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Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of our podcast series, Changing the Narrative, in which we're exploring and sharing insights from various human learning systems, examples of practice that have what we think are interesting and helpful insights into embedding equity practices and principles into work. My name is Onika Winston from Collaborate. And I'm Gabriel Eichsteller from Thampress Social Pedagogy.

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We hope this series is valuable for everyone, but particularly for practitioners who would like to better understand how human learning systems practice can intersect with intentional equity and inclusion practices. Today, we're joined by Anna Willow, who has been involved in Brent Care Journeys, a strategic alliance between Barnardo's and the local authority of Brent. Before we start, it'd be really helpful if you could share a bit about where this partnership came from.

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But yes, so quite a while back now, Barnardo's began to have some kind of three core areas of strategic direction. And one of those was for people, young people who were in care or had been looked after to acknowledge the fact that there was kind of systemic dysfunction there in that. If you kind of track some of that data over time, although

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also acknowledging that the data was quite poor, the quality of data for those groups of people was quite poor, but they were overrepresented in all of the wrong places. So something was clearly still really going wrong. Lots of us had been very dedicated to supporting those children and young people, they weren't having good outcomes. And so it was in recognition of that. So some strategic partnerships were established also to think about sometimes the roles of

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third and statutory sectors can be kind of overly distinct. Those are systems that might kind of in some ways partner in some of the same kind of intimate situations for young people and families, but not work in a kind of collaborative strategic level on those big problems. So I think the charity was maybe kind of being a bit humble and recognizing that we might too often

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offer a sticking plaster, whereas we really, really wanted to go much deeper into what happens between systems that are working together and see how we could learn what might create more legacy, more impact that really sticks, that really creates a difference for people. And for this partnership, which I was leading, was particularly interested to find out what happens when you prioritise the voices of people who kind of

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It's a bit glib, but you might describe as being least heard. you create you create priority for people who are sort of structurally disempowered, but also who have lived experience of the issues.

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Thanks, Alan. That gives us some really helpful context. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit more about how did you consider equity within your project? You were saying that care experiencing people are overrepresented in all the wrong places and some of the least heard. So what was important to you in that respect? So I just think that kind of by definition, that's at the core of this, isn't it? If you think about experiences, particularly in childhood,

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of not being able to stay with your birth family or your family of origin, because decisions are being made about you to protect you or keep you safe. How from the kind of very beginning of those processes, the removal of kind of choice and self advocacy and power is kind of baked into everything that begins to happen next. And also, you know, it's really kind of common knowledge now, isn't it, about kind of how

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underfunded these systems are, how overwhelmed they are. However, we're only, we're not able to keep up with the needs of children, young people and families in these systems. we are kind of, think universally in agreement that some of our solutions and outcomes are not good enough and too expensive and not having a good impact.

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So this kind of inequity is in it from the beginning. And then we know that certain groups of people are more likely to have poor experiences of being into care or going into care in the first place. And certainly, like I was saying, of being in destinations that arguably aren't good enough. I think we might hope kind of in an ideal world that

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if such a difficult thing had happened, which meant you had to be removed from your family, that you were part of society that deserved the very best. And actually, you know, kind of when you get under the surface of these things, you actually find the opposite is happening. Yeah, and of course, all of that plays out against the background of, you know, this happens predominantly or disproportionately for families affected by structural inequalities, by poverty and

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So even before kids are taken into care or even before they're part of grand care journeys later on, there's already a lot of social justice issues that come up. I think the evidence is really strong that families, for example, who live in poverty are unfairly represented in these families, the kind of the drivers for structures and systems to make these decisions about other people's lives are

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led by and informed by things which are of fundamentally not fair. So it's an interesting example of looking at equity and systems, I think, from that perspective as well. mean, during the lifetime of Brent Care Journeys, we developed these things called power groups. know, and a lot of the stuff that I talk about, I have to be really careful not to over claim kind of the size of the example or

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its duration over time or how many people are affected. there is a magnitude, there's a kind of, there's often something quite profound about what we learned. So it was kind of a small project on a bit of a shoestring really for the things that we achieved. we developed these power groups by looking at, by listening really hard to people who we were successful in engaging, you know, and we worked really, really hard to engage the people that didn't normally come.

