they hand you a carnation and say, "Oh, you can have a hug." And what I've heard from Laura and other childfree friends that I now have, it's just annoying for them. You know? Take your flower, go give it to a real mother. You know, I don't you know, I don't need it. But I know women who don't go to church on Mother's Day. It makes them too sad. You know, all the mothers in the congregation stand up. Well, so what does that leave like six women just sitting in the pew with tears running down their faces, and nobody notices? Or women who are just ticked off that they get no, no love that's Sunday, and they have to leave. There are supermarkets. You know, as soon as you walk in the door, it's I mean, it is so pervasive. And we've learned that certainly in the UK, where mothering Sunday is how they refer to it. The same is true. It didn't used to be as commercial as it is now.

**Christine Erickson** 32:09

Right.

**Karen Malone Wright** 32:10

Mother's Day is like the backup Christmas, you know, I mean, it's just. And it starts early. It starts early every year, Mother's Day is coming, you know, buy this, buy that.

**Christine Erickson** 32:22

Very true, very true.

**Karen Malone Wright** 32:23

So we just want to say happy Un-Mother's Day to all of our community.

**Karen Malone Wright** 32:29

Yes. Thank you.

**Laura LaVoie** 32:29

Happy Sunday. Yeah. As, as someone who didn't want to be a part of that process. I didn't have any interest in having kids. I still don't.

**Karen Malone Wright** 32:42

Never will.

**Laura LaVoie** 32:43

No, thank you!

**Christine Erickson** 32:44

That didn't change! (Laughter)

**Laura LaVoie** 32:45

She did not change? For people who ask about regret, I do not. But, you know, Mother's Day is not for me. And I don't need you to shoehorn me into it. Because somehow you feel bad about that. Because it has nothing to do with me. I'm not a mom, I'm not a mom on purpose. So you don't need to make up some reason to include me just because I'm a woman. It just comes off disingenuous and frustrating because I don't need to be a part of this. I'm not, you know, I love my cat. And sure, I call myself a cat mom, but I do not need to have you know, Happy Cat Mom Day. No, it's just not.



**Karen Malone Wright** 33:27

That was what I got Laura. Remember the year when the guy sent me an email saying that he gave his wife a Happy Mother's Day from the dog and she like slapped him?

**Laura LaVoie** 33:38

Right! You know, there is a pet day and I can celebrate my pet that day. And there is a cat day and I can celebrate my cat that day. I don't need to do it on Mother's Day. It's not for me. And I just if there's anything I want someone to know is that you don't have to shoehorn childfree women into Mother's Day. Just because somehow, you feel bad that they're not acknowledged. I don't want to be acknowledged.

**Christine Erickson** 34:03

Yeah. That's a really poignant description, shoehorn in, and she's right.

**Karen Malone Wright** 34:12

About five years ago or so CBS Sunday Morning, did a Mother's Day segment on women without children and I used to work in television. I am certain the producers were thinking, hey, this is another side of you know that we've been ignoring every Mother's Day. And instead, instead, they got so much hate. How dare you take my Mother's Day and put these women who don't have kids and God forbid there were some women interviewed who never wanted kids. And you gave up your Mother's Day time to these women. And as a former producer, I thought to myself, had they done it the Sunday after Mother's Day. It would have been okay. But it was a shoehorn, kinda.

**Christine Erickson** 34:57

Yeah.

**Laura LaVoie** 34:59

And we, childfree people have a day. There is a day to do that. August 1st is International Childfree Day, do your segment then.

**Karen Malone Wright** 35:10

Send them an email or send them or something.

**Christine Erickson** 35:13

See how helpful we can be if we're included in other ways, in decision making, policymaking, we understand ourselves. We have some solutions for you.

**Laura LaVoie** 35:25

Exactly!

**Karen Malone Wright** 35:26

We learned, Christine, during our second summit. Our second summit kicked butt. It's just a shame, you know, the world ended after that. But we had HR people there, who were childfree women. And what we learned was what you and I and the three of us have talked about, that there is this sort of burgeoning issue coming up across America for sure, but worldwide. About workplaces and companies that for without asking their employees what they think, you know, childless and parents decide to take company money, for example, and make a lactating lounge for moms who, you know, who are breastfeeding. Well, that's a great thing. But did that use of company money mean, now, I don't get fill in the blank. You know what I mean? I mean, without thinking about your other employees, and that type of HR issue is where when I heard about, you know, what your Institute's doing for policy, I was really impressed because you're, you're on the cusp of something big.

