

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 is a wee bit different, I'm speaking with Margretta who is one of our Co-production partners. 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 here in Edinburgh and we're delighted to have them help shape our work. You can learn more about our Co-production work by visiting the Turn2us website.

Just wanted to add a little note that we record our interviews in our office in Edinburgh which is in a busy and loud area so you may hear some background noise and a little bit of banging on the mic as well. So thanks for your understanding, thanks for your patience and I really hope that you enjoy this wonderful conversation.

So, can you please introduce yourself to our listeners and to the followers of the podcast?

Thanks. My name is Margretta. I live in Edinburgh for quite a while, but recently I just moved to Gorebridge.

That's lovely. Thanks so much, Margretta.

Thank you.

What first attracted you to being involved with the Turn2us Edinburgh Trust and becoming a Co-production partner?

I was really pleased when I heard about it because at the beginning, I was working with this organisation in Edinburgh. Our job was just to advocate for the people in the community, people who are struggling due to a lot of social security, social...

So like social issues?

Social, yeah, social issues and stuff. So me myself, I've been through a lot of difficulties in this country. And then I just saw that opportunity and I just realised that probably if I get involved, I will be able to advocate for people, for vulnerable people.

That's really beautiful. So the fact that you were doing work around advocating for people, but also drawn to it because of your own experience and your own challenges.

Yeah, sure.

Is there any issues around financial insecurity that you feel particularly passionate about?

Yeah, because currently the cost of living is really affecting everybody, especially if you are on low income. And I mean, everybody is struggling and currently everybody is really kind of anxious about winter coming up because we all agree that bills are definitely going to go up. And if you are earning such a low income and you have children to look after, especially if you

have a child with disability, it makes situation really worse. So it's something that everybody is anxious, especially, I mean, myself. I feel really anxious about it because I'm just worried about how those bills are going to be paid and adding council tax to it and a whole lot of expenses. So it's really a tough time at the moment.

Yeah, I totally agree. And we're seeing that in our work a lot. And even the amount of grants that we're making, the amounts that people need, it has just gone up so much. I think we noticed a change during the pandemic and then the need kept getting higher and higher.

Right. Yeah.

So could you talk a little bit about the Co-production work that you've done so far and maybe explain a little bit about what that Co-production work is?

Yeah, the Co-production work has been really amazing. It's just a really nice journey to me and a big experience to me. First of all, being able to meet a lot of people from different organisations, different backgrounds coming together; share ideas and trying to kind of find a way to distribute finances to help people, not just like, short-term goals.

But what really excited me was the fact that like it's going to be a long-term support, which is really good because like from my own experience, when I've been through that before and those years, I really appreciate all the support that I receive. But sometimes some of the support you expect to be, ongoing support, but sometimes it doesn't turn up to be like that. And once you are in the middle like that, it's really hard for you to kind of fulfil your potential.

So I am really excited and I'm just hoping that through this, for a lot of people, life will be really changed forever, and people will be able fulfil whatever they wanted to achieve in life. So it's really, you know, a game changer for everybody. And I'm really, really, really happy that I'm part of it.

Yeah, we're so happy to have you. Have you found that your own personal experience has been like helpful to bring into the Co-production work?

Yeah, definitely. Because I mean, once you go through that in life you've really been in that position. I mean, doing something to shape other people who were in the same, you know, situation like you, it's always easier. Because obviously you've been in their shoes before. Because I quite remember there was a time that I was struggling having a disabled child. And then I was living in a house condition full of damp. And there's nowhere to tend to. You try all your best; you go to GP they will say you go to first the council. They said, Oh, go to the GP and ask for a GP letter to support. I did that. Later on social work got involved. It's like everywhere that you go, they will say, Oh, go here, go here, go here, go here. And everybody is like, they are trying to help you. But at the end of the day, you end up getting nowhere. And it's really frustrating to me at that time, because, it can add to your pressure, and you end up being really ill, I was actually suffering from depression. So, when all these circumstances, add up, it makes the situation worse. So, I was really in a bad place.

And I think, I mean, sometimes a lot of people kind of blame the government for everything. But from my experience, sometimes the problem cannot be really pushed on top of government itself all the time. Sometimes it's the way some of the, I mean, organizations, the way they deliver those services. It can have a lot of impact in people's life.

Because I realized that sometimes it's all about the person that will be assigned to you to deal with your case. And majority of the times, those people, not all of them, but some of them are

maybe they are not aware, or maybe they don't really know what they are doing, like training-wise and things like that. It can make situation really, really worse.