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or felt like there were reasons that stopped them from receiving and engaging and trusting with people who might be able to help. And then enabling and empowering and leaning into their experience for them to become leaders and conveners in what would help them. And so those were our power groups and they focused around things such as like men's mental health or fitness, et cetera, et cetera. And there was one for parents.

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for people who were care experienced and became parents. And these kind of layers of inequity in terms of how the system regards you. If you've been in care and you become a parent, a really prime example of what you're asking me about there, Gable. The system's really stacked against you from the beginning. That's the experience of a lot of people who have been looked after when they become a parent.

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Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I wonder if you can say a little bit more sort of going back to the early days of basically setting up Brent care journeys. You mentioned that it was a partnership between Bernardo's and the local authority. Were you both coming from a similar place in terms of that sense of injustice and that sense that we need to change things? We need to, you know, amplify the voices of care experiencing people and ensure that they're

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more at the heart of decision making? I think traditionally local authorities commission voluntary sector organisations to do things according to a kind of contract and agreement which has kind of set parameters and expectations and people who have authority and power to decide what good looks like or what an improvement would be have already identified and articulated that from the outset. And it was really important to me that we structured and engineered this whole opportunity differently.

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and we didn't do any of those things before the right time. And the right time was going to be when we'd grown from the ground up to make sure that the people who have those lived insights were able to articulate what a better outcome looked like and how we'd know when we'd achieved it. So some of that kind of narrative and definition had to be put on hold. So what we were working very much with in terms of this alliance was a blank page for quite a long time.

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I people who work in, whether you work for the local authority and you have statutory power or whether you work for a charity and you have kind of influence and other kind of enablers

to being able to gain the trust and respect of the people that you're, know, the families and young people that you're working closely with. I think all of those people at kind of individual level care deeply about creating change for people.

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You know, those are both sectors which are full of amazing, inspiring people who are very kind of values driven. I think the space and opportunity to pause and look up and say, what should we do with this? What's the opportunity was maybe different for the charity, whereas the kind of pressures and the drive to keep going for the system is part of what's so hard about iterating and reforming. So I think there's this slight difference.

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I also think on reflection, I realized it took a while, I think, for us to be in a truly shared space in terms of mindset and approach, partly because of some of the things that drive the respective systems, partly because in a local, well, in any local authority that's offered an opportunity like this, it's very...

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unlikely that there's capacity to release dedicated resource to the project. So we were having to ask for people to be part of it as well as, you know, holding the responsibility and the risk and the demands of their daily lives. But I think, I think those I think like universally people have the same understanding of what isn't right and the inequity that exists, but the opportunity to change it, I think is maximized through

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that kind of partnership working and being able to dial into people's strengths.

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Yeah, and it's heartening to know that by starting with a blank page and bringing people together around a shared sense of purpose and a shared perhaps shared sense of recognizing the injustice and that determination to make things better. As you were saying, I think that drives a lot of practitioners, whether they're in statutory services or in charitable organizations. That seems to be really critical.

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I wonder if you can give examples of some of the practical things you did at the beginning to kind of bring people together and to get a clearer sense of like, what are some of the disadvantages and how can we actually address that? How can we get out of this situation where the system seems to perpetuate some of these inequities that affect care experience to young people? Yeah, sure. some of my response will probably sound simple and obvious, but

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actually be quite kind of heartfelt and I think has had profound results when it's been applied well. Some of it I think is kind of common good practice and is applied quite often then maybe some of it is stuff that we especially learned by having this kind of very special opportunity to start with a blank page and work for five years which is in some ways not long enough but in the context of what's available and possible was a real privilege.