**Christine Erickson** 36:38

Well, and really just companies looking at, I often ask people, do you know how many employees you have that do not have children? Like at this moment? Like, what's the percentage? You know, they don't. It's like, it's not a question, you know.

**Karen Malone Wright** 36:54

They may not know how many parents they have, either, but I think the thing is, it's assumed.

**Christine Erickson 36:59**

You just assume it's the majority, right? Yes, it should be both. And so yes, from that financing, exactly what you said. That's such a great example, you know, the benefits that you're putting forward, it's not equity, for the sake of equity, of that, you know, that's kind of a baseline, I think that's where we should move as a world and humanity. But there are really specific things that we can hone in on in that space, you know, and it's still just a silent conversation or the efforts of one or two people who get shut down. And particularly in the childless space, I think that just adds to that weight of being in that environment. It's another type of dismissal or, you know, rejection, another loss really in a way when you're trying to, you know, be representative. And again, it doesn't go anywhere. And so again, back to that collective conversation, that we're having the need for that. So people that are in, you know, feeling vulnerable, or on their grief journey, you know, wherever they are, or they're just not people that take on those type of roles. They shouldn't have to do it. You know, it, we should be leading that for all of us, and not putting that burden on individuals. So yeah, thank you for raising that point, Karen. Yeah. And you were saying that HR people at the summit, what happened after that?

**Karen Malone Wright 38:27**

It just, it's just the room? I mean, Laura might know too. I think one woman stood up and said, you know, that's, that's that story or something like it. The room just sort of erupted. Everybody had a story about, you know, the boss who says, you know, you can work on Saturdays because you don't have a family. Because using those words, you don't have a family. Well, maybe I'm taking care of my mom who just had surgery, you know, I mean, nobody, nobody asks. And journalism major, the first thing they teach you is, you know, assuming makes an ass out of you and me. So, ask the question, do you have, you know, something that's really critical to do this weekend, you know. You don't need a child, to have something really important and personal.

**Christine Erickson** 39:19

And beyond that, you know, if we look at universal policies, which, you know, we would love to see the world get to where we're not walking in the door having to be defined by our reproductive statuses or, or, or anything else. We have universal policies, it shouldn't even matter. You know, why you're taking time, whether that's because you need whatever. So it shouldn't be a critical thing matched with the critical thing. That's a step in the conversation, right when we talk about care policy, and we want to take it even even past that because we're just. There are these building blocks, right? That we create so much like suffering and angst in these HR diversity conversations by going at it like step by step. And it's like how about we look at humans in the workplace?

**Karen Malone Wright** 40:11

As the brown person in this conversation, may I say, I've been asking that. My people have been asking for quite a while. But I think about people who, when it comes to the HR thing, and I used to work with a very, very high executive senior executive, who was never married and childless, but she had a dog she loved. And when the dog died, she used what we all think of as a good thing. Then, what do you call it? The, whatever, when you have time that you can use however you want?

**Laura LaVoie** 40:11

Exactly!

**Christine Erickson** 40:49

Yeah. Like personal leave.

**Christine Erickson** 40:50

**Karen Malone Wright** 40:51

That's a great thing that she can take off that day of mourning, for her own thing. But the word got out and said, and suddenly the entire company knew. Can you believe she took a day off because her dog died?

**Christine Erickson** 41:05

Oh, my gosh.

**Karen Malone Wright** 41:06

And she was ridiculed to the point of looking for another job, because she never could surpass that joke person in the office, who took a day off for her dog and not her child or her, you know, family and human family.

**Laura LaVoie** 41:23

Right.

**Christine Erickson** 41:23

Yeah.

**Karen Malone Wright** 41:24

But it's, it's those kinds of baby steps of change. The idea that we have time in the workplace to use as we want is great. The idea that somehow you disapprove of how I use it has got to go.

**Christine Erickson** 41:38

Right. And even when there are separate grief policies or bereavement policies, I think universal as well. So you know, that you're using your days for grief and your personal time off isn't impeded by that, because that's personal time off, you know. So there are so many directions that can go to, to better this. And without the judgment, or I had a conversation with an executive who was saying, Well, if we have these policies, we worry about people misusing them. And that the universal policy diffuses all that if it's the same, there isn't an abuse of policy, because there's no space for it. Right? So you're not questioning.

