

**Samantha Michael, Director of Business Services  
Rutgers School of Social Work**

Hi and welcome to the first episode of the fourth season of toward a more just future. A podcast from Rutgers School of Social Work. My name is Samantha Michael, and I'm the Director of Business Services here at the school this season, I'm speaking with directors and members of institutes and centers at Rutgers School of Social Work about their work, their connections to the field of social work, engagement with communities throughout New Jersey and beyond, and how their areas of focus prove critical to the future. Today, we'll be speaking with Emily Greenfield, professor at Rutgers School of Social Work and director of the hub for aging collaboration. Dr Greenfield is an internationally recognized scholar and leader within the aging in community movement. Her community engaged scholarship seeks to bolster community based efforts toward more equitable opportunities for long and healthy lives. Her work has helped to advance understanding of innovative approaches to aging and community in the 21st century. Examples include age and dementia friendly community initiatives, supportive service programs for naturally occurring retirement communities and village organizations. Doctor Greenfield also conducts research on how social inequalities stemming from childhood influence later life, cognition and well being. Through her leadership, the Rutgers hub for aging collaboration was formally established in september 2022 at the School of Social Work, the hub for aging collaboration, or the hub, as we affectionately call it, advances excellence in collaborative research, teaching and engagement. Its goal to improve social context for aging and health equity. The Hub serves as a nexus to strengthen networks among community leaders, researchers, service providers, policy makers and others towards innovation and leadership for aging in community fueled by the Social Work value of leveraging social relationships for change, the team works across disciplines and sectors to improve environments for aging, equity among individuals, families and communities in all of their diversity. Dr Greenfield, thank you so much for joining us today. We're excited to have you here for our first episode of the fourth season. To kick us off, could you give us an overview of the hub and the work that you do. Absolutely.

**Emily Greenfield, Professor and Director of the Hub for Aging Collaboration  
Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you so much for inviting me. It's really fun to be able to speak about work that we're also passionate about through the hub for aging collaboration at the Rutgers School of Social Work. So the hub is the school's newest structure, having been founded in the fall of 2022 after years of discussion and a year's plus long planning process, the mission of the hub is to collaboratively change social context for aging and health equity. By social context, we mean the landscapes in which we all are aging, the people, the programs, the places in which our lives play out and through which individuals, families and communities experience the challenges and also the opportunities of aging, especially in our later years. So in planning for the launch of the hub, we spent a good amount of time deliberating on what we should title the thing. Of course, we wanted to highlight our focus on aging, but I also wanted something more to it that really would address what I think makes the hub unique. I'm really proud and happy that we chose the word collaboration as part of the hub's leading identity, because partnerships, relationships and

working together are all foundational to what the hub does and how we seek to contribute to social change. So you know, aging, of course, encompasses the entirety of human experiences, psychological, social, physical, existential, and more clearly, aging doesn't belong or fit cleanly under to just one discipline, and our focus on collaboration highlights this truth. The concept of collaboration also fits with the core principle of social work, that human relationships are vehicles for change, transformation for individuals, families, organizations, communities, society, we at the hub, are leading. What with this focal Social Work strength, we lead with the idea that there are many, many systems components that must come together to improve social context for aging and health equity, and that part of Social Work leadership is helping to identify what those components are and how can they better fit together. Another thing to note is that the assumption that most people today will survive and live into their later years, years is relatively new. Aging is, in many ways, considered one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century, and here we are in the 21st century figuring out what to do next. In general, we don't live in a society that was designed with long lives in mind. So all of our social institutions, schools, towns, healthcare, public health, families, government, businesses, housing, transportation, even our very own. Diversity have room for improvement in terms of transforming themselves for age inclusivity. So this is especially important in the context of interlocking systems of inequality, because individuals from historically marginalized groups by identities such as race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, socioeconomic status are especially affected by what we as a society do and do not do in response to population aging. So this is why we view the hub's focus on changing social context for aging and health equity across sectors, systems, levels, time and place is very much connected to the Rutgers School of Social Work's inclusion, intersectionality, diversity, equity and advancement, or idea work, but in terms of what the hub actually does, we're very cognizant that we operate out of the sector of higher education. We therefore seek to lead with our strengths in higher ed, which include research, teaching and engagement. But it helped for me to give a little bit of overview of what we do in each of these things.