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So I'd always start by talking about relationships in terms of humanity and human connection. And I don't say it lightly, like it's something that we took really seriously. It's something that we invested really deeply in. We went live sort of as the pandemic began, which initially felt like a bit of a crisis. But over time, we were able to think and

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work on the kind of opportunities that presented as well. And one of the key opportunities that presented particularly for these groups of people who face multiple structural disadvantage and barriers is being able to respond to people's acute need. Because I think it took a few years actually before some of the kind of main actors and our kind of

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our key collaborators, our young people who had this lived experience began to truly believe that we were going to do things and we were going to change them. They were going to be able to see them and feel them and understand the difference we had. And we weren't going to be working at this kind of too high theoretical or abstract level. So by demonstrating in those early days, things like dropping off care packages and things that people needed on a kind of urgent basis during the pandemic and responding to acute need,

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Many of the young people we worked with in North West London were people who were seeking asylum, children who were seeking asylum. And sometimes they didn't have the right footwear or they didn't have a mobile phone or lots of the young people. I think the world's changed quite a lot since 2020, but we were working in digital poverty, for example, and people were very isolated. So responding to people's acute need to evidence that you can make a change and you mean what you say was really, really important. Then there's lots of, you know,

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There's the kind of simple or kind of standard good practice, I think, when when the services do things well, which is to identify a barrier and just like remove like there's a simple solution. So let's commit and prioritize resource for it. So that might be about paying for people's child care. You sometimes it's about helping people move around. So transport. I'm quite kind of practical steps.

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And then lastly, think what we did is we pushed the boundary on what's kind of creatively possible in terms of convening systems and not being too restricted in who that might be in order to enable these kinds of opportunity for people. So doing things like we've had two live events which promoted the lived experiences of people and

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put people in positions of like high regard, where usually actually they'd felt kind of either oppressed or discriminated against or kind of forgotten about. Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, it's interesting because some of these things you could have done within a more traditional framework of doing things to young people for the want of a better word, but

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How did you think about shifting power and what did you do to make that possible? To make it more than just like, we drop off care packages, we show that we're serious about improving your life, but we don't really do that with you, we do it to you. That clearly wasn't your approach there. I think that, you know, with the caveat of always working within safe, contained professional relationships and being clear about your boundaries with people, which we were unequivocal about.

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We were also kind of unrestrained by and open to reviewing and what else our relationships might achieve or be or mean. And we were humble about and kind of, think, hopefully open and transparent about how these relationships were also affecting us and our own lives. So there was a lot of meaning there.

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I think partly this was driven by pride because it's really easy to talk a good talk and then not actually make a difference. So, there's something here which is driven by like pride and ambition just to go further and do better and go deeper. So, we would do and so a kind of like as a kind of working principle, I think whenever we encountered

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something that an opportunity or a piece of work or a task or anything that had to happen. I think we'd be quite playful in seeing what will happen if we kind of upend this actually, if we can just completely.

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reverse these roles. And again, like I think some of this is incremental over time. And some of these examples might sound quite small, but might have quite a big effect. So we would think about, I would think a lot about power and how that is accumulated. If it's accumulated, if the person that has it is aware of it, how they're exercising it, whether it's, if whether they're kind of hoarding it or hiding it, whether it's visible or invisible.

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I think so much to do with power, particularly for the lived experiences of the young people that were collaborating and working with us, was just kind of inherent in everything that they did. They saw it all the time. It was kind of embodied. And that's a really emotional place to be in. And you see that sometimes in people's behaviour, their assumptions or how they react to things is because of feelings so immediately disempowered by lots of things.

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So we'll be thinking about then how we can change how it appears, whether it's visible and how it's communicated, which is often nonverbal. So, for example, coming into the local authority building, which is open to the public and has lots of people coming and going from it, there's quite a strong security presence and they might sometimes be dealing with real life, really difficult things.

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And sometimes that might be that might involve kind of constructive ways of dealing with young people who are behaving in a way that isn't kind of okay in this space. But that meant that the children who, you know, this building is particularly important to you if you're a care leaver because these are your corporate parents. So you have to feel welcome there. But the initial thing is that there's a barrier with how security of being suspicious of you when you enter based on what you're wearing and what your age is, maybe what your race is, et cetera.

