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[00:00:18] Colby D'Onofrio: Welcome to Stocking the Pantry: A CalFresh Healthy Living Podcast from Leah's Pantry. We'd like to acknowledge our funder, the CalFresh Healthy Living Program, an equal-opportunity employer and provider. On this show, we discuss any and all things community nutrition, food equity, and nutrition security. This is a space for thought leaders to share success stories and strategies for equity-centered and resilience-building initiatives. We hope to foster collaboration and community, as well as leverage strengths among listeners, guests, and hosts as we share ideas and dreams of building a more equitable future where everyone has access to healthful, nourishing food.

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[00:01:13] Tee Atwell: Hey, all, Tee here-

[00:01:15] Colby: -and Colby.

[00:01:17] Tee: Thank you for tuning in to Stocking the Pantry.

[00:01:20] Colby: Today's episode, Trauma-Informed Organizational Change, highlights the integration of clarity, compassion, and community within a phenomenal organization, Lindsey House, based in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

[00:01:36] Tee: Lindsey House offers a housing program for women with children experiencing situational homelessness.

[00:01:43] Colby: Tee and I had the opportunity to speak with three amazing individuals who all share a connection to Lindsey House to offer their unique perspectives and lived experiences, which is why we had to make it a two-part episode. Continue listening to this episode to hear CEO Maggie Hoey and program manager Nicole Eddy, share what it is like managing Lindsey House and their personal stories.

[00:02:10] Tee: In part two of the episode, Colby got to speak with Natalie Frech, who runs the Lindsey House Pantry as part of a Master's of Public Health program at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Tulsa. Colby, you actually know Natalie from another project, right?

[00:02:30] Colby: Yes. I first met Natalie when she was going through our nutrition pantry program for implementers training, and I was then introduced, firsthand, to the Lindsey House Pantry when they graduated as a gold-certified pantry. Natalie is a phenomenal person and she brings such great energy to this pantry.

[00:02:51] Tee: In talking with all of our interviewees, I also got a really strong sense of community from both the staff and participants, and it was really inspiring to witness the impact and authentic dedication to incorporating a trauma-informed approach into both the program structure and operations. Two things I heard consistently from each guest was the importance of building meaningful relationships and meeting participants where they're at.

[00:03:23] Colby: Speaking about guests, Tee got to talk with Maggie Hoey, CEO, and Nicole Eddy, program manager. We're going to let them tell you a bit about who they are and what life is like at Lindsey House.

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[00:03:42] Tee: Thank you so much, Maggie and Nicole for being here with us today. I am so excited to hear more about the Lindsey House and the stories that you have to share. Maggie, I would love to open it up to you. Could you just give us a brief overview of the Lindsey House and the Tulsa family served by this program, and please correct me if I am saying the name incorrectly.

[00:04:10] Maggie Hoey: No, you're perfect. I'm thrilled to tell you about Lindsey House. We are located in Tulsa, Oklahoma. We specifically serve women who are raising their children. A group of volunteers decided that was an unmet need in our community, and they started Lindsey House to help support that specific demographic. We provide them housing, so they're living here on site, and also going through a series of curriculum on financial literacy, workplace proficiency, and life skills.

Our goal for every family is self-sufficiency and independence. We want to provide them the time and the resources to help build a solid foundation for their family. Today, 24 moms and about 42 kids call Lindsey House home. It is beautifully chaotic-

[00:05:03] Tee: [chuckles] I love that.

[00:05:03] Maggie: -but a really special place for families, a soft place for them to land when they need it. A high level of accountability to build those habits and the skills that we know lead to success. Kids who grow up in an environment where they're observing their mom putting in some hard work and setting that example for them, and hopefully, observing those positive behaviors so we can break cycles of poverty, addiction, incarceration, abuse, et cetera.

