

## inSocialWork Podcast Series

### Episode 177 - Dr. Virginia Eubanks: Casework, Social Justice, and the Information Age (part 1 of 2)

[00:00:08] Welcome to in social work the podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at W W W dot. In social work. Dot org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice research. We educate we connect. We care. We are in social work. Hello I'm Charles Sims your host of in social work. Welcome. Our guest today is Dr. Virginia Eubanks. Dr. Eubanks is an associate professor of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University at Albany State University of New York and a Ford academic fellow at New America in Washington D.C. She is also co-founder of the popular technology workshops a place where people come together to combat social economic and political injustice in the Information Age. Additionally she is among the founders of our knowledge our power a grassroots welfare rights and antipoverty organization. Dr. Eubanks is the author of Digital dead end fighting for social justice and the information age. And she regularly writes for The American Prospect and equal future Dr. Eubanks received her Ph.D. in science and technology studies from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. And much of her research and writing centers on issues of social justice in the digital age. This podcast begins with an interview with Dr. Kathleen Kost associate professor at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. It is followed by a brief question and answer period with other members from the school. This is the first of two podcasts from that interview.

[00:02:10] During this discussion they explore Dr. Eubanks work and understanding technology in the lives of low income communities as well as how technology is used to manage the poor. Dr. Eubanks also describes attempts to use technology to change the eligibility and case management processes for financial assistance. She details its impact on those receiving assistance as well as on the systems charged with providing it. This interview took place in March of 2015 so I'm Kate Kost. I'm faculty. This I'm Virginia banks. And thank you for inviting me. I am an associate professor of Women's Gender and sexuality studies at SUNY Albany. And right now Half-Time and the other half of my life is with a foundation in D.C. called New America and I'm working on a project that I'm sure I'll get a chance to talk about. So welcome. I thought we'd begin with maybe you telling us some of how you got into this world and what it's about. You can go from there. I'm happy to do that so the work that I'm doing now comes out of a project I did 15 years ago now and that resulted in my first book what's called the Digital dead and fighting for social justice in the Information Age and that project was based on four years of participatory action research that was done with a group of 90 women who live in a residential YWCA in my hometown of Troy New York. So the Y was run like they had one floor that was sort of a program floor. So it's a little bit more structured and people coming out of like the criminal justice system or coming out of recovery programs.

[00:03:52] But the rest of it was basically just an SRO single room occupancy so sort of dorm like rooms bathrooms and kitchens down the hall. At the time that I was there they cost two hundred fifty dollars a month. And like 80 percent of the people who lived there were getting some kind of help to meet that rent. So it is for the folks who are really struggling to meet their basic needs. And I was coming out of the community technology center movement and thinking that what I had to offer that community was a set of skills and access to resources that they wouldn't have otherwise. And so I was very much sort of caught up in this idea that the social justice issue around technology and particularly in

cities was about access. So imagine my surprise when I got there and after the first year that we worked on stuff together very generously a number of the women sat me down and were like Virginia like the questions you ask are dumb. They have nothing to do with our lives. This is not useful. We need to talk to you about being less dumb. And I was sort of taken aback and then just really grateful that they had corrected me and I started asking like well if this isn't the framework that works what works what does describe your life. And they said you know the thing is that we're not technology poor we like technology is really ubiquitous in our lives but mostly where we come into contact with it is in the low wage workplace the criminal justice system and the welfare office.

[00:05:20] And what really really is that moment sort of really struck me that people who I was working with women in the YWCA community were having this really profound experience of bold technology and the state in the social service office was something that really has stuck with me for a long time. So there is a chapter about that in my first book. And then after taking like an interesting detour working on a book with sort of this famous black feminist founding member of the company river collective one of the authors of the statement on black feminism really incredible woman named Barbara Smith who lives in Albany New York who I just wrote a book with and our colleague Alethia Jones after that sort of detour which is like Barbara Smith ask you to do something and you say yes I have come back to this work and so I've always wanted to sort of expand that piece of it how people interact with technology and social services and it seems like a particularly good time to do that work. So I've done a bunch of research with clients and caseworkers of both child protective services and public assistance in Rensselaer County which is where I live. But the project more recently has sort of expanded so that I'm looking at child protective I'm looking at public assistance but I'm also looking at law enforcement. And so my new project which is currently called Digital poorhouse is about how we use government technology in poor and working communities sort of more broadly. So law enforcement welfare child protective potentially public education as well. Could you tell us a little bit more then about your project or what you're finding or are you so new in it that you know it's pretty exciting.

