

THE STORY GOES | ANGELA WHITE | ALPHA HOME

MOLLY: (funny voice) Hello! I don't know why I used that. It's because you're here.

ANGELA: (laughs, has English accent) It's because of my accent. You're just making fun already.

MOLLY: (laughs) I'm already Ms. Doubtfire, apparently. I'm Molly! This is The Story Goes! This is a collaborative podcast between SA2020 the organization that drives podcast toward a shared vision of a thriving San Antonio, and KLRN, your local public television station. And we want to make sure that we are telling a more complete story of San Antonio, and finding the people and organizations that are quietly, sometimes loudly, changing the way our city operates being disruptors. Today, we've got with us, Angela White, who is kind of one of my favs. I shortened it because I'm hip and cool. Angela is—is it president and CEO or Executive Director?

ANGELA: CEO. I don't get two titles. I'm not *that* important to Alpha Home. [\(0:58\)](#)

MOLLY: Alright, just CEO of Alpha Home. Today, we are going to be talking more specifically about what Alpha Home is. Also, *clearly*, Angela was born and raised in San Antonio as you can tell.

ANGELA: Deep south.

MOLLY: (laughs) We are going to talk about how you ended up in this role—like what? Huh? It's been three years now--

ANGELA: Yeah, just over three years, well done.

MOLLY: And you, three years in San Antonio or just three years with Alpha Home? [\(1:22\)](#)

ANGELA: Just three years with Alpha Home.

MOLLY: Okay, so you've been here a little bit longer. Angela also has a mild obsession with cars.

ANGELA: I do. It's not mild.

MOLLY: It's alright. We'll talk about it. (laughs) It's real. It's an actual thing. Let's start first then, I want to talk about more specifically about how you ended up at Alpha Home. You are clearly from across the pond.

ANGELA: Indeed.



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MOLLY: I feel bad that we like set up this podcast, and I did bring in tea or something for you.

ANGELA: (jokingly) I'm a little appalled, but I'll get through it. Thank you.

MOLLY: (laughs) We have no manners here at KLRN and SA2020. So, tell me how you got to San Antonio in this role?

ANGELA: So, I am corporate all the way until this role three years ago. My husband's job brought us to Houston in 2007, moved to San Antonio 2012 with his job again. Then, I went to actually a career coach. I said, what I really want to do is bring all that corporate stuff – I'm an accountant by trade, which I don't tell many people--

MOLLY: Yeah, no. You should keep that.

ANGELA: (continues) because then people will think that I am boring. I really don't talk about that a lot. (MOLLY laughs) Bring back what I really wanted to give back. I did not want to be in customer service for widgets anymore or run big IT structure. I am also an SAP consultant, which is big software. I am very *boring*. [\(2:36\)](#)

MOLLY: Yeah, boring and fancy.

ANGELA: So, I went to see a career coach. Two years later, a chap I had met while I was doing that, had this job and said he wanted a conversation with me. I actually laughed when they put it across the table at me because "you have no chance." (MOLLY laughs) I went, *really?*

MOLLY: There's no way.

ANGELA: You know, it's addiction, not have done that before. Managed bigger teams, but not on this bit, and then it happened.

MOLLY: Three years later...

ANGELA: Three years later, I'm still there causing trouble, disruption. [\(3:10\)](#)

MOLLY: Yeah, disruption, which I appreciate. I, it's interesting to right, like you come into the nonprofit sector from the corporate sector, into something like Alpha Home, which was also, maybe I'm not wrong when I say Alpha Home is this very quiet organization that is sort of just doing some *really* amazing things like over the course of the last several years gotten louder. Like we *know* it exists, it's gotten bigger. The work that you're doing has pivoted some. It's gotten more focused and more specific, maybe. It's like you're driving more impact. I feel like I've seen, it could be the CPA in you or the accountant in you--



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ANGELA: Yeah, possibly. Don't tell people that!

MOLLY: I mean you said it, I didn't! But can you tell me then, one: Alpha Home is very specific targeting women with drug and alcohol addiction, correct? [\(4:05\)](#)

ANGELA: Yes, we do serve some men, though in an out-patient format and in our family first program. At Alpha, we have three programs. We've been around since mid-60s. Originally, out of Trinity Baptist Church, still very connected. So, at any one time, 47 women in a residential home facility receiving drug and alcohol treatment. We also have around 100 in an out-patient setting, and around anywhere between 150 and 200 in a family-first program. Let me talk to you about that a little bit because it is least known in a way.