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Sure. Thank you. Okay, great. Well,

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in terms of research, some of our signature areas include age and dementia, friendly community initiatives, villages, other program models to address social determinants of healthy aging, life course, social context, racism and later life, health and end of life care. We also have a component of the hub that involves procuring novel data sets with information about both aging services and health services. This component of our work is led by my colleague, Dr Aisha kinsengell. It's a unique and important niche that reflects the special constellation of research expertise that we have at the Rutgers University school social work hub for aging collaboration in terms of teaching, the hub is a resource for all of our schools, academic programs and continuing education. This encompasses the BA, SW, MSW, PhD and DSW programs. Much of our focus historically has been in the MSW program, with a long standing specialization program

through the aging and health certificate, as well as the top fellowship in aging, which is a competitive program that focuses on cultivating Social Work leaders in aging. Dr Lawrence netacker, Assistant Professor of teaching, leads these programs and others. We also collaborate with Dr Doug beeham, associate professional protector, professional practice and director of continuing education at the school, to promote and support the school's continuing education certificate programs and workshops in aging as the hub for eating collaboration. Of course, we also do a lot of work on engagement. This involves engaging others across Rutgers, whose work focuses on improving social context for aging and health equity, trying to amplify this focus across the Rutgers ecosystem. It also involves cultivating meaningful partnerships, from one off projects to long term and multifaceted programs of work with organizations and groups outside of Rutgers. We write grants together, prepare conference presentations, put on conferences together, serve on inter organizational advisory committees, cross promote each other's work on social media. It is actually a lot of engagement.

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Thank you for sharing. It's so interesting to kind of hear you talk about all the different pieces that go into operating the hub. And also I appreciate the passion behind the work that you have. It sounds like there are a lot of different collaborators and partners involved in the work that you do and that the hub does. Can you talk to us a little bit about the network of collaborators you have? What does it look like, and who are you working with in the state?

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Great, yeah, sure. We have been very intentional about building the hubs network guided by the fundamental belief that social change on aging requires not only top level policy change, of course, but also grassroots innovation, leadership, practice change and collective impact. We've been focusing on developing our networks, both across the Rutgers University, all four Chancellor units, as well as beyond Rutgers and throughout New Jersey's diverse communities and organizations. So I can give you just one recent example of our work on cultivating University Community Connections. Over this past year, we've been working with New Jersey advocates for aging well, which is a statewide nonprofit in old bridge Township, which is a municipality in Middlesex County, we came together to try to better connect senior centers with each other across the state. There used to be a formal network of senior centers that served to share information and learning and coordinated action among senior center professionals in New Jersey, but that network hasn't been operational for some time. So about a year ago, we started a meeting by zoom every once in a while to strategize on ways to build back this network. We took a play from the playbook of age friendly community leaders whose work I have studied over the years, and I suggested that we do a collaborative event together, a statewide virtual event, to start spurring some more connections and seeing who shows up. What the interest is, what questions do people ask? Etc. So over a series of planning meetings, we had a breaking our the mold event last month on Zoom. This event addressed mutually beneficial partnerships between senior centers and Age Friendly Community Initiatives. It was great. It featured the voices of statewide leaders as well as on the ground community leaders,