[00:07:03] So right now I'm working on I've developed enough on two cases to talk about them. One of them is the state of Indiana's attempt in 2006 to automate and privatized their eligibility systems for Tanoh food stamps or SNAP and Medicaid. And so they signed a one point four billion dollar with a B billion dollar contract with a coalition of high tech companies that was led by IBM and they basically replaced the state's 2000 case workers with online forms and privately run call centers and they made a couple of options that were not good. Like for example requests for help with stay stable. And then we had of course the recession. The Midwest floods increased access to food stamps which doubled applications. The system basically crashed something like between 150000 and 700000 people lost access to their benefits and it actually went so badly that the state broke the contract with IBM IBM then turned around and sued the state for breach of contract and won. So they ended up spending these 437 million dollars on the original contract plus 52 million dollars in penalties. Three class action lawsuits. Untold number of fair hearings that just completely uncountable. And then importantly just hundreds of thousands of people lost access to benefits that they needed. So I'm really interested in the last thing that's important about that case is that exactly the same thing had been tried and honestly failed in exactly the same way in Florida and in Texas. And then it was tried by Indiana.

[00:08:54] The difference is in Texas they did it in two counties it was a pilot that they only rolled out to two counties and in Indiana they rolled it out to 59 counties. So most of the state. They didn't make it to Gary or to Indianapolis which is probably good. So I'm really

interested in why we tend to make the same mistakes over and over again when we are trying to make a technical administrative changes to particularly to means tested programs. I think your point about presuming that everything is going to stay stable and that nothing's going to break is really such a fallacy. Because everything breaks for won. But technology is just proud to do that as updates grow our system gets overloaded. It's really almost comical right. Yeah we do that. And I suspect too that we have a tendency to build assumptions about who accesses public services and about what public service programs were for into that technology in ways that create very rigid systems. So you know the direct deposit save for Social Security works pretty well. And the technology systems that run Social Security aren't perfect but they're pretty flexible and pretty rigorous and pretty functional. One of the things that I see in the Indiana case is that the governor at the time Governor Mitch Daniels who has gone on to be the president of Purdue. He started this push to automating eligibility by arguing that there was that case workers and clients were colluding to defraud the system. And so there was a famous case in Indianapolis where two case workers had sort of worked with this storefront church to set up some dummy accounts and I think they defrauded the state of eight or nine thousand dollars which is not good. OK.

[00:10:51] But basically he sort of seized on that to say like look this is the problem. The problem is these caseworkers these working class caseworkers and these poor people trying to get benefits are coming up with schemes together to defraud the good people of Indiana of their hard earned money. And so this system was set up to break the relationship between case workers and clients. It's not unproblematic relationship. There's all sorts of problems in that. But we did not get a system that was better. So they moved caseworkers jobs from being based on cases on families on individuals to being based on tasks and the tasks were just in a queue and any case worker could respond to any task or really had to Rees-Mogg to any task. So it was a way it was assumed that caseworkers not developing relationships with their clients was actually good was going to be more efficient and less prone to fraud. In fact what it was is people had no context for what was going on in people's lives no way to make decent decisions. And so the people who got kicked off of the system again 150 just 700000 people were pretty much all denied for this catchall reason called failure to cooperate in establishing eligibility. And basically what that meant was you filled in the online form. You had to send your supporting documents which basically you had to either fax them yourself or go to a help center to fax in the documents.