MOLLY: Okay. [\(4:41\)](#)

ANGELA: So, in that program, we serve pregnant ladies, who are and ladies with young children under six, that have been maybe at-risk of using drugs and alcohol, or just not well-educated through their pregnancy, so it is just an education intervention program. Within that, we have something that we call a padre-program, which is for men with young children, teaching them to interact with that kind of thing. It's a lovely program. It's less known, and it's neo-natal abstinence syndrome and PPI that sort of thing. [\(5:09\)](#)

MOLLY: Well, what I find particularly interesting about your programs, and your organization generally, when we talk about substance abuse, we almost end it. A person becomes sober, and then it's over. I think what we don't see is the ripple, both upstream and downstream, of the kinds of work that you're doing. The economic development that occurs cause now a women is sober and can go get a job, return back to school, so there's an educational attainment piece to that. You've just mentioned maternal and infant health, right. There are so many ripples inside of this. I think, typically when we think about substance abuse, it's such a weird and taboo topic.

ANGELA: It still is, even today. [\(5:51\)](#)

MOLLY: We just don't know about it. We just, like, stop. We never think about it from a space of "no, this is a disease. This is something that needs real support, and not just support once, but again and again." I'm curious how you meet with a chap – I'm using your word there—he says, "Hey, I think you should work for Alpha Home." And you're like, "I don't know anything about addiction." I want to know what it was...

ANGELA: Let me address, not knowing perhaps anything about addiction. I am a foster and adopted child. My adopted mother was an alcoholic, undiagnosed, probably mental health



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issues, again undiagnosed. So, from my mid-twenties I volunteered at agencies that either, foster and adopt, and I have been on the board on several in the UK. Or that had to do with battered women, or women coming out of trauma and the hurt they have been involved with, whether that's addiction or abuse or so on, and to become empowered and make the choices that they make. I started with the Princess Trust in the UK around 23, and I volunteered in various roles, and had that connection ever since. So, I don't suffer from addiction. I'm blessed, but my connection with the women, is putting women and children together, putting that family unit back together, because I've seen all the harm that can happen when it is broken. So, it kind of runs through several different layers for me from a very personal point of view into how I serve today. [\(7:28\)](#)

MOLLY: Angela, when you, A. I didn't know this story, so now I have 400 other questions, and we are going to go down this sideways. So, when you said, you wanted to get back into giving back. You didn't want to do widgets anymore. Were you thinking immediately, this is, I think what I am going to work with is either, it'll be something around women?

ANGELA: Women and children. So, children are a big passion for me. At Alpha Home, the stand-in joke is that I'm the baby stealer. When they come and do CPS visits, the babies are usually, in some way or form, visited by me.

MOLLY: Your office is the baby room is what we are hearing. [\(8:08\)](#)

ANGELA: Yeah, we have one next door, and I just go hang out on the floor sometimes and play with the kids.

MOLLY: Perfect.

ANGELA: So, I didn't know what it was. When I went to see the career coach, I actually had my own business cards. I wasn't working there then, but I just rode up the slide, I really want to run a nonprofit, and that was two years before. It wasn't the running of it, more than what I could bring to it. What is going to be of value that we can bring and change? We keep seeing this, as you mentioned, kind of shift in Alpha Home, and that we are at more. We have the videos that you've seen. I really, I really, wanted to spend some time in that space, and I've been very blessed to do so. Great team. Shout out! [\(8:56\)](#)

MOLLY: No, yeah. You have a fantastic team at Alpha Home. There's a couple of things, right, from the Alpha Home perspective, and now knowing where you've come from your own personal growth. When you think about Alpha Home, I know we talk about so many different things. We talk about the ripple, and it's kind of the idea of not know the full story. Again, it comes to there is a continuum of care that occurs within our community. And how are we then helping people sometimes in the worst time in their lives set them back onto either a good path



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or give them the left hand turn they needed to go down a different path, and I feel like Alpha Home does that... it's such a small and then big ripple. You're saying 47 women live--

ANGELA: in a residential facility at one time, but we serve 1200 women a year.

MOLLY: Right. And the reason I'm saying that is because we sometimes get stuck in the numbers or the widgets, where it's like "it's *only* 1200 people," when we know the Food Bank is serving thousands and thousands and thousands, right. 47 women in a residential facility, and we are thinking "oh, *only* 47 women." It's like that's---

ANGELA: a drop in the ocean (10:06).

