

Something Extra EP 084 – Rose Hanley

[00:01:29] Lisa Nichols: I am thrilled to have Rose Hanley on the show today. Rose is the CEO and co-founder of The Little Bit Foundation. Rose, I am so excited for today, for this conversation that you and I are going to have. I thank you so much for making the time and I can't wait for our listeners to hear your story.

[00:01:49] Rose Hanley: Lisa, I have been looking forward to it also. Thanks so much for having me.

[00:01:52] Nichols: Well, you and I met several years ago. I think I came to an event that you were having. Rose, I remember hearing your story and just getting teary-eyed and thought, "Wow. This is something that I want technology partners to be a part of." It totally resonates with my heart. You are not from St. Louis, right? Are you from the Big Apple?

[00:02:17] Hanley: I am, Long Island, New York, born and raised.

[00:02:20] Nichols: How did that all come about? Tell me a little bit about your journey if you would, before we talk about what you're doing today. What were the connection points to get to you here?

[00:02:29] Hanley: Well, I grew up with a great mom and dad, very passionate people. My dad worked in the garment industry in New York City. We were able to go into the city and see so much of the city and the melting pot and to see how people all came together.

When I was in high school, we moved to Dallas. It was a different community and it wasn't as diverse but still found lovely, lovely people. I went to Bishop Lynch High School, became a great part of that high school, and went to school in New Orleans, Loyola. That's where I met my husband, Mike Hanley. He's from here. We fell madly in love in New Orleans and he brought me back to St. Louis. St. Louis is my home. As soon as I got here, I felt like this is where I needed to be.

[00:03:17] Nichols: How long have you been here now?

[00:03:19] Hanley: Since '83 so quite a while.

[00:03:21] Nichols: Wow. We've not ever talked about that, but you know, Greg and I grew up in Kentucky and we moved here in '85 with our jobs. The funny thing about it is when we moved, we said, "Oh, we'll be here for two years and then we'll probably go somewhere else." [laughs]

[00:03:36] Hanley: I tell you, St. Louis has a way of catching you and not let you go. Right?

[00:03:40] Nichols: It does. It does but it's an awesome community. Well, I'm so glad that you're here. You started out as an elementary ed teacher. Is that correct?

[00:03:48] Hanley: Yes. I taught preschool, kindergarten, and first grade for a few years and my passion is children. I love children, always want to be with children. There was a time in my marriage where I needed to start helping with more financial support and change from teacher into sales. I sold for a advertising support company, graphic design, large-display company, to large companies and to advertising agencies and I loved it.

[00:04:19] Nichols: I bet you were good at it. [laughs]

[00:04:21] Hanley: I love people.

[00:04:21] Nichols: You took of that personality. Yes. You love people. You love relationship building so that was probably a really natural segue, but getting back to that, again, your passion, though, you love children. That brings us up to what you're doing today. When I came to that event at Deer Creek, you told the story, the beginnings of something rumbling in your heart that you just could not let go of and that is where The Little Bit Foundation, the whole idea was born. Tell our listeners that story, Rose.

[00:04:56] Hanley: In 2001, something was pulling up my heart. I miss the kids. I was praying a lot about what's my next step? What does my future look like? How to bring a business and my love for children together. Love for business, love for children, and my son was part of this great soccer team. The coach said, "Hey, we want to do something a community service project. I think will bring the team closer together. I think it will help us stay focused."

Another mom on the team, Elise Tierney, started a coat drive. After work, I would go to her home and start coats and then help with deliveries down to St. Patrick Center. Then, one day, she got a call from an inter-city school teacher saying, "Our kids aren't coming to school or if they are coming to school, their arms are blue. Do you have any kids' coats?" The next day, she and I went down to a City School, we brought down 170 coats, and they were all packed in big black trash bags. They were gently used, all different sizes.

I remember being outside the school and it was about 23 degrees. I remember in my mind, and I'm sure it wasn't this way in reality, but in my mind, I remember it as being very dark, and very windy. I kept ringing the bell and nobody was letting me in. I remember looking around thinking, "What's going on here? How long should I wait? I don't quite feel safe." Poverty wasn't new to me but this was a different situation.

