

Hello and welcome back to Partner Conversations, a series of interviews from Turn2us Edinburgh Trust where we learn more about the work of our partners across the City of Edinburgh and the challenges faced by the people they support. My name is Ems Harrington and I'm the Senior Partnership Development Officer.

Today I'm speaking with Justine who is one of our Co-production partners. So just as a reminder, Co-production is when we work alongside people with lived experience to design and deliver services that affect them. We have a team of Co-production partners across Turn2us and a new team in Edinburgh and we're really thrilled to have them help shape the work that we do. You can learn more about Co-production work by visiting the Turn2us website. I really hope that you enjoy this lovely conversation.

Can you please introduce yourself to our listeners and followers of the podcast?

Great, thank you so much. My name is Justine, and my surname is Ehimen. I live in Edinburgh. I've been living in Edinburgh for a couple of years just now. I schooled here in Edinburgh, and I can say it's one of the best cities in the whole world, trust me.

Thank you so much, Justine.

So you are one of our Co-production partners. Can I ask you what first attracted you to being involved with Turn to Us Edinburgh Trust and this Co-production work?

Great, thank you so much. I love this question you just asked me. Yes, I got attracted to the Turn2us Co-production project because of at least two reasons. One of them being the fact that the vision of the Turn2us Edinburgh Trust resonates so well with me. It resonates because everything centres around the community, centres around family, centres around making people financially independent or at least to thrive. And that works so well with me because the work I do personally is community-based, focusing on supporting young people and their families. I work in a charity. For some reasons, I'll just leave the name out except if it becomes necessary. And this resonates so well with me because I see that embodied in the work of Turn2us and Edinburgh Trust.

Thank you so much. Is there any issue of financial insecurity that you feel particularly passionate about?

Yes, there are some issues about financial insecurity that I am passionate about. For example, I've had to support or work with people who struggle with their health. Some struggled to find their footing again after paying so much school fees or struggling to fend for their families.

Having to work with these people and see the struggles they go through and also seeing how they get back, becoming so happy and joyful again after receiving some sort of support from the work I and my organization do, it gives me that passion. That drive to continue to look for ways to impact the community a lot more. And that's one of the things that really endears me so, so much with the work that Turn2us and Edinburgh Trust is doing.

Thank you. How have you found the Co-production work so far? So I know it's relatively new but how have you found this experience? Anything you want to share about that?

Okay, great. Trust me, the Co-production work is super, super amazing. I've happened to get to meet people with different backgrounds with super amazing experience, each one of them. So we gradually have become more of a family.

We support each other. We learn from each other, and everyone's contribution is welcome. No one's contribution is seen as better than the other. No one is shut out. Everyone is given an opportunity to express themselves, to share their experience, share their own opinion. And everything, at the end of the day, it's coming together. It's coming together as a solid and a more formidable work plan that will help both Edinburgh Trust, Turn2us and the entire community in general.

Nice. Have you been involved in this type of Co-production work before?

Yes, I have. I was involved with Citizens Panel under the Capital City Partnership. And we did some amazing work together that even had us to work with the Scottish Parliament at some point and several other groups. So it's super amazing working with people. You get to learn at the same time you are sharing your own experience as well.

Nice. Justine, what would you say to organisations who are thinking of having Co-production work? This is not a question we talked about before, but that's really come into my mind with someone like yourself who has so much experience doing Co-production in charities and with government and local authority. What would you say to an organisation who hadn't done this before? What are the benefits of Co-production?

The benefits are endless. Endless because the usual experience is maybe at the middle of the project or when the project is already concluded before maybe clients or Co-production partners come into the picture. And at some point, in the life of the project, the clients or the partners get to see certain lapses. But having the Co-production working together towards the actualisation of any project, it makes it more holistic. Everyone is involved from the bottom to the top and from top to the bottom. And at the end of the day, the chances of having the end product well accepted by everyone, the chances are endless because everyone sees it as their own thing. I was part of this. My contribution was part of what made this to be what it is today. So it's more encompassing. It's more acceptable by everyone.

Wonderful. So there's a feeling of ownership. That's what I heard.

Real ownership

Which is really important when organisations are designing services for people. If people haven't been involved in those services, I'm not saying they don't go well, but I think they go better when people are more involved.

Exactly.

What are your hopes for the future? So two parts to this. So for yourself and also for the people of the city. So that can be personally, that could be with Co-production, whatever you want to share.