MOLLY: It's exponential in what could shift for them in the community, and I want to speak more specifically about that exponential seismic shift that occurs. (10:15)

ANGELA: I am going to take it right back to one woman. Okay so, let's talk finances first because I just confessed to being an accountant.

MOLLY: (laughs) You did.

ANGELA: One woman, if she's with me, it'll cost \$10,500 for treatment. The children will probably be cared for, possibly by a family member because she's come to us sooner. She won't be incarcerated. Children are not in care. When you start to add up those things and the fact that they're not working, you're looking at about a loss of the community of \$220,000. So, service with us is \$10,500, so there's that piece of the work as well. But you know, women do not want to be addicted. Many women come to us because trauma caused in childhood or later, sexual violent trauma, physical trauma and mental health issues. So, 87% of who we serve have cooccurring mental health issues, so we deal with that, too. If you get one woman on her feet, and you know, she's now raising her children, she has education possibilities at Alpha Home, and you know, continues to receive support. So, one of the things that we have that is very unique to us, we are the only gender-specific program in the city for this, but also we have an alumni that is hundreds of women strong, and they are mobile. They are in action to support that women as she moves forward in her life of recovery. We also have recovery sport coaches now, who can work alongside someone for up to two years. You know, recidivism is always a big deal, "oh well, they always *fail*." A. That's not true.

MOLLY: Right. (11:53)

ANGELA: B. We have such success stories of people going to nursing school, becoming lawyers, becoming doctors, just having a life that's free of addiction. The shame in stigma, it kills me. You know, this disease can take anybody at any time. It doesn't matter how much money you



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got, doesn't matter where you came from, you know *anything* it has no respect for that. So, I think the judgement of those about addiction we need to stop it. I mean, it's (inaudible) disease. [\(12:29\)](#)

MOLLY: Well and you've just mentioned... No, of course. You just mentioned, too, mental health also with the stigma, alongside something like addiction. Also, Bexar County has recently put a ton of resources into an opioid crisis, right, that we've also seen. What we are seeing, right, it's not a nonexistent thing. [\(12:53\)](#)

ANGELA: Let's talk about the opioid money. So, I am on the opioid taskforce, and it's been reconvened this year onto TJ Mays and County Judge Wolff and the Mayor. It was a good piece of work to do, collaborative, lots of people, different people in the room. I think we need to recognize in San Antonio, the opioids are only a small part of the problem. The women I see are uninsured. The women who have probably fallen further than normal...

MOLLY: Back up for me, and opioids are things that a doctor prescribed.

ANGELA: Unless it's heroin, yes. [\(13:25\)](#)

MOLLY: Got it, perfect.

ANGELA: So, this is a prescription that started to effect people who were getting prescriptions. Suddenly, there is a lot of money... I want to say, too, it's not filtered to Alpha Home, or Lifetime [Recovery], or Rise [Recovery]. It's all at the state level right now, and it's trying to come down, and they're working to make that happen with the mental health authorities. Now, what we struggle with here in San Antonio is methamphetamine. Alcohol and methamphetamine. Methamphetamine is cheap. It's an ugly drug. Nasty, insidious. We've always seen that here. So, opioids: are they a problem? Absolutely, but they are so outstripped by methamphetamine. [\(14:07\)](#)

MOLLY: You just said... I want to make sure we highlight what you said- ish. You said-ish, that this idea of opioids are something that are prescribed, and now all of the sudden people with health insurance are getting prescribed opioids. Now, all of the sudden we found money for them. But things like alcohol or methamphetamine, you don't need a prescription. You probably don't have health insurance. You are probably doing something because it's mental health, etc., that is lacking in dollars and the spotlight, generally, which is yet another piece. You say that the women that you are seeing, that's the crux of the disease—meth and alcohol. [\(14:50\)](#)

ANGELA: Yeah, absolutely.



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MOLLY: Across the board. You mentioned other organizations as well—Rise Recovery.

ANGELA: Yeah, Rise Recovery is sort of adolescent education. They don't do treatment per say, but they are very in that field. SACADA would be remissive... I didn't mention.

MOLLY: Of course, SACADA is the San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Awareness.