[00:12:25] If 20 to 120 pages of supporting documents the people who work in this field actually know how hard it is to establish eligibility for this stuff and if any one of the documents was upside down not properly indexed to the file too dark to read. Right. So you're photocopying your driver's license and faxing it into a digitizes call center. And if it wasn't readable then people would just get determined uncooperative so they would failure that it would be failure cooperate and they would be not only told that they were terminated or they didn't get benefits but they weren't told to appeal. They were told to reapply. So if and if you reapply of course it sets the clock back. So 30 or 60 days for another determination. So you've already waited 30 or 60 days for this determination of failure to cooperate for reasons of lacking this one paper and then you have to wait another 30 or 60 days. So it's not surprising that the case loads dropped as quickly as they did. You know one of the open questions I think here and probably one I won't be able to answer is whether or not that was the intent of the administration was just to build a system that was so hard to get through that people would self deport stated very right. The welfare system has a reputation a very strong reputation there's lots of evidence that it uses administrative barriers to block access. So it's I think your suspicion is well founded in that way. Yeah and

it seems like one of the people I did some interviews with in December a guy named Chris wholey who is a Medicaid attorney in Bloomington Indiana.

[00:13:55] He sort of put it in a really nice way in which he said and I'm paraphrasing here but he said you know you have to think and do a thought experiment like what would a system that was built to make sure everyone gets the benefits they're eligible to by law. What would that system look like and compare it to the system we've got. And he said you know I suspect that this is just a gotcha system like it's looking for ways to deny people. And he said in our legal system we believe that it's better that 10 guilty people go free than one innocent person languish in jail. It seems like the welfare modernization had the opposite philosophy which is better to deny 10 eligible people than to have even one person who is maybe not eligible get resources because if they're really eligible if they really need it they're just going to keep fixing keep make us actually spending that money right. Ordered money to do that. Right. That actually brings me to another question I had a chance to read through an article from last year January 14 in prospect or on the future of surveillance and I found the information in that in a couple of examples that were used in that fascinating. And I I don't know if you remember some of it but I wondered if you could share some of that information with us as well because I don't know if other folks got a chance to look through that. Yes so that article that Kate's talking about was published in January on the American Prospect and it was one of the. I've been making a transition from more academic writing to more journalistic more popular writing recently and it was sort of my first big piece and I think like often happens to writers.

[00:15:40] I had a lot to say that I hadn't been waiting to say. And so it's called the one to predict the future of surveillance. Ask poor communities and it sort of rose out of a frustration with the conversations we're having about surveillance and how they tend to focus on the concerns and the experience of professional middle class people. Is not not important it's just a myopic and limited way to understand surveillance. So right this is right after the Snowden revelations I put revelations in quotes because like I say in the article like nobody I worked with would be at all surprised that any of this is not revolutionary to them at all. They're like of course the government watches everything you do. They've been doing that to us forever. So yeah it grew out of that frustration of there are so many interesting things to talk about that we're not talking about that doesn't fall into consumer protections on the Internet or Google's search algorithm which is really important to understand but maybe not an earth shatteringly important social justice concern. Sorry I was able to do great work on Google. So I said you know we really are looking in the wrong place like we should be looking in. You know we should be looking in the welfare system and we should be looking in another place. I do my research is in the homeless community in Skid Row in Los Angeles. And the issues around state surveillance are so very clear there.

[00:17:02] And I think the stakes are so high that it's really important if we really want to be smart about surveillance to start in poor and working class communities not just in the United States but globally as well. So I talk about how we use state technology in sort of low rights environments. So that's saying that public assistance system in the United States but that's also in in Afghanistan where we test the technology that we then bring home and use on Americans. So the idea is to sort of look for what I think are the most compelling cases in places where people really struggle to find entitlement and exercise of their rights and also partially because the issues are so clear there but also because the really creative solutions come there as well. Right. So I talk in the article about the BRICS cable for example which is an alternative Internet backbone that's being built by Brazil Russia India and China in order to sort of run the United States because the United States

has basically packets nippers on all the Internet backbone in the United States so every message that goes across our cables has some kind of interaction with the NSA and because we control most of the infrastructure of the Internet you know other countries are like hey we don't want to go to the United States let's build a cable that just goes around the United States right or Brazil is creating this Internet constitution help Marco that is based on some really important participatory democratic principles. That is just beyond sort of what we're thinking about politically in the United States right now too. So there's some great solutions. And I guess because I mean most of us are pretty familiar with Edward Snowden and just a sense of surveillance in terms of on the streets and all that.

