

Interviewee: Ms. Anita Burdick
Interviewer: Alycia Barney
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Abstract: Anita Burdick was born in 1966 in Webster, Massachusetts. While she lives in Thompson, Connecticut, she has worked as the office manager at Worcester's Oak Hill Community Development Corporation for the past eight years. In this interview, Anita focuses mostly on her work history and particularly on her current position with the Oak Hill CDC. She explains, in a general sense, what the CDC does and goes into more detail of her day-to-day tasks in this busy office. Anita describes how she came to work at the CDC, what her role is within the organization, and the process through which she has gradually taken on more work responsibilities, including human resources, the annual Neighborhood Works Picnic, and general office support. She shares stories about the chaos and joy of the annual Toys for Tots drive, which she also coordinates as a part of her regular duties. Anita further discusses her challenges to balance family and work life as a recently divorced mother of three children. She also briefly touches upon the changes she has witnessed in the downtown area and her memories of the Worcester Cold Storage Fire.

Barney: Anita, where and when were you born?

Burdick: I was born ... 1966, in Webster, Massachusetts.

Barney: So, how did you come to live or work in Worcester?

Burdick: I had worked at Commerce Insurance for ten and a half years, and had moved to Florida. When I came back from Florida, this was a job that I came for an interview for from a staffing agency, and I was hired.

Barney: Okay, so tell me about your family. Do you have any brothers or sisters? Any parents that live up here? Were they all from Webster?

Burdick: Actually, I live in Thompson, Connecticut...and born and raised there. Well, not born there, but raised there all my life. My parents live in Quinnebaug, Connecticut, and my sisters both live in Connecticut, as well. I have two sisters, one older, one younger.

Barney: And what kind of work are they in?

Burdick: My older sister does real estate and medical transcription, and my younger sister works at a day care.

Barney: Okay, and what kind of work did your parents do?

Burdick: My mother was a bus driver... And my father was a truck driver who now is a bus driver. (laughs)

Barney: Okay. So you didn't grow up in Worcester, but what was your first impression of Worcester when you came to work in here?

Burdick: Oh my god, I'm gonna get lost! (both laugh)

Barney: And is it very different from where you've come from, or similar?

Burdick: Well I grew up in a small town and, I mean you know, I've worked most of my working life in Webster, which is like eight minutes, eight miles up the road. So it's like, get off the highway, go to work, or get on the highway, go home. I never came into Worcester for anything.

Barney: Okay, so what are your earliest memories of your neighborhood, and what was your neighborhood like?

Burdick: When I was growing up, when I was really young, we lived actually in a nice little community. It was a lot of kids around. I was probably seven or eight years old, and my parents built a house off in the country. So we had no neighbors it was just us...(pause)...I used to ride my bike into town to visit my friends and stuff. It was safe...it was...it was just nice, growing up as a kid in a small town.

Barney: Okay, did you receive your education here or in the area?

Burdick: I also went to school in Thompson, Connecticut, at Tourtellotte Memorial High School—graduated in 1984.

Barney: Did you go to college around here?

Burdick: Nope, I didn't go to college.

Barney: Oh, okay.

Burdick: Got married too soon and just never had time to go.

Barney: That's okay. Do you have any hobbies, or regular leisure activities that you do outside of your home or work?

Burdick: Well I don't know about outside the home because everything I do is in the home. I read; I like to read. I do crocheting, a little bit of needlework. And besides working, I have a side business, which keeps me busy quite a bit.

Barney: What's your side business?

Burdick: It's called The Gopher. I do a lot of desktop publishing, bulk mailing, business cards, for actually a lot of companies and nonprofits here in Worcester.

Barney: Okay, interesting. How do you fit in your leisure time in with raising your family, doing like household duties?

Burdick: Barely.

Barney: Barely.

Burdick: There's not a lot of time for leisure time. It's...(pausing) I'm actually going to be out this weekend. It'll be my first weekend that I can remember other than going on business trips. My first weekend I can remember not having kids.

Barney: So, when you're not at home, where do you usually find yourself?

Burdick: At work.

Barney: At work. Here?

Burdick: At work. Yup.

Barney: Here, at the CDC.

Burdick: Yup.

Barney: Okay, and your side business, you do that from home?

Burdick: I do that from home.

Barney: Okay. So, you do work outside the home for wages now, but when did you begin working and what did you do?

Burdick: I was 16 years old, and I got my first job working in a nursing home in the kitchen—cleaning, scraping excess food off plates, and doing dishes. It was a fun job, you get to meet a lot of different people. You get really attached to some of the elderly people in the nursing homes.

Barney: So, how did you learn how to do this work, how did you come to do this work?