**Karen Malone Wright** 42:18

Misuse is going to the, to the premiere of a movie to him. I'm serious. I mean.

**Christine Erickson** 42:25

That's what, I'm saying, and like, it shouldn't matter, and we shouldn't have to disclose, like, the workplace is not the whole of our being. And what what we have to do in those things is just, it's it's too much right now. And so, anyway, those are our, that's a vision. That's our dream. That's our direction, right?

**Laura LaVoie** 42:45

Well, and we've been learning over the last two years, right? That, that people or businesses did have this idea that people were gonna misuse time off, or, you know, if we let people work from home, they're just gonna not work. They're just gonna watch TV, and they're gonna do their laundry and not do any work. But we have learned that that was absolutely not the case. People were just as productive, if not more. Working from home over these last two years, we eliminate the commute, we eliminate, you know, the fear that I need to take five seconds to do something for myself. So yeah, I think the key for HR is to trust people, rather than the treating adult human beings like infants.

**Laura LaVoie** 42:48

Yeah. Who are you hiring?

**Laura LaVoie** 43:21

Right! Like, nobody, nobody argues that parental leave isn't important. Everybody, you know, yes, parents should have time off. But you know, what other people who aren't parents should also have time off for taking care of an elderly family member, taking, you know, grieving the loss of a pet, doing these other just natural human things that happen to all of us. And it shouldn't matter that you have children or not to be able to just take care of your own business.

**Karen Malone Wright** 44:05

Well, the news is that that may be one of the best things that comes out of the pandemic, is that the, you know, the office in general and I shouldn't say that the workspace. I mean, it has begun to acknowledge, gee, we sort of got it wrong. You know, but as I listen to this conversation, I can't help but all with my mind goes to those who don't work in an office, I think, you know, my favorite cashier at Walgreens, you know, I think, you know, do they, you know, do they get time off to just, you know, go to the bathroom. I mean, we could talk about workplace policies and fairness.

**Christine Erickson** 44:44

Yes, and this is why we are you know, we're coming in through a lens of a very an extremely diverse marginalized group marginalized because we are not visible and we are not named within that space. However, you know, our advocacy is for policies that are inclusive, we don't mean just including us or just, you know, and not in a bypassing way. We need to first be seen as a community, as do other communities. That's the first step. But ultimately, we want to have something that that is inclusive and impacts everybody. It doesn't matter what the cashier wants to do with her time, or if she's a cashier or a CEO. Why do we have I mean, I'm not gonna say that that's a whole different show. Not why do we have those disparities, but those disparities, it's time to end them at all of these different levels. Yeah. And so this is just our this is our lens. This is our portal into that.

**Karen Malone Wright** 45:47

I think it shows, you know, we're in 2022. And yet in so many ways, it's we have structured our workplaces, like a Dickens novel. I mean, really. There are still too many people in the, in the on the planet who get a half... 30 minutes for lunch? Even if all you're gonna do is eat lunch that you brought from home, you're gonna, like get a stomachache eating that fast. It's crazy.

**Christine Erickson** 46:14

And I think, you know, to Laura's point and yours. The pandemic, I mean, I think we learned a lot about what capitalism requires of people. You know, and that's what people are walking away from and letting go of, and in

another life, in my work in consent, I always say, you know, capitalism requires the absence of consent.

**Laura LaVoie** 46:32

Mmmhmm. Yeah.

**Karen Malone Wright** 46:40

That kind of sounds like rape, Christine.

**Christine Erickson** 46:44

Well, I mean, the resources in the way people are utilizing in companies, you know, no one's signing up for \$15 an hour. You're working because you need to, or the cashier that you said, she doesn't want 10 minutes for lunch. Or, you know, whatever. That's a whole nother topic. But the point is that we're, you know. Really, and as Laura said, you know, we want parents to be covered in the workplace, we want healthy leave for people who work, and also those of us who work for ourselves. We have to figure that out somewhere too. That's hopefully coming. S Well, thank you for that.