[00:18:55] But one of the things that I hadn't even thought about even though I knew it existed were like electronic benefit transfers with SNAP and the fact that caseworkers will actually review. I mean they must have a lot of time on their hands to review people's shopping decisions and whether they got chips or something that they shouldn't have gotten right with them or like Governor Le Page in Maine. So another thing we talk about a lot and sort of internet justice or digital justice circles is openness openness. And I'm a big supporter of transparency and data openness. However like if you look at what happens in poor and working communities in the United States in that case law page basically took all the data about where people were using their EBD cards like where they were getting cash where they were going shopping. Any relief at all to the Internet as part of a campaign to get this law passed that says you can't use your card in a liquor store or a strip club or. Right. Because based on a misunderstanding of what's on your card. Right. So you can't buy a lap dance with your BT card like that's just not possible that's in the program. You can do that. But if your neighborhood only has a liquor store in a strip club and you need to use the AGM and you do have cash benefits you now can't use any time anymore. So when we look at it data openness I feel like we have to keep in mind that particularly people on public assistance in the United States are already hyper visible like all their behavior is so open and that that's not just right.

[00:20:31] So when we talk about data openness we need to be thoughtful about where that openness is aimed and for what purposes. And I think the last page example is a really good example of absolutely. I guess we want to open it up to folks that are here now. Two questions if you have one of the questions I had was in listening to your summaries of some of what you did with women in the YMCA you talked about after you had your aha. Oh I'm asking the wrong questions and they know about technology about working with them on quality of popular technology project. And that's kind of cool and I wondered if you would talk a little bit about that. Yeah. Thank you. I'm actually really glad you asked the first half of the book is the book that I think of as I like the real world of information technology is the kind of corrective like the aha moment that I had like trying to help other people have that moment and because of that half of the book it sometimes seems a little doom and gloom right. So I think of that as sort of the evil empire half of the book. But the second half of the book is like the Luke Skywalker half of the book because I think it's really important that I'm not understood as saying that basically technology is one more foot on the neck of the poor. Like I don't think that that's true.

[00:21:39] And I think that so much power is routed through technological systems right now that it's absolutely critical for us to figure out ways to be critically engaged in how it's designed how it's implemented and how it's used. So the second half of the book is about trying to use some of the insights from popular education which basically the idea of popular education is just people are basically smart. They have a lot of information about the problems they face most directly. And surprise they're most invested in coming up with smart analysis and good solutions to them because it affects their lives really directly and

trying to apply that to technology education. So we created some resources like some physical resources a tech lab and some other stuff but we also created a series of what we call popular technology programs that were ways to get people to come together across lines of difference particularly class difference and to talk about their sort of everyday interactions with technology in ways that helped us all be more critical about the way we think about technology. And then we built technology projects out of that and some of them were quite successful and some of them were middling successful. The one that is actually sort of middling successful as a technology design project but really interesting. The most interesting to me is we actually were going to build a videogame that was called Beat the System surviving welfare and it was based on do you know this game called The Sims. Yeah. So there's this game called The Sims where you just like you have this avatar and you like live their life and you're supposed to like get a house and a car get a job and meet somebody and like make out not.

[00:23:18] And so we had this huge workshop like 100 people came to this workshop where we played the Sims and then we did this in person this simulation called Life in the state of poverty that is created by a welfare rights organization and we compare the two and a very hilarious conversation ensued where people are like Wait you're born and you get a car or you're born and you get ten thousand dollars like who does that happen to you. And I was like well a lot of people are like wait you got a job and a car just shows up to pick you up. Where does that happen. And so we have these great conversations about what was missing in these simulation games and the women that I worked with were like We want to make a new version of this that's based on real life. And so we didn't actually ever get to the video game programming part of that but we did a bunch of collective research and then use that research to create a number of characters that we then built a bunch of popular education exercises around of being like. So these are common experiences that people have in the system like how would you respond. And that became something that we then took into the community to use for education. So it wasn't super successful in the sense that we made a video game but I think it was just an incredibly interesting experience I think. The exercises were super useful and I certainly learned a ton from them. So all of the tools we use to do that work are in the appendix of the book.