and we had over 80 people in attendance. Representing 17 of New Jersey's 21 counties. This audience was built deliberately and in large part because of outreach efforts of the hub, more specifically, our MSW intern Asia Ricker, with support from the hub, Asia, made over 70 outreach calls to Senior Centers throughout New Jersey. She used the contact information that was collected through a prior project of the hub, as well as our multi sectoral partners, we made a special effort to connect with senior center leaders in the southern region of New Jersey. Since so much of my own work and through the hub has been on age from the community initiatives that has happened in the northern region and someone in the central region already, each of Asia's touch points help to build a stronger foundation of community leaders who care about aging are motivated to grow and want to work together. It is so exciting, and we're continuing to build out this list of connections for hopefully our nonprofit and public partners will be able to use this foundation for revitalizing of more formal network. We've also been intentional in building out the hubs membership structure in a way that is fair, transparent and consistent, because the hub is anchored in the School of Social Work, core members must be full time in the school. We do, however, have an equally sizable and growing number of affiliates from outside of the school, which reflects the fact that work on social context and aging is not happening in just one discipline, one unit, or even one Chancellor unit. We have strong ties with other centers and faculties focused on aging and workers health, of course, but also great connections with people doing the work in Newark and Camden as well. This is so important to us as the hub for aging collaboration.

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You've brought a lot of expertise to the hub and the work that you've built to date. Could you talk to us a little bit about the path that led you here and your role as director,

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absolutely, as a life course scholar. Myself, I really appreciate this question, and I have to say that at my heart, I'm a developmentalist. I've always been fascinated by humans as they grow and evolve from their very beginning days through their very final breaths. When I was growing up, I loved playing school and being around kids and adults of all ages, and I wanted to be a teacher like my mom and always said that I wanted to teach the grade of whichever one I happened to be in at the time. So in first grade, I wanted to be first grade teacher. Second grade, I wanted to be a second grade teacher. But then I got to my freshman year of college, and I honestly wasn't so impressed by my classmates at the time, but then, when I got to more advanced studies as an undergrad, I found faculty mentors and decided that indeed I wanted to be a college professor. I was first exposed to the field of aging by chance, a friend in college was overseeing School service club, and nobody else was stepping up to lead the quote, unquote senior citizens project. So as all good volunteer managers know, the best way to recruit people to volunteer is just to ask them directly. So he asked me if I would be interested in leading this part, and I just wanted to help. So I said, Sure. I then found myself driving shuttles of 20 something year old students to nursing homes multiple times per week in a rural university setting, I made some very good friends by taking part in the nursing home communities. There

was one resident in particular who I became very close to, and I just couldn't understand why she was living there, and really neither could she she was especially cognitively alert and physically spry. She wanted to go home herself, but there was no real plan for her to be able to do so. So in retrospect, I think it was this friendship that got me started thinking really deeply about system level issues and aging in place. Specifically my role to the director of the hub has been one of starting early at Rutgers and sticking with it. I came to Rutgers straight from graduate school in 2007 and started my tenure clock in a faculty position, actually pre tenure, I led a proposal to launch a Center on Aging at the school. It was part of a philanthropic opportunity that was looking to seed centers on aging and social work schools across the country. We unfortunately weren't selected then, and I was told that our proposal was fantastic, but they hesitated to award the grant to an institution when the lead was before tenure, but the ideas and desire to start a Center on Aging in our school never left. So over the years, I became increasingly involved with grants administration and especially community engaged projects that require coordinating a lot of different people and activities towards shared goals. I think it's these experiences in addition to mentorship and support from school administrators, faculty colleagues and others that have helped me to grow into my now current role as Director.

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Thank you for sharing that. So when it comes to funding, what goes into making sure an organization like the hub works? How do you balance wanting to produce good research and effective outcomes, but also needing to keep the organization running and feeling supported and valued.