**Christine Erickson** 47:26

So we talked, we touched a little bit on funding earlier, as well. And, you know, how the assumption, misperception, and fear how does that hinder inclusion among these playmakers, you know, of advertisers, policymakers, advocates and adults without children themselves? You know, in our own community. I, this is a question that I often asked myself, and maybe one or two other people, and probably we spoke about it, but I, when I think about all of the, you know, such as The Not Mom, and what we're doing with the Institute, Jody Day's work. The active organizations and people within the childless and childfree communities. So, so much of it is self-funded, and the limitations of that resource wise, just human capacity wise, I think, where also is our community? You know, I'm curious about, there's certainly we're excluded from external funding, I'll name it in terms of traditional corporate sponsorship, and those kinds of things, which needs to change. And then I look to our community, you know, so many of us are connected to socially or uplifted articles about, you know, actors or people who are known to not have



children. And just all the layers of people within our community based on its its natural diversity, and I'm curious, where, where do we go for that? Like, where will that come from? And what is holding it back?

**Karen Malone Wright** 49:09

Well, I mean, as I listened to you to that really good description, I thought of the sort of broad comment that we've all heard about women in general for so long. That we are the last people we take care of. So you know, I mean, for our summits, at least I remember for sure, the second one, we opened it up to donations, and I would round it off to say we got about \$500, just from people really just, you know, "Here, Karen, I love what you're doing." And as you say, those same people may be giving to Salvation Army or you know, Cancer Society or whatever. But the thought of "Well, I don't really know what Karen's gonna do with it." Or, you know, or, or "Yeah, well, she'll figure out a way to do it but the Cancer Society..." And I'm not downplaying cancer.

**Christine Erickson** 50:02

Right. It's just an example.

**Karen Malone Wright** 50:06

But it is that thing of, is what we are and need as important as fill in the blank?

**Christine Erickson** 50:15

Right, right. Absolutely. Yeah.

**Karen Malone Wright** 50:19

I mean, you know, I started The Not Mom and I gotta say, you know, there are times when I find myself going, you know, well, you know, you know, it's not as important, as you know, and maybe that's why I'm not making any money because I don't have a product. You know, I mean, Laura can tell you how many times I've said, Well, what am I selling? And maybe if I'd hurry up and finish the book, and I'd have something to sell, but the thing is, I'm selling unity. You know, much like your Institute. I'm selling a connection. And what Laura and I have learned for sure is, every 10 years now that we're 10 years old, we've learned that every 10 years is a whole new group coming up. And

they need to go through the same thought process of childless, childfree. You know, am I kind to someone who is a stepmom but never had children of her own? And is sad, or should I make fun of her? Am I you know, I mean, everybody's got to go through this. Again, and again, this is a cyclical thing.

**Christine Erickson** 51:20

Yes, yes. Wow. Yeah. Well, thank you for that. Well, before we close here, would you like to say some quick words about the anniversary?

**Karen Malone Wright** 51:34

You go, Laura.

**Laura LaVoie** 51:35

Well, I mean, we're celebrating our anniversary, and, uh. So.

**Karen Malone Wright** 51:39

Well, alright! Laura and I are working on a survey. To follow up the survey we did I think when we were five years old. And again, I thought maybe if I had some statistics behind me, surely the brands will fund us. That didn't work. But it sort of didn't hurt. But we're going to be doing a survey. And other than that, we're just I don't know, that's, that's our biggest thing that we're working on right now is to figure out, it's 10 years later, did you go to one of our conferences? We hear again and again, that women say it changed my life. Because it made me feel worthy. Because it's, you know, really quickly, we have all been to a women's conference where there's one breakout session on women without kids and you feel accommodated, not included.

**Laura LaVoie** 52:38

Exactly. Yeah. If that!

**Karen Malone Wright** 52:41

And at The Not Mom conferences for three days. No one is asking you give kids, no one is pulling out their phone to show you their child. They're pulling out their phone to show you their pet. No one was willing to ask you those questions that either hurt your feelings or piss you off. Right. That's why our

conferences drew people from seven countries as far away as China and New Zealand. Because women around the world wanted that inclusion.

**Christine Erickson** 53:11

Beautiful. Thank you so much. And happy anniversary. We will be there right alongside you celebrating. Thank you for listening today. Join us on any of our platforms and continue this conversation with Laura and Karen of The Not Mom. We will be in touch next week. For now, buh bye.

**Karen Malone Wright** 53:30

Love y'all.

**Laura LaVoie** 53:31

Thanks.

**VoiceAmerica** 53:35

Thank you for listening to New Legacy Radio. We hope Christine and her guests have given you the context and insight to connect with our community in new ways. What personal or professional change might you consider, acknowledge, and include in our diverse community of people without children? Until we speak again, we invite you to engage with us on any of our platforms.