Burdick: To do what I'm doing now? (Barney nods) I worked, well 'cause I had I worked for Commerce Insurance for ten and a half years, so it was basically I was in the office. When I left Commerce, I moved to Florida, also went to another insurance company. I lasted there about a month, and I just found it boring. It just wasn't the same as what I was doing. And I got a job in Human Resources at another insurance company. I was there for a year and a half, and when I

moved back to Connecticut I interviewed through a staffing agency and they just, they had an opening here for an office administrator. And I interviewed for the job and I've been here ever since.

Barney: So is it a long drive from Thompson to here?

Burdick: No, it's only about twenty minutes, unless I hit traffic on the highway. Then it'll be about 30 to 40..

Barney: It's really not bad though.

Burdick: No. I take all the little back roads that I've learned. I get here pretty quick.

Barney: And have ever been involved in volunteer work or any type of paid work for a nonprofit organization?

Burdick: When I was a teenager I used to work as a candy striper at Day Kimball Hospital. And since, I've done some volunteer work at a nonprofit in my own town. It's called Thompson Ecumenical Empowerment Group. I used to do some newsletters and mailings for them.

Barney: So, can you just describe your job here for me? Like what you do, how many hours a week you work, what kind of people you work with?

Burdick: Well typically I work forty hours a week, occasionally there is extra time, depending on what's going on. My position here is office...

(There was a telephone call Burdick had to answer. Barney recaps briefly after to remind Burdick of what she was talking about)

...Like I said, depending on what's going on. I'm the office manager, and I do planning of all the events. So in June we've got our Neighborhood Works Week picnic, and October we've got the Job Fair. In January we have a Board and Staff Retreat. I also do the coordination of the Toys for Tots program, not just for Oak Hill, but for the entire area. All of the agencies that do Toys for Tots, every form comes through me.

Barney: Wow, okay.

Burdick: And I set everything up, and I send it off to the Marines. I handle all the Human Resources here, all the anything to do with any of the equipment...excuse me again!

(Another telephone call. Barney recaps)

Barney: Toys for Tots, Job Fair, you said all the paperwork comes through you.

Burdick: Yeah, I do all of the—deal with all the equipment, the fax machines, copy machines, computers, anything that needs to be done. Sometimes we have staff that leave, and it's my job

to fill in the gaps and make sure that whatever they have going on gets done while we replace them.

Barney: So how many people work in this place?

Burdick: In this office, there are six people. We also have two down in the Neighborhood Works Home Ownership Center of Worcester. So there's a total of eight staff for the agency, one of which is part-time.

Barney: So, we've already talked about how you came to join this, but what are your organization's main goals, aside from doing like Job Fairs and Toys for Tots?

Burdick: The biggest thing that Oak Hill does is related to housing. We do new and rehab homes, and we sell them for low- to moderate-income first time home buyers. We have two gentlemen that actually deal in that area, so I don't—if they were to leave, I wouldn't have to do their work because I don't know nothing about that stuff. I just run the office, and try to fill in where I can.

Barney: Good. So, what were some of the main programs or initiatives that you actually worked on while you've been here?

Burdick: (Thinking) Um, probably the biggest part of my job is the events, is planning the events that go on. The picnic we have in June, we get like 900 or more people showing up at this picnic, and it takes—I start planning it in like February; it takes a little while.

Barney: Yeah.

Burdick: (Pause) It's hard to say because I just do so much. I don't work on specific projects like they do with the housing or the community organizer does with the resident leadership. I just do whatever needs to be done.

Barney: So you're the fill in.

Burdick: Yeah.

Barney: Okay, and what would you consider the group's major accomplishments?

Burdick: Oak Hill's major accomplishments?

Barney: Yeah, the Oak Hill CDC.

Burdick: Well, I mean just the rehabbing of the homes and selling them. We are giving people opportunities to own homes that under normal circumstances wouldn't have that kind of opportunity. I think that's one of the biggest—that's what I like best about working here at Oak Hill, is we give opportunities to advance themselves. Even with the Job Fair. I mean, people that don't have work, we give them an opportunity to find work. Rose's job is to help people find

jobs and last year she placed 111 people in positions. So, I mean, just those two things alone—it amazes me how much we get done around here.

Barney: That is great. Do they work around—do the people that you place in work, do they work around this area? Or just in the Worcester area?

Burdick: A lot of the employees that we place are here in the Worcester area. They're very few that are outside. Most of the people we place are local and don't always have cars, so they need local jobs.

Barney: Good. So, were you involved with other organizations?

Burdick: No, this was my first experience really with a nonprofit. I didn't even start doing work for TEGS in Thompson until I came here.

Barney: How long have you been with Oak Hill?