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So this is a really important question, and I appreciate your asking it. Of course, structures like the hub are relational. They definitely connect us and our efforts in ways that would not be readily possible otherwise. But I have. Oh, well, that centers are also fiscal and administrative structures. They require a flow of financial and other types of resources to sustain themselves and ultimately amplify their impact. It's important to note that the hub would not be possible without a long time partnership between the school and the Henry and Maryland hub Foundation, in particular, a philanthropic organization based in northern New Jersey that maintains a grant making portfolio on aging in place. Our school's partnership with this foundation began more than 10 years ago when a Rutgers colleague connected me with them. We did a small starter project together on aging in place and housing in Bergen County in the early 2000 10s. Since then, there have been many subsequent grants and projects, including an eight plus year long partnership on the development and seating of age friendly communities in northern New Jersey. The Henry and Maryland tab Foundation also has supported our school through the top fellowship in aging. This program, as I mentioned before, is for MSW students who demonstrate a strong commitment and leadership potential for social work in aging. It is a competitive program with a stipend that involves students completing a leadership project during their advanced year of practicum. We're so grateful to the top foundation for all of their support, especially for their support of our students in the future social work, workforce and

aging. Currently, the Henry and Maryland Todd foundation is supporting the hub through startup grants now in our second year and planning for the next each grant has multiple goals with associated activities, outputs and outcomes, across research, teaching and engagement in developing, designing and implementing these startup grants, we're making progress and refining the hub shape, scope of operations and resource allocation. The idea is that our core functions and resources are going to become more stable and long standing over time and in turn, they will also become more visible. Various others will better understand their value, and this will help us to go responsive, grow responsibly with additional funding sources and sustainable growth in terms of new projects and more hub supported team members.

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Thank you. The need for your expertise isn't going away anytime soon, so I'm excited to hear you moving towards growth and sustainability. As a director, you're responsible for the work that goes into making the organization run the core of the hub and its operations. What are some of the major areas of responsibility you have?

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So thanks. It's my great privilege to not only serve as the hub's director, but also as its founding director, take the responsibility as founding director very seriously to lay the foundations for a hub whose operations and impact will outlive all of us, and that will be around long enough to progressively realize the promise of social change and progress on Aging and health equity, especially anchored in social work values. The summer before the hub launched, I had the privilege to speak with my graduate mentor from the University of Wisconsin, and in that conversation, I remember she shared with me that her own graduate mentor founded what is now the Institute on Aging at the University of Wisconsin. I actually never knew that he was the person who laid the foundations for this anchoring Institute in my graduate alma mater, I only knew my academic grandfather as a productive, thoughtful and brilliant scholar of the life course in aging. This story helped to fuel my inspiration. I hope that work toward the mission of the hub will flourish in the decades and generations to come. And again, as a developmentalist, I take great pride and feel much privilege in helping to create this thing with brilliant others from its very earliest years. A lot of my work as director involves creating systems, policies, procedures and programs that don't really exist yet, especially in the context of ageism. My goal is to demonstrate the great value the hub presents the school to our universities, funders, partners, students, faculty, staff, society, everybody, to the state and to continue to strategize, Jive on ways to sustainably grow this work over time,

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in thinking about the structure and the infrastructure right that you've created for the hub, what makes the structure of a research center, research group so appealing to the work that you're doing and the outcomes that you're looking to produce.

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Yeah. So before the hub became a thing, we actually as a school, have had a really long history of excellence in the field of aging. For example, our continuing education programs focused on aging are some of the oldest in the country. We were doing work on continuing at an aging for a lot of other universities and schools were and we have multiple faculty conducting social work research on aging. We have multiple specialized training opportunities for students in aging. All of this predates the hub, but there was no real good way to bring it all together and to achieve synergies across them. The Hub also raises the visibility of our schools work on aging to the broader university and to the state. For example, earlier this month, we hosted an inaugural roundtable on aging education, which attracted people from all four Chancellor units to come together online and learn about each other's work in classrooms and beyond on aging. Work and find new ways to share ideas and resources and make this work even better. I think that creating cross unit programs like these that don't yet exist are made more possible because of the existence of the hub, the title of our center, leads with our value and purpose. We are here to help people come together, learn and grow together, and take action together to improve our own work and those of others toward a better future for aging and health equity. The Hub also serves to create synergies across those three functions I talked about earlier research, teaching and engagement. For example, later this month, we're hosting a large virtual summit titled innovating nj. The event will feature breakout rooms with presentations from over 20 organizations across the state that are engaging in innovative policy advocacy and practice to change norms on aging in the Garden State, this event is primarily engagement as it fundamentally is about creating and cultivating partnerships between the hub as the convener and the groups and organizations doing this work across the state. But it also has a strong teaching component, an opportunity for curriculum development, for example, for our own students at Rutgers, and lifelong learning for professionals. It also relates to our research at the hub as it is a translational project based on our findings of how collaborative events are an incremental step toward longer term collective systems change, doing this work through the hub makes the interconnections across these three functions, engagement, teaching and research all the stronger and more obvious.