[00:24:42] So I appendix it's like a third of the book it's all like these exercises we did at this workshop and these are my notes from this and so we tried to be really really transparent about what we did so other people can do it as well. An organization came out of that as well called the puppet technology workshops that we continued to do trainings mostly for social movement folks who are thinking about technology is one of the issues that they want to address. So not all doom and gloom. Some really great stuff really fun and interesting stuff and that's been true with the new work as well as sort of dire as some of the situations are like people sort of courage and smarts and resilience has been really inspiring to me. So I've been really lucky to work with a number of social movements on this work. One of the greatest compliments I've gotten in the last year is one of the groups I work with in Los Angeles which is a coalition called the Stop LAPD spying coalition. One of the guys in the Stop LAPD spying coalition was like oh it's like you're an embedded journalist you're just embedded with social movements instead of the military I'd like to think of it that way. So that's been really great. Others will better try a happier place. As we're talking you know it just made me think about you know it's just too much more technologically advanced way of life because of the drive by checks on women when they were received in the early days.

[00:26:08] There you see it then of course the drug testing and all of that but I'm thinking here about I mean I think I've been aware of all of that in terms of what's happening now

with anything how you think about it is that we are probably so surveilled that what does one do about it. And I'm sitting here trying to think what should or source worse to know about how in poor communities is worse and what's happening here in New York State. And what should they be aware of. And what are the experts in social justice efforts around that. And I think that's incredibly that's some really challenging stuff. Right. So my impression right now is that we actually know very little about what's happening. And that's from both sides on the social justice side. We have a tendency to think about technology in terms of being a tool like a tool for mobilization like Twitter or apps for mobilization as a means of sort of civic engagement or as an access issue and then we think of the content of our organizing and that's against police brutality or if that's LGBTQ rights we think of that as our issue. And technology is a tool. And one of the things that the popular technology workshop does is say every single issue you have is also a technology issue. Right. And you have to think of technology not just as a tool but as an issue as well. So if you're doing say police brutality impossible to think about that well without thinking about the role of body worn cameras right now without thinking about the uptake of drones and police departments without thinking about the tension between statistical models of policing and community models of policing which actually aren't so different. I've recently learned that the whole nother conversation so that every issue you have is also a technology issue.

[00:28:04] So I think that that's probably true within that actual frontline work as well. The most important issue I've found for frontline workers who have also talked to is about the role of their discretion and discretion is a double edged sword. Right. So on one hand case worker discretion historically has meant really an equal access to public service programs particularly along the lines of race. But I always tell the story of how we lost judicial discretion. So like in the 70s there was sort of a weird bedfellow situation created by progressive folks who were really concerned about racial inequities in judicial Senate seat and law and order folks who were just like just lock everybody up that way. And the result of that was mandatory sentencing guidelines. And the idea for the progressive folks was mandatory sentencing guidelines would make it so that judges could not be as racist in the way that they were applying the law. But what we got was like an exploding incarceration of black youth or black and brown youth. So I think it's really important to keep that in mind as a model that light though case worker discretion can be really problematic that replacing that with technological systems that are no less biased but have made that decision making invisible is not useful. And so I think a lot about this role of discretion and that's partially why I'm trying to do work in the welfare system and also in law enforcement it's because discretion plays so much of a different role for say a frontline welfare examiner and a beat officer in some ways it's similar and in some ways it's quite different.