Burdick: August was eight years. I had my eighth anniversary in August.

Barney: Oh, and how long have you been with the Thompson, CT group?

Burdick: I only worked with them for like one season, and then their Executive Director left and just I never went back.

Barney: Oh, so you're not there anymore just here.

Burdick: No.

Barney: Okay, so what kind of an impact has Worcester had on you as an individual?

Burdick: I spend a lot of time in Worcester. Even in my free time if I have to go out to the store, or when we go out to dinner or something, I find myself heading to Worcester. I mean I live in Connecticut. All my friends and family head off to the other end of Connecticut and here I am heading to Worcester!

(Telephone call).

Barney: So you're here a lot in Worcester. The impact that Worcester's had on you is that you're—you find yourself being drawn here.

Burdick: Yes, I know my way around. I know, I mean, I know, not everything, but I just, I find it... I wouldn't want to live in the city, but it is a fun place to come into when you're not working.

Barney: Mm, so do you think that you've had any impact on Worcester?

Burdick: I say no, because I'm just in the office. I don't do the housing. I don't do the community organizing, so personally I'd say no. I'm sure if you asked others they'd say yes. I just, I can't think of what I would do, or how I would have an impact. But I'm sure some way or another I have. I mean, Toys for Tots...I volunteered last year to be the coordinator for the area and it was never done before. So by doing that I'm checking like 3,000 families to see how many times they've registered and making sure that they only registered at one location, which gives the opportunity for other families to get toys that may not have gotten them if one family had registered at five locations—which they do.

Barney: They register at a different location to try and get more toys?

Burdick: Yes. Yes.

Barney: Ok, so you're making sure that each family's only getting...

Burdick: One batch of toys.

Barney: One batch of toys.

Burdick: Which, I have a lot of people calling up yelling at me. They want—they need toys; they don't have money; they need this. I'm just following the guidelines the Marines give us. I mean, only so many toys are donated, and there's so many families out there that need toys for their kids. It's only fair, so.

Barney: Yeah, I agree. So what challenges does Worcester still face, in your opinion?

Burdick: I think there's a lot of need for housing still in the area. I mean, I—so many people call me on a day-to-day basis, looking for apartments, looking to buy a house, and there's just not a lot out there. You know, affordable housing is a big thing.

Barney: But you've helped so many families, but there's still such a need?

Burdick: Yeah. I mean, as a non-profit, we can only rehab and build so many homes. There's only so many vacant lots we can build on. Our service area's only so big. There are other non-profits in the city that do the same thing we do, and they're in the same boat we are. There's only so many vacant lots, there's only so many burnt out buildings that you can rehab.

Barney: So where do you guys get the funding to do all the different, all the housing, rehab things that you guys do?

Burdick: We get funding from the city, from the state, and some foundations, private foundations.

Barney: Okay, and is it—it's a set amount each year, you guys appeal every year to get more?

Burdick: Yeah, depending on what we have going on. You know, our Executive Director does all of our fundraising, and he sends out the grants requests. Usually the same people, you know, we'll get good hunks of money from them, depending on the projects we're working on. Others it's just, you know, give and take. Some of the smaller foundations will give us \$1000, \$1500. Some years we get it, some years we don't. Some years we'll get more. It depends on their funding as well.

Barney: Do you do any type of fundraisers outside of that, or...?

Burdick: With our annual picnic, our Neighborhood Works Picnic, I started about four years ago doing a raffle to help raise money to pay for the picnic. That's pretty much the fundraising that I do. I mean, I'll ask for donations from the local businesses to get the prizes for the raffle, and then all of the proceeds from the raffle help pay for the picnic.

Barney: Good. So what would you do to improve—what would you improve in the city?

Burdick: The roads!

Barney: The roads.

Burdick: It's amazing. I drive, I mean, I'm everywhere driving around doing errands, and the roads are just horrendous. There's just potholes everywhere. It's just amazing. That's what I would do.

Barney: That's what you would do.

Burdick: But I mean, if I lived here, I'd probably think on a different perspective. But then I just don't live in the city. I just drive around it, so that's what I notice a lot of.

Barney: So what do you think we should do to confront these challenges? Like we as members of Worcester community, working here, living here?

Burdick: Well I mean as far as, as far as the roads' conditions, people that live here in the city should probably be calling the Department of...whatever department that is...roads?

Barney: Public Works?

Burdick: Yeah, Public Works, then you... I mean, they have a Pothole Hotline. And, you know, if enough people call reporting potholes, they're gonna fix them. I just don't think people care. They just drive around them!

Barney: Can you call and...like can you, because?