As I'm waiting outside, just getting ready to leave, this little boy runs up, this beautiful little boy with the most beautiful smile. He looked up at me and he said, "My dad let me wear his coat today." I looked at him and he had this big leather jacket with the broken zipper and he just said, "How lucky am I that my dad let wear his coat?" They finally let us in. I'm walking up the stairs carrying these big plastic bags in the arms of his coat are hitting the stairs as he's walking up. He didn't stop talking to me the whole time. Beautiful boy and I don't know his name and I wish I did.

We got up to the top of the stairs and he ran off. I went into the principal's office and I started giving out coats. That day, they gave a pink slip to every child who didn't have a coat or didn't have an appropriate coat. We gave out coats for hours and who comes through with this beautiful little boy and I gave them a navy-blue puff coat. I zipped them up and I put a slit on them and I said, "Look at you." I held his shoulders and I said, "Look at how handsome you are." He looked at me and he said, "My dad's going to be so happy I'm warm."

At that moment, something changed to me. I couldn't take it. How can our children here in St. Louis not have the appropriate clothing or the appropriate coats or not have food or not have hygiene items, whatever it is that's standing in their way to be successful? I went home that weekend and had a party at my house. I was talking to all my friends about my experience and they all encouraged me to do something about it.

One of my girlfriends said, "Put an email out and ask people to drop things off on your front porch and maybe you can deliver every month or every week." Another friend said, "Hey, I'll connect you to all my friends." That was how we got started.

[00:08:18] Nichols: I love that story. I'm so grateful that you didn't just have that thing that happened in your gut, but then you took some action. There's a lot in there because you also had friends who had support around you that was encouraging you. "You know, Rose, you got to do something. Here's some ideas."

[00:08:39] Hanley: Lisa, it's just like we met. We bonded. You believed. We worked together. You give me strength in times that I don't have strength. You give me vision when I don't have vision. Those friends of mine that came into my house for that party, they are still deeply involved. I may be the face or I may be the voice. It is so much greater than me and beyond me.

[00:09:03] Nichols: Right. Well, that's a perfect segue, it's The Little Bit Foundation, but tell me how did The Little Bit name come about because I think that's really important?

[00:09:15] Hanley: It's a belief that everybody has different talents and has different gifts. If we all come together and bring whatever talent that is to the table, whether it's little or big, everybody has to place at Little Bit. To give you an idea of how this may work, when we first started, a girlfriend of mine said, "Wouldn't it be great if you had a seamstress to make sure the uniform pants fit?" Well, that was years ago. I looked at her and I thought she was out of her mind. "How could we possibly do that?"

Now, there's a team of women in place that sew for a little bit every week. If a child needs their pants taken up, we measure them, we bring it back, and they sew for us. We deliver them and they fit the child. That talent of being a seamstress and loving children brings that love directly to that child so it's so dignified and respectful the way we take care of our students.

[00:10:09] Nichols: I think now you serve something like close to what, 15,000 kids?

[00:10:14] Hanley: It's about 15,000. It's through 42 schools.

[00:10:18] Nichols: Right. Here's the thing about that. You didn't start with that many. Sometimes, I think that we look at an issue, a social issue, we just think, "That is so huge. How can I do anything?" Just a little bit at a time and people coming together in a community, giving

a little bit, giving what they're, what I like to call, their something extra, [chuckles] really can move mountains.

Now, you are serving-- you started with a few but now you're serving 15,000. I believe on the trajectory that you guys are on. The service you're bringing, we could be on this podcast a year from now and it could be double that.

[00:11:01] Hanley: I would love that.

[00:11:02] Nichols: The whole idea is I think sometimes people have this fear and think the issue looks too big, but if you just start with a little bit and just chunk it out and then you get more people excited about what you're doing, then that's when it can snowball and who knows. The sky is the limit at that point.