[00:05:38] Tee: Yes. Love this. This really proves and shows that opportunities are there for us to come together as a community to support one another. What a beautiful way to be able to do this. Nicole, as I understand it, you were also a former family at the Lindsey House that is actually now a part of the staff. Please tell me about your personal and professional history with Lindsey House.

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[00:06:13] Nicole Eddy: I've been on staff at Lindsey House for seven years, but this place has really been home for me for more like nine. In 2011, I was arrested for manufacturing meth. I was facing 16 to life in prison. I went into a prison diversion program to get my life back on track. During that time, my mom took my kids for a couple of years while I really focused on what I needed to do to get myself back in order.

When it became time to transition back into their lives, we did that at Lindsey House. It was probably the most perfect place that could have happened. It was a studio apartment. The only doors were the bathroom door and the front door. We didn't really have anywhere to go to hide from each other. There was healing that took place and love and nurturing and community in that building that helped us come back together as a family. While I was at Lindsey House, I was able to pay off the debt that I owed the state, pay back my mother for child support for the time she had my kids, and I was able to save enough money for a down payment on a home. I left Lindsey House a homeowner.

I've been a homeowner for seven years now. I've been on staff for seven years now. I came to Lindsey House as the administrative assistant but just worked my way through.

I wear a lot of hats here. The one thing I do is hold the ladies accountable with this unbelievable amount of love and understanding for where they are in their journey and where they're headed, knowing that I've traveled that path myself.

[00:08:11] Tee: Congratulations on putting you and your family first and knowing your worth.

[00:08:17] Nicole: Thank you very much.

[00:08:19] Tee: It really sounds like a big portion of that was having a healthy support system.

[00:08:25] Nicole: Yes. That's what we have here. It is a community. It happens so organically. I've seen it from both sides, just the way that these women come together, and they love each other, and they love each other's families. They were missing that. I was missing that. To watch it happen, to watch the growth personally for the ladies, their growth, and then the growth of the children, it's magic. It really is.

[00:08:59] Tee: Maggie, since coming on board as an executive director, can you please share some things that you've done to embed a more compassionate understanding of resident behaviors?

[00:09:11] Maggie: Yes, absolutely. I think it's always helpful to get fresh eyes on a program. I want to make it very clear that Lindsey House has done really incredible

work since the day they opened their doors. When you have a new perspective, and I am someone who has to wrap my mind all the way around at problems, so I need to know exactly how it works. Nicole can tell you I ask a million questions a day, and I need to connect all of the dots. In asking questions of staff, I realized some of these dots are just not connecting. If I can't understand it, then how can a new family understand it?

Not intentionally so, but we had a lot of rules that felt unwritten to me. If we're using Brené Brown's to be unclear is to be unkind. There was a lot of things that didn't feel very clear to me. We set a high bar for our families and we do expect a lot from them, but in that, there needs to be a lot of transparency on what those expectations are. Interestingly thinking about it, while this work is different than what I've done, a lot of what I've learned in managing employees is directly applicable to the accountability we're providing to our clients.

Through a lot of questions and just challenging the why, explain to me why it's done that way, what's missing? Is there a better way? Collectively, we've learned a lot about we don't know why, though collectively we realized we were seeing the same issues coming up frequently. Every single time we were treating it like it was the first time we saw it. That was exhausting to me. It was exhausting staff. We weren't always handling those things in the exact same way each and every time. When you think about from an equity lens and implicit bias, and all of that, there's just some buttoning up. It's a refining that we could do in the process.

We have been on a journey. We're not done. That work will continue of really leading with transparency and accountability. You will know exactly how you stand in the Lindsey House program. We give people chances because we know life happens and it's not personal. They're managing a lot and so we're leading with that compassionate lens, but not lowering our expectations. I think that's a really important distinction, is we can be incredibly supportive. Nicole said it perfectly, we can lead with love and still hold them accountable and still have high expectations for them because we know what they're capable of.