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So this is I mean about the kind of partnerships and not discounting any part of the systems and the connections in the kind of ecologies around everybody. Like the security guards were a really key part of what we achieved, just as the social workers were. And it was important not to write them off and bring them in and talk to them and train them and get to know them and everybody know each other's names. Later on, when we went through phases of co-design and we got to a point where we'd

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We tested some prototypes and we had some really compelling evidence about why something needed to change in the system and the difference it would make. I was fortunate to have kind of senior leadership that allowed us to bring our kind of youth collaborators into those board meetings. So we were integrated when we were presenting and we were looking for accountability and governance. We were all there. We were all presenting work as equals.

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But I was kind of aware that that was going to be, that if we just come to the meeting, that's paying lip service to the problem and going back to this thing of being like too proud to accept that. I also wanted a question. What room are we in? How does that make these young people feel? Some people feel more comfortable in this room than other people. How's everybody dressed? Some people look quite formal. That asserts something about their power and authority and it's quite disempowering actually to somebody who dresses another way.

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So let's ask questions around this. What time of day are we meeting? Oh, we're probably meeting between nine and five because this is really convenient for these professionals who are going to squeeze it into their busy diaries. That's actually really difficult if you're a single parent or if you're trying to go to college or you've got a job. So we did think so we're having to say, well, are we doing this in the evening? Are we doing this in a boardroom or are we doing this in a more formal area? I mean, sometimes I was saying, let's do this in Nando's. Let's do this where the people who are most disempowered.

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in this structure, feel the most comfortable, let's upend how this whole relationship is weighted. And, you know, just simple things like designing some clothing that everybody liked wearing. And when we were working together, we were all wearing it. So kind of visibly, this difference was, of course, by no means being eliminated, but we were kind of working

at eroding it and chipping away at it. And whilst we couldn't eradicate it, because these problems are like

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huge compared to how tiny we are. But we were also indicating that they mattered to us and that we were committed to keep chipping and that also if people had more ideas or wanted to push on another area of change that we would be receptive and that we kind of put our money where our mouth is. Yeah that's brilliant. So many really good examples because I think very often we kind of when we have power we kind of almost take it for granted and it shows up in ways that we're not really

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reflective of and that is only very noticeable to people who have far less power than me. And so actually that bit about kind of asking those questions, reminding people, reflecting with them on like, where does your power show up in these ways that you're not even aware of? Because, you know, it's you who controls when the meeting can happen, where it can happen.

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you determine what you're wearing and that might be based on other things that you're doing during the day, but it might also just be based on what you feel comfortable in. But how does that make the other person feel? What does that suggest about your power? All of those are really helpful kind of little things that I think we can all do. Certainly we can all do that. We can all ask those questions, but sometimes they don't occur to you until you've taken the time to make the relationships.

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I'm not from Northwest London. My difference was kind of visible and felt with a lot of my youth collaborators and I was challenged loads of times and I think probably on a really justifiable basis of people not being able to trust me. And I had to earn that trust over time so that we could get into a place where we could actually work together in what transpired to be a very kind of inspiring and meaningful way.

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committed to was that for us to be heard or to have to be able to, I knew we got to a point where I knew we were having impact and we needed to think about how we shared that and how it landed and how it affected people's hearts and minds. And I just always felt very clear. I didn't always want that to be in my voice or in the way I would write it or reach the audiences that I could reach. So I had to backtrack a bit. I had to kind of really unpick then how do we start this journey again? And

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my kind of driving kind of design principle on that was that my youth colleagues, it was my responsibility to give them the opportunity to be heard in their own voice. And I just kept thinking about that and handling that and thinking about what that would mean. And that meant that we sometimes got it wrong. know, some of those, was one particular like live exhibition where



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We gave people opportunity to try out loads of different ways of sharing our impact or communicating their message. And not all of them were popular. Some of them really were. But so there's an element of testing and getting things wrong. And for that being for me to say, well, that's okay if it doesn't actually it's fine to fail. Let's do it really quickly and let's do it like low cost, low risk. And then there were other things that took off much more quickly, such as podcasting.