ANGELA: Yeah, they just changed the name. And Lifetime Recovery serves men, as we serve women. So, that, and in the sense for health care, as long with mental health. Volunteers for America is another one. We all do slightly different things, but all in the same space, and all are important. [\(15:26\)](#)

MOLLY: Of course.

ANGELA: We work collaboratively with all of them.

MOLLY: When you think about addiction and the stigma, etc., are there things that for people who A. who don't have any history of addiction in their families or they never knew, or I think what typically comes up, right, for people is just stop doing it. Just stop doing the thing. Um, what is the advice that you, somebody who has been working in this space, who has a history of knowing people who have been suffering from addiction, what is the advice you have for people who don't know about it? [\(16:04\)](#)

ANGELA: So, if you think you have a concern about how you're behaving, acknowledge the fact that this is a brain disease. It's not a choice at that level. There's a reason that you're doing something. The brain metabolism changes. There's a physicality change in the brain. If you do feel like that, get help. I think one of the best words of advice I ever had coming in was from one of our program directors, Melissa. It was about when addiction starts to be, starts to create change in the way you live your life. So, instead of putting gas in the car, you're going to buy a bottle of wine. Instead of putting food on the table, you're going to see if you can score some coke or whatever. Then it's starting to take over where you are. There's a book called *When the Serpent Becomes the Master* because people think they are using alcohol as a really good example of this to relax after a day's work, chill out, and suddenly that one glass is a bottle a day. You start to realize that it's not helping you now. Now, you are subservient to whatever this substance is. That's a good flag to recognize. [\(17:15\)](#) If you see someone in your family that's doing the same thing, reach out for help, not just for them, but for you. (inaudible), Rise is really good at that. Again, SACADA for information. You can call Alpha Home. We have a family group that meets. Lifetime does something similar. I think just, don't be the burden of it. Don't feel like "Oh, the shame and stigma. I can't tell anybody." Reach out to people you can tell. If that's an agency, great. A family, excellent. Don't leave it. Don't leave it until it gets bad because then it gets harder. [\(17:49\)](#)



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MOLLY: If you could sort of impart to the community-at-large about the thing that we should know about the work that y'all do, what is that? I like to--

ANGELA: That's interesting. God, the *one thing*.

MOLLY: I like to just--

ANGELA: We're awesome? I don't know. (laughs) We're awesome. Give us money. We do great work. We are fighting a battle that is not going to go away. You know, I think they need to understand the level of collaboration. The fact that we talk about moving the needle on employment, but if the person you are trying to get employed is not clean and sober, how do they get to employment? We've got to understand that the services that we offer, and the sister and partner agencies I've mentioned, need to be there to get people able to work, able to progress. We can't ignore it because it's a nasty subject. We can't ignore it because it's not cute. It's influence in this city is huge. San Antonio is a party city. We've got Fiesta coming up. There are sober events at Fiesta. You know, they exist people! But it's hard. That's a challenge. If people come to you, be supportive of them and get help. [\(19:05\)](#)

MOLLY: I love that you sort of tied this in, this idea of prevention and intervention. This isn't going to go away, right. We can intervene, which is what your work does. You can intervene, so that you can set them on a different path, a healthier path. But there's also a space around, is there a way to prevent addiction? [\(19:26\)](#)

ANGELA: Education. Okay, and we've got to go early. There's a campaign around a sober high school in San Antonio. There's three in Houston.

MOLLY: Oh wow, okay.

ANGELA: Or to just get, to educate, you know, young people and middle schoolers, we are starting to see. You see 15 year olds are 15 times more likely to use than their parents did today. We've got to get into that prevention mindset, so people don't think that it's a joke. You know, the kids that you see, that you hear about. They're not addicts. They play sports. There was a family that lost two boys in one night in another state. What they had done is drink, but then had taken a pill out of a bowl because that's quite trendy now. You raid your mom's cabinet, and then put them into a bowl.

MOLLY: Wait, wait, what!?

ANGELA: Seriously. There's a kid thing, well teenage thing. But if they do that, and they're drinking and taking opiate, you're going to stop breathing. Is it a horrible subject? Yeah. Do we



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have to talk about it to be protective of who we serve and the youngsters? All day, every day. [\(20:30\)](#)

MOLLY: We are into our fourth episode of The Story Goes, so you're our fourth podcast. What I keep finding in every single conversation we've had is this idea of shining a light on something that feels like we shouldn't be talking about it. In every single one of these episodes, we keep hearing that over and over again. It's sort of why we started it. Why aren't we talking more specifically about all the things that are happening in our community? They're not just one tiny little soundbite, but there's so much more to it than that. So, I appreciate that you're sort of like, "Hey, it's okay to talk about it." It's not sitting around talking about Game of Thrones, but it's something--

ANGELA: April 16th.