Nicole, I'm curious of your perspective, I think it's gone well. I think it's taken out a lot of the- just the hard part from a staff perspective, just constantly feeling like we have to respond to now we know what our response is. We know what that looks like. That's been, I think, helpful to me. I think those conversations we're having with our program participants, they want to do better. They don't want to be failing on some of these things. Sometimes life is just a little bit much and it's helpful for us to know those things and to offer support to them in other ways.

I say all that to say I think it's going well, not only for the staff, but I think for the participants. Again, I think it's the right thing to do. From what I realized really early on is

if people are coming here to put the pieces of their life together, we cannot fault them for not having all the pieces of their life together.

[00:13:11] Nicole: They're here for a reason because they've struggled with making good choices. It is going really well because we are asking those questions and everything starts with a conversation now. It's the conversation of what's going on, what's happened, how can we support you? The turnover rate has dropped, the success rate has gone up.

People are making it. There have been times where I'm like, here recently where I've thought, "This girl is not going to make it." Then months later you're like, "Look at her. Look at that growth. Look at what she just said. Look at that decision she just made." It reminds you of why you're here. It fills your cup up. It makes tomorrow so much better. I just love that.

[00:14:15] Maggie: I think it's this idea. If they knew how to do it, they wouldn't need us. Nicole's saying, they're here for a reason.

[00:14:24] Tee: Definitely a lot of what I am hearing, and thank you so much for sharing that, is consistency, staying curious, and community with that foundation of transparency and belief that they can and want to be their best.

[00:14:44] Nicole: Yes, absolutely. It's not just about accountability for them as well. This is one of the things that Maggie's brought to us in the past year and a half that she's been with us is if we're asking them to do it, we have to make sure that we're doing it too, so making sure that we're holding each other here in the office accountable to the things that we say we're going to do for them. If we say that this is the way it needs to be done, we also need to meet that expectation as well.

[00:15:12] Tee: I really want to lean a little bit more into talking about that trauma-informed change or those trauma-informed opportunities. I'm going to pose this one to you Nicole but, please, both of you by all means chime in. When really thinking about it from a perspective of a family that is living within the Lindsey House, how do you think the trauma-informed changes that exist within the Lindsey House have an overall impact on their lives to include parenting approaches?

[00:15:56] Nicole: I don't think that they're even aware that it's happening. I get emotional about it because I've been here for seven years and we didn't always ask questions about what's going on in your life. I wished that more questions had been asked for me. I struggled. I think that just the amount of compassion that we're showing these women, the chances that they're being given, the links that staff is going to grow alongside them, it's amazing. I don't think they even realize that it's happening, but we do, and we get to see how they're benefiting from it. I get to see not only from a past participant but as a staff member, how we are growing alongside them. I get to grow as

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a person and as a staff member, as a human being in my job to provide this amazing opportunity for these families to heal and to get the chance to be where I am today.

[00:17:27] Maggie: We're just now embarking on some trauma-informed training at a staff level. One of the things I'm most excited about is teaching us the tools that I think we will also be teaching our participants, that they're probably going to be utilizing with their own children. We're building this group of people who are resilient, who are willing to ask for help, who are willing to offer help to the people in their own community, and to really realize they don't have to do it alone. I tell this story all the time, but a family moved in here and they have to fill out forms and one of the questions was emergency contact. They said, "I don't have anyone to put down."

We said, "No, just anyone we could call if something were to happen to you, you would trust with your children." She was like, "No, there's no one," and she meant that. She absolutely meant that. To see people leave here with a community of people that they can rely on, that's a big deal. That social support is incredible. Not only while you're physically here in the building. I know Nicole keeps in touch with people who she lived with at Lindsey House. I know our other staff member who's a graduate, some of her best friends are people who she lived here with at Lindsey House.

That community matters. I think all of that is an answer to that trauma-informed approach, is this should be the most supportive environment for the families while they're here. We should be modeling that at a staff level. We should be encouraging that at a participant level because I think that matters, that pays off in the long run.