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Hearing you talk about the work that you and the hub are doing, it's clear that you have a passion for this work and also for your partners and the people that you're reaching. Could you tell us your aspirational goals for New Jersey in this area, and then any similar goals you have for Rutgers as an institution when it comes to this work and the collaborations.

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Thank you so much for that. Yes, we have lots of we don't. We don't call it planning at the hub. We call it dreaming, because that's really what it is. And I really do think it starts with like the tenacity to have vision, but just kind of this audacious hope that we can keep striving to do more. And so yes, I have both many hopes and dreams from our state on Aging, as well as for

our university, and I'm super fortunate to continue to work with wonderful colleagues and practice and policy leaders who share in this passion. So one thing that's of great interest for the state of New Jersey is continuing to work toward a state multi sector plan on aging. So state multi sector plans on aging are a relatively new phenomenon that has emerged nationally. Started with states like Massachusetts and California championed by private philanthropy to try to make it easier and more enticing for more states across the United States to engage in a multi sector plan, process and outcome. And the idea is that it's this long term, usually 10 year vision, to embed an age friendly lens across all departments of state government and to, I think, fundamentally change how people think about the role of state policy on aging. So yes, of course, it's about improving healthcare systems, Medicaid, pensions, tax relief, but it's also equally about housing, transportation, communities, families, education, and it's definitely not just about like, oh, we need to do something to help those old, those little old people, which is a pretty ageist frame for approaching this work, but really doing this for all of us, and the intergenerational richness of our state and the opportunity for human and societal transformation. So I think New Jersey moving forward with the multi sector plan on aging would be an excellent tactic in the near term toward these social goals for the good of the Garden State, and I think this hopefully will become a shared focus across sectors in New Jersey, and include higher education, our State University and the hub so on the topic of our university, I'd really just like to see work on aging continue to be amplified again, especially in a way that balances out more traditional biomedical research approaches. I actually was just stumbled upon the New Brunswick Chancellor unit's diversity equity, inclusion phase two plan over this past week, and of the many action steps, there actually were several that stood out to me is being especially conscious of age, diversity and inclusion in terms of the diversity, equity and inclusion practices of our own university. So like, for example, I don't know if you knew, but Rutgers, as per state policy, I believe, allows New Jersey retirees, ages 62 and older, to audit university courses without tuition. Amazing, never knew this. We put it right up on the Hub website to help promote this work. So this is the type of work that I hope to see become more widely known and celebrated at our State University. And on that note, I'm really hoping that we can work toward H friendly university designation my colleague, Dr Lawrence netacker and her colleagues through. Rutgers aging Task Force have been discussing ways that we can work toward getting that designation. The age friendly university movement is truly a global initiative that reflects higher education's commitment to being more responsive to population aging and better preparing our students for an increasingly aging world, we have such a strong foundation at Rutgers for pursuing this designation and getting our university officially on the map in this sense, and hopeful that the hub can help work in partnership with others toward that goal over the months and years ahead.



**Samantha Michael, Director of Business Services**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you, Dr Greenfield, we appreciate you sharing your time and your journey with us today and all of the critical work, the hub for aging collaboration, is moving forward.

**Emily Greenfield, Professor and Director of the Hub for Aging Collaboration**  
**Rutgers School of Social Work**

Thank you so much for this opportunity, and thank you. It's really a privilege to do this work with and of being part of our tremendous Rutgers University School of Social Work. You