Burdick: Yup, I have. You just have to know the exact location of the pothole. And I may be driving down the road and know I'm on Cambridge Street, but, don't ask me whereabouts I am on Cambridge Street. When I notice things, I do call. As far as that's concerned, we had some

pretty big ones up on Aetna Street, and it's taken us three, four phone calls to get them to get down here. They have like a 24-48 hour response time. If you don't see them come down within that time, you call again. You call again, but they're still busy themselves, so...

Barney: So do you encourage the people in this area to take initiative like you do and call the Pothole Hotline and try and like, make Worcester a better place even just by doing a small act?

Burdick: Yeah, even for other things, not just the road conditions. You know people call and they ask about—you know, oh, they call: 'My neighbor, my neighbors' yard is full of garbage, and it's messy, you know, it's downgrading my property.' And we give them the number of who to call. You know, we encourage them to call. People call complaining about their neighbors being loud; well, there's not much we can do about it, but if you call the police, you know, depending on the hours that they're doing it. But they don't wanna do that because then their neighbors will think it was them, and they'll...it'll just cause fights. You just try and encourage them, you know, anonymously. The police aren't gonna tell them who called. You just kind of have to encourage people to stand up for themselves.

Barney: Good. What changes have occurred in Worcester over time, from the time that you've been working here?

Burdick: A lot of changes with the roads. I mean, the big—the work on the highway they're doing, the Grafton Street. They just put the new Shaw's in, changed all the roads over there. A lot of new housing going up in the area, not just non-profit housing, but there's several other developments in our area that, you know, for-profits are doing. So they're seeing the need. They're not always affordable housing, but they're seeing the need for housing.

Barney: And what are the main events that have happened in Worcester during your time here?

Burdick: Um, the biggest thing that's happened since I've been working here is probably the Worcester Cold Storage Fire. That's the one that really sticks out in my mind.

Barney: Can you explain that a little bit?

Burdick: Down at the other end of Grafton Street down the hill here, just about four or five years ago now, if not longer, there was just a fire at the Worcester Cold Storage building, and six firefighters were killed there. And it was just started by two homeless people that didn't realize what was happening, and left the building and the building caught on fire.

Barney: I remember that.

Burdick: And it was just days, the traffic, it took them days to get the fire out. There was traffic backed up, detours everywhere. It was just not a pretty picture.

Barney: So what kind of effect did that have on the population in Worcester, just besides the traffic do you think it had a greater impact? On the residents, or even just working people here?

Burdick: Well, I think when you lose six firefighters at one fire, it has a big impact on everybody, even if you don't know them. I mean, it's been going on for days, everybody sees what's happening, and...it's very...sad. It just really gets at your heart, its...these people, these guys are out to serve and protect us and they're dying. I think it affects everybody. So it just kind of brings the city together, everybody united, and you know tried to help out the families.

Barney: Any other major events?

Burdick: (thinking)

Barney: Or even anything that just sticks out in your mind?

Burdick: (thinking) Nothing I can think of off the top of my head.

Barney: So, what distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

Burdick: Everybody knows everybody. I mean it's not a big city, and it's amazing how you talk to this one, and they—everybody knows everybody. It's got a small town atmosphere, for a city. I kind of like that about it.

Barney: So would that kind of change your opinion about moving here, maybe, later?

Burdick: No, I still like my small town quiet life. I'm just a—I mean, deep down I'm just a small town girl. I like being able to sit outside at night and not hear traffic running up and down my street, or fire trucks going everywhere, police cars and...not having to worry about my kids playing outside and they're, you know, shootings in the area. I don't have to worry about any of that. I don't mind working in the city but I definitely wouldn't want to live here.

Barney: Violence, is that a huge problem in this area? Or do you see a lot of that at work?

Burdick: I don't see it; you hear about it the next day when you're reading it in the paper, and you're like, 'Oh my god, that happened right up the street?'

Barney: Yeah.

(Telephone)

Barney: So violence, and you hear about it the next day?

Burdick: Yeah, you usually hear about it the paper the next day or somebody will come in say 'Did you hear what happened down on Dorchester Street?' You're like, 'No,' and it could have happened while you were here at work, you really don't hear nothing about it. The only time we really hear something going on is when the fire trucks go zooming by the office, and it's like we try and look to make sure they're not going to one of our properties!

Barney: Yup. What do you guys do if it, if there was a fire, at one of your buildings that you've built?

Burdick: At one of our buildings? We'd probably panic. (laugh) I mean obviously we'd try and help the families that live there. We'd relocate them. You know, call our insurance agent...and assess the damage and get it fixed as soon as we can.

Barney: Who do you call in to fix the housing, or even just build the housing? Is it volunteer work, is it contracted by you guys?