So, all the time, what I try to advocate is that, organisations who are trying to deliver services to, service users, they should make sure that people at the front line are really well-trained, you know, they really know exactly what they are doing, because it makes a huge difference. Obviously, you are not expecting everybody to come in to walk into your door and solve all your problems. No, it doesn't work that way. But sometimes, even the way somebody will talk to you that day, can make a huge difference in your life. It's not about money, or money is, I mean, important, but sometimes, its the human relationship. Some people will come to your house, and by the time that the person will leave the door, you feel happy. The person did not give you money or anything like that, but just that relationship alone is something really dear, and I think people need to realize that because it's not all about money. It's about that building relationship with that service user. It's very, very, very important.

Honestly it does really help, because I remember there was a time one particular health visitor, came to my house. At that time all the doctors were just kind of trying to find out what's going on with my little girl, and this lady started, prejudging the whole scenario. Because in the beginning they were suspecting that she might have autism, and then all of a sudden, this lady started saying, oh, I don't think so. Probably, I thought maybe it's like attachment disorder, and I was like, hang on. Obviously, I'm not a doctor but this is they are saying, this is what probably is happening, so for you to tell me different thing, what are you trying to say. This woman wasn't really kind.

She wasn't nice to me whatsoever, so this is typical example. So people need to realize how to build that kind of relationship with service user. It's very, very, very important. From my experience, it's very, very important. Honestly, it does help.

They're really important words, because I agree, the money is very important for people, but it's also being treated with humanity, and being treated with dignity, and with respect, and with kindness, and with care, how meaningful that is. Thanks for sharing how meaningful that is, and sharing that part of yourself as well. What are your hopes for the future, so for yourself, and also for the people of this city?

My future, probably, I mean, at the moment, Co-production teams that I'm part of, my future is trying to help, to advocate for people, for vulnerable people in such a way that people can realize their dreams and fulfil it. So it's really, really, important to me, honestly. And I mean, for the general population, what I'm just hoping is, like, through this work, we will be able to help a lot of people, for them to realize their potential, and for them to have that self-believing. Thinking that, oh, if somebody can make it with a little bit of support, me too, I can make it. And it's something that I'm just hoping people will realize and grab it, happiness, and get on with it, and change their life.

Because honestly, I always say to people, this country is very generous, when it comes to welfare system and everything. The government, local authorities, everybody, they are all trying to do their best. But at times, like, individual people receiving that kind of benefit or system, they need to realize that sometimes you can achieve something with help, support from different organizations or from different sources. If you want to work hard towards your own goal, you can achieve something.

And at the end of the day, being, able to do that, you'll be able to achieve big. And if you are really struggling financially or whatsoever, gradually, gradually, you will get there, and you can be your own person at some point, unless you decided not to make any difference in your life. Because obviously, if you start small, and you aim high with hard working, it's not like just folding your arms. Because I know there's a lot of, temptation, a lot of difficulties going on,

everywhere in this country or whatsoever. But my advice is that everybody is a person. You need to realize your own potential, believing in yourself, and kind of grab every opportunity that you will get, regardless how big or small it is. Because a lot of people are out there, they will never get such chance.

So if you are able to get any help, try to grab it. And I know if you are able to grab it and work hard, you will definitely succeed. And that's the way of getting out of poverty. Because if not, it doesn't work. Because if you are really struggling financially, and you want to all the time rely on, excuse me to say, rely on all this kind of benefit all the time, you will never achieve anything really good if you are struggling. But to me, I think you need to have a goal, you know, just realizing that. Maybe this is the starting point.

So where do I start from? So because one thing I've realized that a lot of people don't know where to get that support from, when they are struggling, they don't really know where to turn to,. But once you are able to get support, please, please, I beg everyone, just use it. No matter how small it is, that's one thing, beautiful thing that I've realized in this country, there's always support there. And if you really, really wanted to change your own life, you definitely get people to get you through to that line. So it's very, very important. Because without your own self-esteem, without setting goals for yourself, you can never do anything, you know. So it's very, very, very important.

That's really special and important. Thank you. When you were speaking there, I had this kind of image of a city of people that believed in themselves and were well supported at every stage, because I think we've all seen, and in our own lives, we need like different kinds of support at different times. We've come to our last question, which seems like it's flown in. What does Edinburgh mean to you?