Okay, great. Yeah, for me, my hopes include so many, but the few ones I would just mention just now, especially because of some of the signs I'm already seeing with the Co-production work, it increases my hope. So I get to see in the nearest future, but immediate, short, and long term, that we'll have a happier community, happier people, because Edinburgh is one of the best cities I've ever lived in.

I foresee and hope that the Co-production work and every other similar projects in the city will bring about happier people, happier community. And if that becomes the case, chances abound that there will be little or no crimes, there will be little or no issues or discontent within the entire polity. Everyone will be a lot happier. Yeah. So that's my hope.

That's beautiful. Thank you. So you mentioned Edinburgh being a great city, which ties in well to our next question. What does Edinburgh mean to you?

Well, Edinburgh means home to me. I've, like I said earlier, I've been to so many places, I've lived in several cities, but Edinburgh for me is home. Very welcoming, beginning from my next-door neighbours, down to the school for my kids, even a place of work. The city is a place to be. The people are very respectful, very supportive. You may be having a moody day and as you're walking along the road, someone whom you've never met before just smiles at you. That means a lot to me. Yeah. So Edinburgh is for me, anyone who hasn't visited Edinburgh before, I think they should give it a try and see how they can get in touch with me to confirm if what I'm saying is accurate or not. And trust me, it's positive.

Brilliant. So I've done these interviews with quite a few different people now and people who are from Edinburgh, people who are not from Edinburgh like myself, I'm Irish. And this is one of my favourite questions because I get a little snippet into people's experiences and whether that's different if they were born here or whether it's different if they moved here or how long they moved here. So it's been a positive experience for you.

Yeah, exactly.

And that gave me a real feeling of community, a real feeling of community. Is there anything else that you would like to share? Just about anything at all really, but you're obviously someone who's got a lot of experience both personally and professionally in community work and community support. Is there anything, and this is your platform to say and to share any message that you might have or any words that you're like, yeah, I would like to get them out there.

Okay. First of all, I would say community, community means everything to me. And I believe the feeling is mutual because and if you like it or not, one way or the other, even if you live alone in your home, one way or the other, you would need to speak with somebody, you would need somebody's help to maybe fix your car.

You may even be a medical doctor, but that doesn't mean you wouldn't need someone to help you do shopping or go for some groceries as well. So having a happier community that has a lot of people who are out of financial struggles to a very large extent would make the day for even the government as well. Because at the end of the day, what the government is striving for is to make the people happier, to have a prosperous community. So everything that anyone can do, even no matter how little it is, it doesn't have to be in a very big way. No matter how little it is, just see how you can make life easier and better for the next person. You can start with yourself, try making yourself happy.

And I've come to realize that a lot of times, speaking for myself now, I get happier a lot when I do what is nice to the next person, apart from trying to be good to myself, which makes me feel happy with myself. But when I do good to someone else, even if it's just a little phone call, even if it is just maybe referring the person to an organization that can support them better than what my organization can do, and at the end of the day, there's a feedback that, oh, they got sorted, that's super amazing. Because if the community is filled with majority of people who are happy, majority of people who get the next person putting a smile on their face, what else are we looking for? Yes, that's how it's supposed to be.

That's really beautiful and thank you. It's also really important because, I mean, I totally agree, and I think that human beings literally rely on each other for our survival. We're just made that way.

And there's periods of time where I haven't felt so much in part of a community, or I've had periods of loneliness, and I was thinking when you were speaking, oh, I wonder what advice that Justine would have for someone who doesn't feel that community. But I think you've already answered that question. Doing a little small thing for somebody else, generating that, even if it's a very tiny connection.

I have a sister, and we both love those small human interactions. We ring each other, or we text each other when they happen, because they're so meaningful to us, even if they might be just saying hello to a dog, and chatting to the owner, or having a small conversation with someone. So that's a lovely reminder that we can feel community in different ways.

That's really, really wonderful.

It's been an absolute pleasure to sit down and talk with you. I want to thank you for your time, and for your energy, and for your heart as well. I feel very fortunate for this conversation, and really looking forward to seeing what our Co-production partners do into the future, because I know your work is incredibly valued. Thank you so much, Justine.

Thank you so much too for this platform. I consider it a privilege also. So thank you very much.

It's my pleasure.

This interview was carried out and produced by me, Ems Harrington, Senior Partnership Development Officer at Turn2us Edinburgh Trust.

We are part of national poverty charity, Turn2us, and we have over a decade of experience in giving direct financial support to people experiencing poverty in Edinburgh. You can learn more about our work by going to www.turn2us.org.uk