Burdick: For the rehab and new construction we hire general contractors. For the properties that we own we have a property manager that manages everything, keeps everything updated and running good. You know, gets the tenants for us. So depending on what was happening, I mean a fire, it would most likely be up to the property manager. Extensive damage, I'm sure we would step in and, you know, do what we had to do like we do with our other properties.

Barney: So you try and find the housing, temporary housing before you can get them into the house again?

Burdick: Yes. What do we do, I think we...there's been several fires in the area, and the families are just out, but it's not the landlord's responsibility to find housing. But being a nonprofit and doing what we do, I'm sure, if it was one of our properties, we would definitely be helping them find places to live.

Barney: What if it's not your property? Do you still try and help people find housing?

Burdick: Not really, I mean they don't really come to us. There are other agencies in the city that they may go to...we're kind of limited. I mean, we can't call another agency and say, 'Can you place this family?' They have waiting lists as well. I don't know, got me on that one. I mean, it's never come up where people have come up to us and said, 'My house just burnt down. Do you know of any place I can live?' We've never had that happen. If we have vacant apartments, you know, people like that would certainly be top on our priority to place. But it's not very often we have vacant apartments.

Barney: How many buildings—do you know off the top of your head how many buildings you guys own?

Burdick: We own six buildings, 21 units, for rental. We also are—we have the Upsala Elder Apartments. We're kind of owners. I mean, I guess we're owners. We don't get any money from it. It's just another entity all by itself and it handles itself.

Barney: 'Cause someone else runs all that?

Burdick: Yeah, yeah. We just go to the board meetings every month.

Barney: So did you build the elder apartments?

Burdick: No it was the old Upsala Street School. We rehabbed it, so that's why I'm still really up in the air as to whether or not we actually own the building or if its just the—I don't know on that. I've been here eight years, and I still haven't quite figured that one out. I mean, I know we rehabbed it...

Barney: Yes.

Burdick: But I don't actually know who owns the building.

Barney: Do you have to go to those Board meetings?

Burdick: No, the Executive Director goes to those board meetings.

Barney: 'Cause you're not with the housing?

Burdick: Right.

Barney: Ok. So, how did you get through tough times, and what kinds of thoughts keep you going? I mean you can apply this to anything.

Burdick: I was gonna say tough times with the business or personal?

Barney: Personal, business...

Burdick: Well...I'm newly divorced, just got divorced in February. And I just put myself into my work and my kids... You know, don't think about what's happening, just do what needs to be done. Just—I try not to dwell on things....tough times here at work... We had—I think the biggest tough time I remember here at work, is the funding was taking a long time coming through for one of our projects, so we were using all of our reserve funds to pay all the bills, and it was like, week to week. Every time we do a check run to pay bills it's like, is there enough money to pay the bills this week? Is there enough money for payroll this week? It only lasted a few months, but it's kind of nerve racking on family, you know. Is my paycheck gonna come this week? Is there gonna be enough to pay us this week? And once the funding came through we were fine, but I'm the one who's gotta screen the calls and deal with the creditors that are calling and, try to explain to them what's happening, so...

Barney: You got a lot of that burden and pressure?

Burdick: Well, yeah. And I probably take it on myself because I could have easily forwarded the call to our accountants, but I just try and do everything I can, and not have to pass on. I don't want to pass the buck. I like to take care of it myself.

Barney: Yeah, so can you tell me about your family? Like you mentioned you had a few kids, or?

Burdick: Yup, I have three children. I have two daughters ages 16 and 13, and I have a 5 year old son... All go to school. My oldest daughter just got her driver's license, that's interesting... I just met somebody, that's interesting... So that's been fun...and...I mean, they don't come up here with me very often. Toys for Tots time I try and drag them up here with me to help me sort toys. I mean this office is packed with toys and I need all the help I can get.

Barney: Are you solely responsible for dividing up all the toys?

Burdick: I gotta find the—well, we have staff that help. We've gotta pick up the toys from the Marines. I get the guys upstairs to help drive the trucks and load the trucks, unload the trucks when we get back here. And then they go out back and do their thing while the rest of us—actually there's only one other staff person that actually helps me sort toys. She drags her kids along. We get volunteers for the neighborhood. I've actually got people calling me already wanting to help sort toys.

Barney: That's good.

Burdick: I just don't allow families that have registered to help sort toys. It just gets too complicated.

Barney: Ok, yeah, so your family, they take up a lot of time like outside of work?

Burdick: Yeah, they do. I mean my 16-year-old she's a typical 16-year-old—up in her bedroom hiding out, doesn't wanna help me with anything around the house. My 13-year-old is getting to that point, just hides in her room, talks on the on the phone with her boyfriend, call me when dinner's ready. Then they don't like what I made for dinner, and, well, starve or make it yourself. My five-year-old, he's a handful—just diagnosed with ADHD and Oppositional Defiance Disorder...you familiar with that?