[00:29:50] So that's one of the reasons I've looked at both of those things so I think discretion the role of discretion is a really important thing for us to think about. Yeah and there's some other stuff but I'll keep it at that for now. You just said something that sort of reminded me about one of my concerns about what do we teach students about technology and I think that technology's here to stay. It's not bad it's not good. It's an issue and it can be used for bad or for good. The decision making systems people are putting into place are invisible and it seems that one of the things that we would want to do particularly for social workers who are moving into more organizational macro practice but for even the direct service people we should be demanding that we know what the decision making pathways are. You know the process season with Edwards that needs to be made transparent. And you know it doesn't always work correctly. But if we just treat it like this box like Okay that gets this decision that chance for us to really scrutinize those rules we're going to end up with some very bad systems. You have some good examples

already and it seems that those are the kinds of questions we need to be asking people they need to understand issues of decision flow and how decision making proceeds and scrutinize it not treat it like it's but treat it just to us does this make sense in light of what we know is going on in a particular situation and that recipients should be part of that as well.

[00:31:14] Yeah so and black boxing as I said is I think a really important part of it. And maybe that means teaching social work students some computer programming so maybe not. Right now the way it's set up so I did some archival research on this because my understanding early in this process was that most of these changes happened as part of the 1996 reforms which required that all offices computerized and I was interested in looking at that moment in time and seeing how that stuff happens. I went to the New York State Archives and started digging through the archives. And I was like 1996 I was like oh no they already had it and I went back and I kept going back and I kept going back. And what surprised me is actually when these systems were built in the late 60s and early 70s so the Medicaid management information system and the welfare management system were both built really early and they were built in the context of Rockefeller's reform of the welfare system which looked very much like the 1996 reforms like it was work. First it was like a new residence in the state of New York shouldn't get access as a family caps. It was right very fraud's centered very familiar language surprisingly familiar language. So at the same time the National Welfare Rights Movement had made it impossible at least legally to outwardly discriminate against people and create that filter to the system. So there have been all of these civil rights successes around access to public resources. But there's also this backlash going on at the same time there's a recession right. There's been all this movement that people are now a little freaked out about and they're backpedaling.

[00:32:49] And so there's this political moment where you can't legally and explicitly bar people from public services but the program's growing really quickly because we've opened up all this access and how are you going to put a new bottleneck on that. And again I don't think you can say that that was an outward intention like that five guys sat in a room twirling their mustaches like saying that we're going to do this. But again you have to think about what the system would look like that what the point was to make sure everybody got their entitlements. And so we see these administrative systems being built at the same time that they're trying to lock down access to public services that the state is trying to move power decision making power up the line away from local offices and to the state. And it matters that this was the context in which these systems were built. So one of the things I argue is that we sort of smuggle politics into these systems into these administrative systems in a way that like the governor of Indiana could not stand up on his campaign trail no matter how right leaning he was and say I'm going to kick half a million people off welfare. I couldn't say that but he could say we're going to make the system much more efficient and we're going to hew more closely to the letter of the law and then the effect is that potentially half a million people get kicked off. So the last thing I was going to say about that is often that decision making tree the power tree will be you know the governor at the top.

[00:34:17] The I.T. folks over to the left and then the social service folks over to the right with their own power and structure but there's not a lot of communication across between the folks who actually do the work and social services and the folks who actually do the work in technology services for the state. They sometimes do sort of participatory conversations around how to design systems that will work best for workers. But in terms of making those decisions about like what is welfare for right that conversation never happens. And I think those are the kinds of conversations we need to get ourselves and our students involved in. I think I spent part of my career. Over my I'm telling you this her

way. And then commercial. I know connection. Oh people have any kind of services or services and it's multiple iterations so there's a piece of me that goes to your model. Go talk to folks who are who you are. So why do you think about how you go with your somewhere under that comes and goes for services that say what they want people in social services other some hopeful. These always those users pursue stuff often will serve you will go home. What was it. Yeah. Connections is a really interesting case right. So connections is another one of those where they roll that out and Texas it did not work in Texas and then we bought it from Texas and we're on building 19 of connections which was like the reprogramming at 19 times since we instantiated it from what I understand it's getting better from the user's point of view.