[00:19:11] Nicole: I think that sometimes these ladies come from a situation where a lot of those moments where they need to come and ask for help felt like "gotcha moments". That's what Maggie calls them. This isn't a gotcha moment. We're not out to get you. That was something I have spent the past year unlearning that idea that, "Well, you're in trouble now," and reframing that thought process myself, and that how can I approach this differently? I don't want this to be a gotcha moment. What I want from you is to clean your apartment.

What I want from you is to get your chore done. If that means you missed it today, and you called me this morning, and you said, "I wasn't able to get to my chore. Can I do it tonight?" Absolutely, because you communicated that with me and we were open and we had a conversation about it. It's not about you getting in trouble. It's about communication and compromise and getting the job done and meeting those requirements. That's been a big thing for me, is that and that trauma and just being more trauma-informed and meeting them where they are, meeting them where they are.

[music]

[00:21:05] Tee: I'm going to shift gears just slightly. We talked about a lot of times we're looking for individuals to have accountability, to follow through on certain daily life activities, to carry out and maintain certain agreements that have been established. One of those has to do with food. How would you say Lindsey House can support a positive relationship to food for the participants and their children?

[00:21:41] Maggie: When I got here a year and a half ago, we have an on-site food pantry, and we had some fellows coming in doing a cooking class, and some of our life skills curriculum touches a little bit on nutrition and wellness, but it felt really disconnected, like we were doing this thing over here and also this thing. We attempted to connect the dots between all of those. For the last year, we've been really working on improving the way in which we support families as it relates to food and nutrition, again, because we want the moms to model that for their kids.

Natalie, our fellow, has done incredible work in our pantry, following many of the Leah's Pantry guidelines and models to really make better use of that space and to really provide. It's designed to supplement our family's food budget. We want them to be going to the grocery store and buying the majority of their food but if they're experiencing a light paycheck or their benefits have run out, we never want them to go without.

We have this space here but what we've done is brought in more fresh produce, knowing that many families want to make healthier choices, maybe transportation is their barrier, or they just don't have a lot of resources to stretch quite far enough. Twice a month, she's going to the local food bank and bringing in fresh produce. The families love it. They're trying new things. They're experimenting. Many of them are now purchasing the things that they've tried that she's brought in. That's a food pantry angle.

Then we've used the Leah's Pantry curriculum to lead some cooking classes and to really help the moms connect the dots. Nicole has been around for those. She's usually babysitting the kids so the moms can have some freedom to focus on that. Then we're updating, knowing that we won't always have a fellow to help facilitate those cooking classes. We're taking that curriculum and embedding it into our life skills curriculum here. We want people to understand-- We're looking at helping them improve in all of the ways while they're here at Lindsey House.

Food is an important part of that, and overall nutrition and well-being, and self-care. We talk a lot about self-care. Now we had an opportunity to launch a Couch to 5K training program that also helps support this overall wellness goal of how can we make healthier choices, easier choices for our families. We have seen really exciting work done on that aspect because it matters. There's so many memories are built around dinner tables. I still cook-- Comfort food for me is spaghetti because comfort food for my mom was spaghetti. I don't make any fancy pasta sauce. I use the exact same recipe that my

mom did because that's what I remember. If your mom's not cooking, or you guys aren't cooking together as a family, you don't have those things to pass down.

Last night we held a cooking class, where the families all cooked together to see the moms. We bought those plastic kid-safe knives. The moms were originally a little reluctant of like, "My kid doesn't know how to use a knife," and we're like, "These are safe." One kid sat there, I'm not kidding, for 30 straight minutes and cut up fruit and made a fruit salad like it was his job. I mean he was so committed to it. His mom said, "I had no idea that he would enjoy cooking or helping me in the kitchen," and I think is actually really excited that she has somebody to help her [laughs] in that aspect.