Barney: I'm familiar with ADHD, but not the Oppositional...

Burdick: He basically does everything—does not do everything I tell him not to do, he'll do the opposite, you know... He's a handful, and he's very taxing on my patience a lot. But he's a cutie, so we keep him!

Barney: (Laughs) Do you have any nieces or nephews?

Burdick: I have two sisters, as I said earlier. Each of them has two daughters, so I have four nieces. I have the oldest grandchild and the youngest grandchild on my side of the family.

Barney: So you get to see your family a lot?

Burdick: My older sister, I don't see all that often. She's very busy, kind of grown to the point where she doesn't seem need family. My younger sister I see more often, except that my life is changing and I'm getting more busy and I'm getting more interests, so I don't see her as much as I used to. I usually see her when she wants me to babysit. My parents, I used to see them every

weekend, and having a five-year-old that's bouncing off the walls just kind of gets to them sometimes, so I don't see them all the time. But I call them every day.

Barney: So do they still live in the same town?

Burdick: Yeah, they live like the next town over from me, which is like five miles up the road. My younger sister lives probably three miles in the other direction. And my older sister lives in Dayville, which is like 20 minutes.

Barney: You said you were married, what kind of work did your spouse do?

Burdick: Oh god, well we were married for 19 years, and he probably had more jobs than when we were married. But mainly he worked in the cleaning industry.

Barney: Cleaning businesses?

Burdick: Anything! When I met him he was working at the hospital cleaning operating rooms, so he had a lot of experience with that. He just kind of went everywhere from there. He had his own business at one point, cleaning. He's been in hospitals, he's been in insurance companies, he's been in small agencies. He's just been everywhere with his cleaning.

Barney: Now that we're working to tell a fuller story of women than we have recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include? Our focus is on women in Worcester.

Burdick: The hardest thing about working women anywhere is balancing work and family. It's not always easy. My youngest daughter's very upset with me because I have to work on her birthday. Well, it's a work day, I gotta work! But it's close to Christmas and she thinks I should be taking the time off. She's old enough to understand, but they're focused on themselves at that age. And I think it's hard for any mother to balance work and family and keep everybody happy.

Barney: So we should include that fact about working women?

Burdick: Oh yeah, we're working mothers. We go home, cook dinner, clean the house, get the kids ready for bed. The husbands go home, sit there, watch T.V. and go to bed. So we don't have just a full time job working, we have a full time job at home.

Barney: And what do you think women's experiences have been like generally in Worcester?

Burdick: It's hard to say. Working here, I've seen so many single mothers, especially at the Toys time, that come through that have nothing to do with the fathers of their kids. It's hard on them. I think being in the city they have a lot more resources. I live in a small town. There's really not a lot out there for me. I could apply for food stamps. I could apply for all this. I have to go find all this. In the cities, there's always agencies that offer these services for you, so there's a lot of resources for single moms here in the city. Single fathers on the other hand could get interesting, because there's not a lot out there for single men. If you don't have custody of your kids, there's nothing for you.

Barney: Major experiences are being a single mom?

Burdick: Yeah, I mean, there's a lot out there to help them in the city. I'm not sure if I answered that right, but...

Barney: Anything else you'd like to add? Anything you see as important that you'd like to share with me?

Burdick: Nothing I can think of. You'd probably just relate it to working women in Worcester. I think there are women here that aren't working that could be and are just taking advantage of the system.

Barney: Your system or?

Burdick: The system in general. They're on welfare; they're on this and that. They could be working but they're not, and they don't want to. I don't know how they can't be motivated to take care of their families.

Barney: Do you guys have programs that try and help these women out that aren't working, or are working, but that teach them how to be there for their kids, and about budgeting?

Burdick: We don't. Oak Hill's not a social service agency. Friendly House and other agencies in the city that do those things, but we don't. We help find jobs. We do accept the Department of Transitional Assistance Volunteers. The women on welfare have to do like 30 hours of volunteer work a week, so we do have volunteers that come in. We do encourage them when they're here to use Rose and find jobs. And some are gung-ho. They'll be here for a few weeks and get a job, and others are just—no, they don't have time. They'll tell you right out, 'I don't wanna work.' It's like, 'I'm happy the way I am.' How can you be happy when you don't have enough money to pay the rent? You don't have enough money to feed your kids. How can you be happy?

Barney: Now, when you do your rehab housing, do you guys collect rent money each month? Or is it one fee for year?