[00:36:28] But this is also one of those sort of big questions of this work which is so the state of Indiana now has instituted this hybrid system because after they broke the contract they were like the work and they just sort of dumped it all but they kept pieces of it including the move to task based work instead of case based work which is important. There was a huge uproar about this in the state. There's a lot of pushback. There's these community meetings. Five hundred people coming out yelling and screaming like there's an amazing amazing movement organization around this. When they had the modernized system when the hybrid system came out that kind of died down and one of the things I've been asking is like is it better. Like is it actually that it's working better. And there's some really conflicting opinion about it. Right. So some people say yeah you know we don't so people don't get failure to cooperate it all the time like the documents just don't disappear into what they call the black hole and Merion which is the document Center. Things don't disappear into the black hole. As much it seems to be working OK. But then there's a bunch of other people who say no it's no better at all. It's just that they've gotten rid of all the people who originally worked there and the new people who work there have no idea that it's ever been any different. And the rest of us got tired and like we moved on to other things or we got sick and retired which actually happened to a number of people or they died. Right.

[00:37:44] A number of recipients passed away during this process. And so it's really like connections like the case workers will say who is much better now but I wonder you know it's like what your comparison right. Were you a worker before this. We had this system and all because it seems to me when I ask them like what do you need to do your job well and what does the computer system do. Like they're just two completely different sets of things. Right. Like they'll say you know what I need to do my job. Well it's like a holistic picture of the community of community resources and community struggles like real time to talk to people one on one access to networks. They don't even get access to the Internet and connections so they can't even check if a food pantry is still open. Right. So it seems like I share your suspicions of connections. Yeah and of what it does to the work of social work and certainly what it does to recipients and coming back to Diane's question as well doesn't have to be that way. Right. These systems could absolutely be built to help people recognize where they have access to resources they need. Simple thing we could do right away in every single public service office in New York state is there is one screen only the caseworker looks at it. When I was working on the book when I was talking to people about their interactions with technology and the welfare system they're like Oh we see the butts of computers all day long.

[00:39:04] They walk into a welfare system and there's like a case worker and this is in the back of a computer and they're like you're not in the system and they go back fine. So they have to make eye contact. And I was like oh yeah that must be frustrating. I have no idea what's on the screen right. All you have to do is put another screen in front of it and have

them look with you as you were filling in the paperwork and correct stuff and be like oh wait I didn't know about Hiep like Am I eligible for that. Like oh let's check that and see if I'm eligible. Right. Has there ever been an example of us doing that for the means tested program in this country. The sample design assist there really works for people and it comes to means tested programs. Right. And when I'm pushed and pushed when people are like what's the solution. I'm like unconditional cash transfers. Stop checking. Just give people money. But you know. But Nixon wanted to do that. So is suspicious of that. I'm not sure that I know of an example of state or local government example of that. There's lots of examples of it in the social movements space and so in New York City there's this great thing called the self-sufficiency calculator which movement organizations sit down with people and go through their finances with them and make sure that they know what they're eligible for. And also at the end there's this brilliant little twist that they added to it at the end. The program tells you what your hourly wage would need to be to actually be self-sufficient in terms of like decent housing decent education and healthcare.

[00:40:38] And so this is something we used at the Y and it was fascinating because people with the like wait I have to make forty five dollars an hour to be self-sufficient and then they'd be like oh my financial problems are not my financial problems they're like this society it's financial problems and we'd be like yeah like it's not about balancing your checkbook it's about the fact that the minimum wage is seven dollars and you have two kids. Right. So there's this real sort of movement building moment built into that. I think there's a lot of space to do that with the ITC. I think there's a lot of space to do that with ACA with luck building our own health care exchanges that are social justice focused rather than insurance industry focus. Right. I think there's a lot of room to do that. I think that's a place we can get sort of civic technology people engaged. The civic technology people tend to be like kind of standoffish about the state which is a whole nother thing that I'll talk about I can talk about but we won't do it today. But you know I think we need to engage much more deeply with these state programs and how we think about doing digital justice work. There's a lot of space to do that. You have been listening to the first of a two part discussion on technology and social justice with Dr. Virginia Eubanks. We hope that you will join us for part two here at in social work. Hi I'm Nancy Smith professor and dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work.

[00:42:07] Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history our online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs we invite you to visit our Web site at W WW dot social work. But follow that edu. And while you're there check out our technology and social work research center. You'll find it under the Community Resources menu.