[00:11:25] Hanley: Little Bit right now is serving probably 25% of those students living in the depths of poverty. That's a pretty good chunk. We're not there yet.

[00:11:35] Nichols: There's another 75% that we could reach. Right?

[00:11:39] Hanley: Absolutely.

[00:11:40] Nichols: When you started, it was coats, but my goodness, [laughs] it is so much more than that. I remember you even telling me at one point working in the school is that you realize that the kids couldn't always see the blackboard. You built a partnership with Clarkson Eyecare. They came in and started doing eye exams and-- talk about the mission.

[00:12:03] Hanley: I would love to. Our mission is to break down any barrier that stands in front of a child from receiving an education. When you embed yourself in school communities and you can see firsthand that children are hungry or there's a child that has an abscessed tooth that can't get it taken care of for a few weeks and you see the pain there and-- or you see a child trying to balance their glasses on the tip of their nose to see the board and they pick up their glasses and they say, "That darn glasses." You're like, "No. It's not that."

It's really just connecting all these incredible services that are available in a wraparound service for that child to make sure every need is taken care of, and facilitating programming. Working with school communities, understanding the need, loving, and being respectful to these children,

and then, also, building a facilitation model, a distribution model, so we all work together with the child in the middle.

[00:13:02] Nichols: Very good. Well, I want to talk more about this. We have a lot more to talk about, but we need to take a quick break and then we'll be back with Rose Hanley.

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AD: Hi, everybody. I just wanted to take a second and tell you about something our team at Technology Partners can do for your business. We have spent over two decades partnering with organizations and helping them solve their IT needs from a 360-degree perspective. A huge part of how we solve those needs is by developing custom applications of all shapes and sizes. If your team is looking for software and an out of the box solution just isn't right, it's time to consider how we might be able to help. Go to tpi.co/customapps and learn more about our awesome capabilities.

Nichols: Rose, as I think about St. Louis, especially, I believe our community is such a generous giving community. We certainly are not the largest metro, but I'm telling you, we got big hearts. I think people want to be involved a lot of times, but sometimes, they don't really know how to plugin. One of the things I really appreciate about The Little Bit Foundation, you guys make it possible. There's all kinds of things that people can get involved in. I know one of the things that Technology Partners has done, we've participated in Laura's Run. Laura Hettiger heads that up for you guys.

Now, we've always done the live event, but this year, you did a virtual run. Talk about that and you guys had tremendous success.

[00:14:34] Hanley: Oh, my goodness. It was incredible. Through this crisis, we had the run plan, Laura Hettiger's Run 4 Kids benefiting The Little Bit Foundation. We knew with social distancing, that we were going to have to change our whole approach.

We decided to go ahead and do a virtual run. Talk about St. Louis coming together to help our kids truly amazing. We had close to 300 runners sign up to give and support online to do their training runs for a month, post themselves on Instagram and on Facebook, share what they were doing to encourage others to give and support, and at the end of the day, we raised \$65,000.

KMOV was amazing. Laura Hettiger, truly, truly a lovely kind woman who got behind The Little Bit Foundation, but then the swell around a Little Bit from people who just wanted to help out and get outside, run on their own, and post their time has just touched your heart to see how people want to continue to help.

[00:15:46] Nichols: Right. You guys really approach things from a holistic point of view.

[00:15:50] Hanley: Absolutely.

[00:15:51] Nichols: With Project Graduation, the health of the child, the education of the child, the mental health of the child, all those physical things that they need, such as underwear or clean socks or whatever the case may be. I know we participate in book buddies. I just want you to have the freedom here to just talk about all the different things that you guys are doing and how companies or individuals can get involved.

[00:16:18] Hanley: Thank you. Well, there is so much need and we created an initiative called Project Graduation. That is Riverview Gardens, staying with the child from preschool, all the way through high school. Then, we talk about walking with them through their academic career and supporting them in any way they need. That's STEM programming, partnering with WashU **[unintelligible 00:16:41]**, who have been a great support to those initiatives and we're so grateful for that introducing them to ideas.