We've done a whole lot of focus on really just the whole-person. We focus a lot on financial literacy, in stabilizing your employment, and reducing your debt, but we have them as a captive audience for a year to up to two years, and how can we really use this to strengthen their foundation in all of the ways? Food is a big one for them to-- Many of them, too, all say the food pantry comes in handy because many of them are, because they're now stable in their employment and they're growing their wages, they're now needing to make those food choices for themselves.

They're coming off of SNAP benefits. They no longer qualify because they don't meet those income guidelines anymore, so how to utilize community resources to help you navigate that transition, but making smart choices at the grocery store. All of these things are interconnected. If we're focusing on one of these things without focusing on the other things, we're doing them a disservice because it really is about all of it all the time.

[00:27:13] Tee: Yes, very well said. Side note, can I get on the Couch to 5K program or--

[laughter]

[00:27:21] Nicole: Yes, you can.

[00:27:23] Maggie: Yes. Absolutely.

[00:27:23] Tee: All right. Well, sign me up. [laughs] That sounds awesome and really inspiring to hear that through food, through cooking, that you were able to give that autonomy to not just the caregiver but to the child that was able to sit there and feel warranted, needed, and doing something that showed them that they can be resilient, something that they didn't know they could do. Seeing that their parent and community believed in them that they could do it just really builds that confidence for them.

[00:28:04] Maggie: Yeah, he was so cute. His mom kept saying like, "Are you done? Do you want to move on," and he was like, "No, I'm not finished yet. I'm not finished."

He had a goal in mind. He was going to cut all of the fruit to make the fruit salad. It was just so fun to see. The mom was taking pictures of him and filming video. This was not something that she had ever experienced before. Lindsey House is full of those special moments and growth that people don't even know is growth. There's just so many things as it relates to all of the pieces that we focus on. Sometimes you see it come together in a really beautiful way, which is just a nice reminder of how important this work is.

[00:28:48] Tee: Definitely. That whole-person wellness approach can have such a powerful impact in one's life for eternity. It is not just a right now, this is a forever. Being able to offer that to individuals can be very inspiring. We talked about really promoting this whole-person wellness. From both of your hats, Nicole, what are your hopes for graduates in regards to the relationship with their bodies, and nutrition, and/or movement?

[00:29:37] Nicole: Oh, man, that's a good one. I know what we're doing now with this curriculum that we've brought in from Leah's Pantry and these changes that we've made into our actual physical pantry are going to be so incredibly important for these women, along with being more trauma-informed and asking those questions in the curriculum about your relationship with food, because as women, a lot of us struggle with that relationship with food. For me, personally, it's my most unhealthy relationship, and sometimes that was modeled at home.

I think that what we're doing now, moving forward, is really going to be therapeutic for our families. They're going to be able to be asked the question and get to answer that, and have that light bulb moment in that, "Oh, wow, this is why I do that," and be able to have the support and the resources to make those changes in a safe environment for a substantial amount of time to build habits so that when they go on, they can change, not only how they feel about their body and their food, and their mental health, change the way that their daughters are going to look at that as well, and their sons.

I'm proud of what we're doing here. As a former participant and as a staff member, I'm so excited for all the families who get to come in and experience this new stuff that we're doing, implement that into their life every day. It just makes me happy.

[00:31:18] Tee: Well, you two have definitely done a brilliant job on really shedding light on the importance of community, transparency, and really that compassion, and meeting individuals where they're at.

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[00:31:57] Tee: I have one last question for you.

[00:32:00] Nicole: Hit us.

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[00:32:01] Maggie: Let's hear it.

[00:32:01] Tee: Okay, here we go. What do you stock in your pantry figuratively or literally?

[00:32:08] Nicole: Lots of hot chips because I have a 13-year-old, so literally lots of hot chips. It's so funny because my kid is completely different than me when it comes to what we have in the house. I know that we definitely have to have those little pizzas, in the same sense, we have lots of sweet bell peppers and cream cheese. I think it's a trade-off in our house. Then I've jumped on OLIPOP train. I don't know if you've had one of those but try it.