Burdick: Our property managers collect monthly rent. Most of our tenants are Section 8, so we do get direct Section 8 payments and partially from the tenants. Not all of our tenants pay full rent personally, but we do get full rent from the apartments.

Barney: I've already asked you what you would do to improve the city, but do you think that residents could take more of an active role in changing this? And do you think that could initiate changes quicker than what city officials could see as problems?

Burdick: Yeah because the residents live in the community and they see what needs to be done. We have the Resident Leadership Committee here at Oak Hill through Mid Works America. They do community leadership institute every year and they try and get people in the community

to become leaders, to take responsibility for their neighborhood. And we're part of that. We have monthly meetings with the residents to try to encourage them to do things for their community.

Barney: Is your job a lot different when you first came in and interviewed?

Burdick: Day of my interview was kind of funny. They had a temp staff here and one of the office workers, and they were doing work on the computer. I came in, and checked in, and sat down, and waited for my interview. As I'm waiting—I was here a little early, so I waited and the two girls are working on the computer, discussing something, how to do something. And I'm sitting in the chair thinking, 'Should I get up and show them how to do it, or should I sit here?' After listening to them for about five minutes I decided, 'Do you want me to show you how to do that? Are you trying to do this?' They were like 'Yeah.' I was like 'Do you want me to show you?' So I got up and I showed them how to do it, and I think that kind of cinched my job.

Barney: Kind of proved...

Burdick: Yup, I know what I'm doing. To me, I would have felt bad if I hadn't shown them how to do something I knew how to do... The job is completely different from when I started. I probably do twenty times more work now than when I started, if not more than that. We had another staff person that did all the newsletters and the flyers. Since she's left, I do all the newsletters. I do all the desktop publishing, the annual reports. Everything that needs to be done, I do. I print business cards here in house. I got my own little print shop over there, and that's the fun part of my job, getting to do all this fun stuff. I used to have to keep the Executive Director's schedule, book his appointments. He does that himself now; I just don't have time for it. I didn't do all the Human Resources when I first started. I do all that now. I mean, hiring and firing is his job, but there's the benefits, and things like that. I take care of everything else. I do so much more, I mean, I don't know how I keep myself busy everyday. I just come in and there's work to do and it's like, 'How did I end up with this?' I mean I just keep myself busy.

Barney: Now, do you think that you've been given more responsibility because of how long you've been here? I mean, you've proved yourself.

Burdick: Yes, I've been here eight years. I'm the senior staff person—not the senior staff person because the director of housing would be above me, but I've got seniority over the Executive Director, I've been here longer than him. I've been here, I keep my ears and eyes open. I know what's happening, what's going on, and I'm one that I do the job and I get it done. If I have questions, don't know how to do it, I ask. I have trouble delegating because it's easier for me to do it than to show somebody how to do it. And I've proven myself over the years, so I've gotten more work that way. Doesn't always help because then I've got more work to do. Just keep myself busy. One of the other things, I shouldn't have done this, but on my interview I said, "I don't like to be bored. I like to keep myself busy." They all laughed. Now I know why! It's not a boring job. I have my down days and it's relaxing. It's fine when I get a break, but most of the time my desk is a mess. I've got four, five, six different projects going on and trying to keep track of everything is interesting. You definitely have to multi- task.

Barney: So there's no down time at all?

Burdick: Rarely. I mean, between projects. I've gone from the picnic to the job fair, to Toys for Tots. Somehow I volunteered myself to coordinate Turkeys—the Turkey drive this year. Not that we're doing Turkey Registration here, I just somehow volunteered to be the coordinator, like I do for Toys for Tots. I just know that all those registrations are gonna come in at the last minute. I'm going to have 3,000 names to enter into the computer in two days. I'll get it done. I may have to recruit a volunteer, but I'll get it done. I just keep myself busy. And besides all that, we've got the annual appeal going on. So I've got the Annual Appeal letter, the Turkey Drive, Toys for Tots, all of them going on at once. And we just had a staff member leave, so I have to step in and get some of the things that he was doing done.

Barney: You're the only one in the office—you have a part-time woman that's here?

Burdick: The part-time woman does all the job training and placement. I have another woman here, Patricia, she does 30 hours a week. She's a BTA volunteer. She'll answer phones, help with the mailings. She doesn't really know the computers. I could teach her, I don't have time for it. It's easier just to do it myself. She'll do copies, filing, answer the phone, just little things to help me out. I can just say, 'do this,' 'do that.' I don't have to worry about it. She's a big help.

Barney: You guys are nine to five, Monday through Friday. You get your weekends off at least?