In the high school, we started a mentorship program. We need people to mentor our high school students and walk with them freshman year through high school, introduction of ideas, career development, opportunities, whatever their dream is after high school, helping them realize their dreams.

When you start at preschool, the needs are books, maybe a uniform, making sure you have school supplies. Then, you go into grade school, it's book fairs. Going to our book fairs and helping kids pick out books, reading to children, academic support, school supplies, one-on-one interaction with students.

Then, you get to high school and it's more, "What is my dream and how do I fulfill that dream after high school? What do I need to realize my dream? Do I need to help support in math? Do I need to look at tutors? Do I want to become a carpenter? Do I want to go into the military?" Just walking with our students through their path educationally. It's pretty incredible.

Whatever gift you have, we have lots of corporations doing drives for us. We also have corporations becoming mentors for our students or working with career fairs, people introducing them to different opportunities. There's just so many different ways to get involved. If you are interested in just finding out more, Lucy England at The Little Bit Foundation is our volunteer manager, lucy@thelittlebitfoundation.org is her email address. She will pick up the phone. She will call you. She'll help guide you through all these opportunities and help you find out where you fit and what will be meaningful to you because it's also about how do you fulfill your calling and helping our kids.

[00:18:36] Nichols: I hope that her inbox is full. [laughs]

[00:18:39] Hanley: Oh, we could use the help.

[00:18:40] Nichols: We've introduced the housing companies. Yes. You need all the resources. Right? You obviously need money to run the programs. You need volunteers. I think you have what? Two-hundred volunteers a week, something like that at least.

[00:18:52] Hanley: When the schools were open, we had corporations coming through our doors every day. We had corporate volunteers and individual volunteers going to our schools every day. We're talking about thousands of volunteers a year. Right now, what we're doing because of where we are in the world, to be quite honest with you, I am so incredibly proud of our leadership team and how we've been able to adjust to continue our mission, even though we can't be in schools and work one on one.

We have a few programs. One of them is called Feeding Hope and it's working with school districts, identifying those families that are in the depths and have the biggest needs. They can't get to the distribution sites.

We're doing a case management with the highest need families, doing a needs assessment, identifying what they're up against, and then answering those needs with the direct delivery service. We're either working through Instagram or courier systems. We're delivering food. We're in partnership with SLU University cooking hot meals and delivering them. We're doing our own staple food canned drives at The Little Bit Foundation, but to give you an idea of a cost, for one family for a week, a family of six to get their basic needs and food met, it's about \$150. These families-- let me give you an idea of what they look like.

We have one grandma who's 92 who is taking care of her six grandchildren. She cannot get to the distribution site to get food, school supplies, basic needs. Little Bit identifies what her needs are and delivers them directly to her house.

[00:20:37] Nichols: I love that. This meeting people right where they are, what is it that they need, and you guys are walking along beside them. You need people that are going to give money so that you can do more of that, Rose. I'm so proud of you. I'm proud of the team there and just the heart. That's what it's about. Right? To whom much is given, much is required, and you guys are definitely doing that, so that's wonderful.

[00:21:05] Hanley: Thanks, Lisa. It's just a true pleasure of mine to be able to work with our community and our students.

[00:21:12] Nichols: We're going to come out of COVID, nobody knows when nobody has a crystal ball. When we come back together, what is next for Little Bit Foundation? I bet you, some of these things that you're doing like the virtual reading to children and things like that, Rose, there's no reason that that has to stop.

[00:21:29] Hanley: I love that. If you want to read to kids, please contact us because we have this great Facebook. It's called Little Bit Storytime. You can read your favorite book. We post that at 4:00. It's a beautiful thing. What does the future look like? As we've been able to adjust to these times, we're looking now at what a school is going to look like in the fall.

We're speaking to the superintendents. We're speaking to their leadership teams. We're getting a lot of different information from different districts. We're creating a level A, everything's back to normal. This is what it's going to look like, but then, we're also understanding that may not be the case. There may be virtual learning still going on at home. How do we support that? We may have 50-50, 50% of the kids go to schools on Monday and Wednesday and then the other 50% go on Tuesday and Thursday.