MOLLY: Believe me, it's in my calendar. But it's also so important to say these things out loud. So, parents need to be talking to their children at a much younger age? [\(21:26\)](#)

ANGELA: And we need SACADA going to schools and doing that when the schools allow them to do so. You know, that's part of what they do. Clarity Child Guidance. It gets to mental health earlier. It prevents addiction further down the line. It plays a huge part into that.

MOLLY: Of course. So, we have 1 in 5 children are struggling with a mental illness. If not treated, it becomes 1 in 4 adults. You're saying 87% of the women who come through your program are also struggling with a mental illness, alongside addiction. So yeah, I feel like sometimes when we have these conversations, it's overwhelming. Then, I'm like, "wait, it's not because we have these organizations that are very clearly giving us the opportunity to engage in the way that we need to – elevating conversations that need to be had, shining lights in areas that aren't." I think for me the biggest takeaway from learning about Alpha Home is not just that you're serving 1,200 women every year, 1,200 people every year. But that you're like at the forefront, of the beginning stages of economic growth of our community, educational growth. If we as San Antonio say, we want lower employment rates, we want lower poverty, we want higher education attainment levels, then we need to be investing in organizations that are allowing people to reenter the workforce. [\(22:50\)](#)

ANGELA: Yeah. I think the one thing... this city is a very giving city. SA2020 do great work in bringing collaboratives together and keeping us really focused on what we want to do. I have a concern sometimes that we don't take the family unit seriously. I have had this conversation a couple of times recently. Say the mum is with me and the little one may be CPS care or in family tapestry now and maybe dad is in another facility, when we can reunite that family and bring them back together, don't drop them. How do we continue that walking to more economic stability, or better housing, better education, counseling for that family unit, so then that family



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unit becomes stronger again together? You know, especially the children because they have been removed or dispersed, and then how do we continue to move that family upward through a cycle? [\(23:45\)](#)

MOLLY: Yeah, you're talking more specifically about once we get them out of crisis, how do we keep them stable?

ANGELA: There are fabulous organizations all over San Antonio, but who is doing the case management of not falling down those cracks and crevices?

MOLLY: Making sure they get continued support.

ANGELA: So, that's a big deal for me.

MOLLY: Alright, another one. Okay so, we like to end all our podcasts with a call to action. What would you say, someone has just listened to this, the thing they need to do or the thing they should do? [\(24:18\)](#)

ANGELA: Widely speaking in addiction, learn more. Don't judge. It could happen to you. It could happen to me. You know, don't judge it. Walk alongside the people, stay beside them, widely speaking. For Alpha Home, obviously it's usually about fundraising. We need funds all the time, but know that the help is there—that you can pick up the phone and have a conversation. We have a huge city of support, as well as agencies. Let's connect the dots. Don't ignore it. Don't think there is nobody there for you, even if you have not got insurance, even if you not got funding. There are people there to help. You know, I will stand shoulder to shoulder with the women who do the right things and want their children back. I mean, I tell them that. It's a wonderful thing when we see that. It's a joy. People often ask me if this job is hard-- yeah, sometimes it's hard, but the joy in seeing that is everything. That's available for everyone. Don't write yourself off.

MOLLY: I love that. Don't write yourself off. Alright, Angela. Thank you for doing this.

ANGELA: Of course, you are very welcome. [\(25:28\)](#)

MOLLY: And mostly, not only educate and inform us, but also your accent to our show cause basically people are going to tune in for that.

ANGELA: No tea and shortbread.

MOLLY: Well, that's something we will have to work on.



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ANGELA: Just saying!

MOLLY: To read more about all the organizations that were mentioned today, we will make sure to post them online at KLRN.org/thestorygoes. This is four down, and now I know for the next time we will have tea, and crumpets, or something.

ANGELA: Ooh, crumpets. Crumpets are good.

MOLLY: Okay, alright. I don't know what crumpets are.

ANGELA: I'll bring you some, it's okay. (MOLLY laughs)

MOLLY: (whispers) Tea time next time. (26:05)



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