Oh, Edinburgh means a lot to me, because people are really lovely. And I like the fact that we are more or less like multicultural city at the moment, you know, different people from all over the country, the world, living in Edinburgh. It is just amazing. Because you get to know different people, different culture, different food, a lot of things going on that we should be grateful about. And I think it's really good that we all help each other and live in harmony. You know, it's very, very important. So I'm really grateful. Yeah, I'm really grateful.

Nice. Before we finish up, is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we didn't talk about?

The one particular thing that I wanted to talk about is there's a lot of inequalities going on, you know, not only this country, but around the world. So this country is not exceptional. We have our own ups and downs. But I mean, the particular inequalities, from my own experience, most of the time, a lot of people talk about discrimination and I know it's existed. The majority of the time, for me in particular, I just kind of experienced indirect discrimination. And that one is really, really mind torture.

You see, service user or whatsoever will not tell you that, oh its because of your colour, or because of this, or because of that. But indirectly, they will just find every means to kind of eliminate you from the whole thing. And I think it needs to change, because obviously, it cannot go on like that. I have a child with autism so like, I know, when you are really in trouble, and you try to find support for your child, and sometimes, like, as I said, we have great people out there. Honestly, I'm really grateful so far for every support that I've received. But I mean, indirect discrimination does exist, you know, I cannot just rule it out. It does exist. And I think, it's the time that people need to realize and do something about it. Because to me, that one is really mentally, you know, torture. It just hurts you mentally, because they will not say because you are this or that, or that, or that.

I'll give you a typical example. I remember when I was living in, Niddrie I had an issue with my neighbour. I was living in a three-bedroom house. And then my neighbour is living in a three-bedroom house as well, but it's a detached one. My little one was three years old, and I have three children. And then my little one always kind of make noise and that kind of stuff. And, it's really difficult to tame them down. Even, children with normal, you know, it's hard to even tell them to stop, not to talk about a child with such difficulties. But yet, my neighbour keeps complaining all the time. And she was just calling police, you know, complaining about noise all the time.

And then the police came the first time, and I said, I'm afraid I have a child with such condition, and I'm trying my best to kind of calm her down. But if you don't know, I don't know how to explain to you, I told the police officers. So, I'm just doing my best, but it's not as easy as you think. And at the end of the day, I don't blame the lady calling police for me, I told the police officer, why? Because I don't know why you gave her three-bedroom with one child. Assuming if my neighbour is living in three-bedroom, I mean, having three children like my own, the situation will be different, because obviously, they will be running around like my own situation.

So she was calling the police all the time. They came back again, three times. And anytime they come with their lights and everything, my kids just keep on panicking. So, it became really unbearable. One time they came, and I said they should come inside and let's have a conversation. So, then they sat down, and we have, you know, a bit of conversation. And then, they said, okay, let's go to the neighbour, we will get back to you. As soon as they get back to me it was one police officer, a male and a female. The female officer was saying, I heard about your neighbour, she explained the whole scenario to me, and I think it's not fair. Then I said, what do you mean by it's not fair? Because you went to her, and she was able to maybe convince you or whatsoever. So, you are even telling me that it's not fair. If you are in my shoes, you will know exactly what I'm going through. It's not easy for me at all. So, for you to not even have any sympathy for me, and you are here blaming me, it's not really the best. So, then I told them that I was getting really agitated because I was a bit depressed at that time, so I told them they should leave. And, I mean, God being so good, they left.

So, after that, I phoned my social workers, and then the lady was very nice to me at that time. And then she wrote a letter and I sent it to them. So, as I'm saying, this is how, like, to me, indirect discrimination comes in. Because it's really not fair. These are some of the scenarios. And if I want to go on, I can go on, I can go on.

So, I think, you know, all these things need to be addressed. I know it's not going to be easy, but I think something needs to be done. That's all I'm asking. But apart from that, if you are in trouble, what I like about this country is they are really generous, and people are always there to support you in any ways. As long as you yourself are a receiver, if you are willing to work with them, people are always out there to support you for you to achieve whatever you wanted to achieve.

You know, see, look at me today. If you are really trusting yourself and if you are able to get the right support. So, that's what I'm just wishing for everybody that in the near future, you know, people suffering will get the right support in Edinburgh, and we will all thrive together. That's my goal.

Oh, that's the most beautiful dream. And thank you for your time today. Thank you for your honesty and for your wisdom and for your experience and for your kind heart that wants to see a better life for people. I'm really grateful to have sat down and talk to you today.

Thank you so much. I'm so grateful too.

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