How do we support that? We're continuing to adjust. We've always worked one on one with the schools. We've always worked one on one with the students with love, dignity, and respect. That will continue. It just may look a little different. We're working through the summer to developing plans or continuing to work through what the needs are and to answer those needs. We don't

have anything that's saying, "This is what it's going to be," because we don't know what it's going to be yet.

[00:22:53] Nichols: Right. Your STEM program, is that something even that possibly something could be delivered virtually and if the child has a box of manipulatives or I don't know exactly what that looks like or their own little robot and then you could somehow administer [chuckles] that virtually. I'm totally in brainstorming mode, but what does that look like?

[00:23:19] Hanley: We just received an incredible donation from **[unintelligible 00:23:22]** Memorial Fund and is to send kids home with problem-solving ideas for them to work on at home. It's just the beginning pilot of something that could be a reality when school starts. It's a makerspace box. It gives problem-solving ideas. The curriculum is based on what WashU has created. We're giving them to kids so that they can work through these different experiments, these different problem-solving ideas at home. We have to keep it working. Right? We have to keep the thinking going.

[00:23:58] Nichols: For sure, because I'm thinking with Zoom, you could even have these Zoom meetings where kids are collaborating with one another. I don't know. The possibilities are endless and sometimes, I think, as devastating as this has been, that sometimes necessity is the mother of innovation. [laughs] That some good ideas are going to come out of this time because we're being forced to. Right?

We have seen behemoth clients within three days that have not had work from home policies, have it to stand up and have all their people working from home in three days. So, we just need to keep dreaming and we need to keep brainstorming and thinking about what this could look like. To your point, we don't really know, but we need to be prepared and be agile in the process.

[00:24:50] Hanley: Have many different plans, continue to adjust, continue to look forward, to continue to gather as much information as we possibly can. I love at least the brainstorming. That's the key. Get the best people around you in that space and continue to think, "How can we continue to support our students that need us the most during this time?" I believe it's going to be a year until things are really back to normal in our school settings. So, we're going to have to continue to adjust, continue to listen, and continue to brainstorm and build and adjust again.

[00:25:29] Nichols: [chuckles] Yes. Exactly. I know you well enough to know, Rose, that if anyone out there is listening right now and they're like, "Oh, I have an idea." [laughs] Make sure that you get that idea over to Little Bit. Rose, this is the *Something Extra* podcast. What do you believe is something extra that every leader needs?

[00:25:50] Hanley: I believe that every leader needs to have a strong passion towards something that helps tell the story. It helps fill momentum. I would have said before that it's a true vision of where you need to be, but I think it's beyond that now because where my vision was a month ago, it has totally [chuckles] changed.

[00:26:13] Nichols: Yes. It's totally changed. Right?

[00:26:13] Hanley: Yes. It's a love, it's a passion, and it's a desire to make a difference, whatever that is for me. That's what it is.

[00:26:21] Nichols: That's perfect. Again, Rose, I want you to tell the listeners, if somebody is interested, how do they find you? How did they find The Little Bit? How do they submit ideas? How do they get their companies involved?

[00:26:36] Hanley: Please go to our website, thelittlebitfoundation.org. You can find me through there. You can come directly to me and email me. If you want to help, we want your help. There's a place for everybody and I have to tell you--

[00:26:51] Nichols: Come one, come all. [laughs]

[00:26:53] Hanley: Come on in. I can't wait to start hugging. Come on in. There's a place for you. I want to say that there's great energy. It's great fun. This is not a sad place to be. This is an ambitious, lovely, beautiful place to be to serve those that need us now. I just welcome everybody to join us.

[00:27:14] Nichols: Well, thank you so much. I cannot wait for our listeners to hear your story, to hear The Little Bit story, and get involved. Thanks for being with us today, Rose.

[00:27:23] Hanley: I'm grateful. Thank you. You're the best.