[00:32:42] Tee: No. What's that? What's OLIPOP?

[00:32:43] Nicole: It's a prebiotic soda pop. It's so good. Give it a shot.

[00:32:47] Tee: Really? Okay. I'll definitely have to check that one out.

[00:32:51] Maggie: I stock my pantry with the most basic food items because I hate to admit I'm a terrible cook. The simple dishes are the most popular dishes in my household. That cooking class we hosted, I told my partner and he was like, "They know you can't cook, right?" [chuckles] I said, "It's more of an assembly class," and he was like, "Okay, well, good luck." [laughs] Basic food thing, but I think it's so cool that Nicole and I, we try to do this, I try to do this as well because we try to model that.

I'm putting together a grocery list. I'm trying to make healthier choices because it's become a priority here for our families at Lindsey House. When we can find things that we have in common, I like to say, "This is what I buy at the grocery store. This is what I cook when I'm too tired to think about anything else." That's usually what my pantry is stocked with or things that I can make without having to think too hard about it.

[00:33:47] Tee: Oh, I love it. Thank you for sharing what you're stocking in your pantry and feeling safe enough to share what you're stocking in your pantry because we're not here to point fingers, we are here to highlight that this is multi-dimensional, and this is colorful, and it comes in all variety, shapes, and sizes and all in moderation. Enjoy. It's really enjoy life, enjoy the relationships that we have with food and understanding that there are many different reasons, rhymes, and everything else as to why we choose the foods that we eat and that we love.

Thank you so much for your time, Nicole and Maggie. This has truly been inspiring, and we can't wait to hear more about the Lindsey House and what you two are doing.

[00:34:38] Nicole: Thank you.

[00:34:39] Maggie: Thank you so much for the time.

[music]

[00:34:50] Tee: Man, I could listen to those two talk all day about their experiences at the Lindsey House.

[00:34:57] Colby: Oh, for real. Nicole's story literally brings tears to my eyes. What a phenomenal turnaround. She left debt-free and a homeowner like, "Go get it, girl. Heck, yes."

[00:35:11] Tee: I definitely think a big part of that turnaround is that the women at Lindsey House can show up as their authentic selves. The program holds them to a high standard but is ready and willing to meet them where they're at to reach those standards.

[00:35:26] Colby: That is such an important part of making meaningful change. If we don't listen to and understand what has led a person to where they are, it's kind of unreasonable to expect them to reach goals because they might not have the tools and skills to do so.

[00:35:43] Tee: Yes, and it also seems through the curriculum and the work that the women invest in themselves while at Lindsey House, they're really able to connect and build relationships with other women. Like Maggie said in that story about the emergency contact form, many women don't have relationships, let alone quality, nurturing relationships that they can really lean on.

[00:36:06] Colby: When they graduate from this program, they have a family and a community to support them, which, in turn, supports their children too.

[00:36:14] Tee: If you know anything about trauma-informed care, you know that quality relationships are the foundation of this approach, and Lindsey House really embodies this.

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[00:36:24] Colby: Yes. Heck, yes, they do.

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[00:36:37] Colby: We would like to extend a huge thank you to Maggie and Nicole for joining us today and giving us such a warm insight into the workings of Lindsey House. They are running a truly impressive organization, and we can't wait to share more about it with you next episode when we talk with Natalie Frech, who runs the onsite pantry.



Natalie has done a phenomenal job of cultivating a space of trust and community with the women at Lindsey House. Her interview highlights the ways in which food is so much more than just what we eat, but how it helps us connect and build relationships with those around us. We are excited to dive deeper into this aspect of Lindsey House and share this interview with you.

Until next time, you can learn more about Lindsey House on their website at lindseyhouse.org, or connect with them on Instagram, [@lindseyhousetulsa](https://www.instagram.com/lindseyhousetulsa), or on Facebook at Lindsey House. See you next time.

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[00:37:49] [END OF AUDIO]