Burdick: Monday through Friday, I've had to change my hours 8:30 to 4:30 to pick up my son by five from the sitter's. Weekends—hardly ever work weekends. In January, we do have our annual Board and Staff Retreat, mandatory Saturday. In June, we have a Neighborhood Works Picnic, mandatory Saturday, have to be there. I'm in charge. Once a month I stay late for the board meetings. I don't go to the meetings, but I'm here 'til 6:30. I get dinner for them, make sure they don't need any copies. I stay a half hour after the meeting starts, wait 'til they're all settled in, clean up the food and go home. Toys for Tots, I'll be here all weekend. Toys this year, we'll probably get—December 17 and 18 from the Marines—we'll probably get four truck loads of toys from the Marines. We've got to get them sorted, bagged up, to the families for them to pick up usually within two days. It's fun. Last year I was flipping the guys out. We had two truckloads. This office was packed; you could not move. We had aisles you could walk through, start bagging up toys. There was toys going down the porch, everywhere! And then Marines called and they wanted us to go get the rest of the toys. I was like, 'We'll be right there.' They were like, 'Where we gonna put them?' Well, we started piling stuff in the conference room where we put the bagged stuff. I got rid of it. I got rid of everything. They didn't think it could be done. I drive a mini van. I think I left here with half a van of toys. Before I even got home, it was all gone. Stop at different places on the way home, and just get rid of it—churches, other non-profits I know of, you know, any families that need toys. Go shopping, get rid of it, send it home, I'm done. That's the fun part, I get to play Santa Clause. The hard part about it is families come back and, 'What'd you give my daughter a black doll for? We're not black.' How do I do know? Or, 'We're a black family how come you gave my daughter a white doll? This is a boy, I want a girl.' Well, you checked off boy! We can't really exchange because we're really limited on what we give out. If we hadn't gotten that second truckload last year, I don't think we would have had enough toys. We never have enough toys for the teenagers, or presents. The past two years we haven't had anything. Then you gotta explain to the families why you don't have toys for their

kids. Even when you tell them when they sign up, there's not a lot for people 13 and above, they don't care. Their kids have no toys and they wanna know what you're gonna do about it. Nothing.

Barney: So a lot of responsibility on you?

Burdick: Yeah, because I'm the one who has to explain everything. Just do what we have to do. With being the coordinator, all of the agencies tell me this family registered at four locations. Well, I'm telling you you're picking up your toys at this location. Then they go to the other four and, 'how come I've got no toys?' Well, they call me up. Or they'll stop here and ask me, and I'll show them, you registered at four locations. 'But that's not me.' Well, it's clearly your signature. So if it's not you how come you're going there to pick up toys? And they get very irate.

Barney: So what's your favorite part of the job, and the hardest part?

Burdick: I'd have to say the Toys for Tots. I've been talking about it quite a bit. It's fun. It takes a lot of time. I'm probably here 60 hours that week, or more, but it's fun because there are so many families that appreciate what we're doing. And the Marines getting toys. It's nice to see the families. Some of them come with their kids. Like some of the mothers come in with their little kids, and stuffed animals never go, so we'll take a stuffed animal out and give them something while they're here. It's nice to see them smile, and it makes their day. Everybody coming together, all the volunteers to help with the program. It's amazing. We just have so much fun. We play Christmas carols and act crazy.

Barney: What's the hardest part of your job?

Burdick: The hardest part of my job? I don't think there is a hard part to my job because I like what I do. I have a variety of work. My kids are sick, I bring them to work with me. So I like what I do. I don't think there's anything hard about what I do. Nothing I don't like, nothing I would give up. It's just all fun!

Barney: It all comes together.

Burdick: Yup.

Barney: So what is the best thing about Worcester, in your opinion? Your favorite part, area?

Burdick: The favorite thing about Worcester...

Barney: Or even just a favorite characteristic doesn't have to be a building.

Burdick: With all the change that's been going on, when they did Union Station, they recovered a dilapidated building. I enjoyed watching it change from nothing to something. Like they're working on the highway now—well not a big deal, but, 'hey, where'd that ramp come from?' Suddenly there's a ramp there."

Barney: 290, right?

Burdick: 290. Overnight, you see things happen. You see changes in the neighborhood, changes in the city. They're putting up the new city hall, or courthouse—whatever it is they're doing down there. And I don't drive there very often, but when I do, it's like, 'Wow, they got so much done on that.' And there's just so much going on, and they're building up the city. I enjoy watching that happen. Behind the city hall, that park, there was nothing wrong with it as far as I was concerned, but it really looks nice now and I enjoy driving by there and I enjoy watching the process. I like watching the development.

Barney: I think that concludes it unless you wanted to say anything else.

Burdick: I'm surprised I'm able to keep going as I am!