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And enabling people to like literally use their own voices to convene their own circle of kind of conversation and influence that they're going to have on the topics that matter to them to broadcast the groups of people and to market them accordingly. So it was kind of thinking in that way that also kind of took us to the next level there. Thank you, Anna. I'm curious in times of the governance, how was redistributing power thought about and made possible there?

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I think there was an opportunity there to shape something or be quite suggestive and say, oh, well, there's a gap. We've got to put a structure here, which is going to be fit for purpose. And, you know, you can be driven to do that because you like to do good work. But what also really helped me in this project is that I would, it would be kind of unforgivable from the people I was working really closely with and they would really hold me to account. And I suppose, you know, maybe I did something right in that I was there for that.

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I was present, I was visible, I wasn't hiding. It was really, we just got to a place of authenticity, I think, with people's kind of identity and experiences, which is such a generous act. It's such a generous act, it's not to be underestimated. And it's not always easy, but I think

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it was kind of universally worth it for people. But I really think about a time when, as the project developed, we had kind of layers of opportunity to collaborate. And so there was the kind of much wider, like some events will be big and we'll just invite lots of people to come and everybody's welcome and we're all members of this movement. Then there was a kind of more, a of smaller core group.

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of members who would kind of reach out and take certain like champion certain aspects of the work. And then as well as the kind of Bernardo staff team, we began to create some opportunities to employ people with lived experience. It wasn't something that progressed quickly. It was quite hard going to figure it all out. But we stuck with it. And by the time we finished, we had a kind of team of about 10 people. And having interviewed

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one young man and offered him an opportunity. I had to talk to him about his criminal record and how actually conventionally it was going to be quite hard to get this through recruitment because it's not typical and we're going to have to push at the boundaries of what we're

going to kind of tolerate or the risks we're going to take in order to change the systems and the structures to kind of really design and lead change with people who

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understand what we're doing and I had to champion that. And we had a really difficult conversation. Over time, we had like a range of difficult conversations and sometimes I'm sure I was quite, it was challenging. But what was interesting when we reflected on them, on this one in particular, he was like, well, you need to remember what that was like for me.

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because you were taking me, you look like you look and you sound like you sound and you're looking at me on a Zoom call because we're not even in the same place and you're asking me these questions about my past and my decision making and I just, everything, I'm in a state of high alert and I'm really emotional because I've been really triggered by everything I've experienced before and that's the response that I'm having to you. So even within kind of what I think was good intention for me, I have to say,

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I got things wrong and constantly had to use these opportunities to learn. But there were people like that who were kind of passionate and clear and assertive and also like invested. So saying, if I'm invested and I'm giving you this and I'm giving you this time and I'm taking this risk and actually often this is emotional and difficult for me, then you have to be accountable. And that was quite important.

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Thank you. I really like what you were saying about how it was a difficult conversation, but being open, having that authenticity to be able to hear the experience of someone with lived experience, how it, I guess it can open up the space to have frank, open discussions and then the reflective practice of how you learn from it moving forward. It's hard to always to remember what you're going to trigger or represent to somebody else, particularly when you've just got such different life experiences.

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And you come with a set of assumptions that they're going to understand that you want to work together and go to the same place together. Yeah. Kind of overlook what it's going to take to go on that journey. And as a, as a team, how, you know, that reflective practice, I guess, how, how did you come together and learn and make sure that was kind of transferred across and into the process? I think a couple of years in, we were getting deeper, the highs were high and the lows were low. It was all still worth it, but it was, it was having

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everybody's like invested in every way. We began to have kind of some external group support. And I think that that really paid dividends. It really enabled some safe conversations for us that we needed to have. it was, you know, it, I think it, it really helped the project and it enabled some of the richest experience I've certainly had, like professionally and personally. You can't

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No matter how much you care or how much you try, think having both kind of that professional expertise, that ability to hold and convene conversations at the core of a project like this and enable people to feel safe enough to share the impact or the meaning that they have was really valuable. Yeah, I can.

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I can totally see that because there's so much there that kind of really relies on creating relational certainty for people that they know that our relationship is going to be okay. can kind of bear having those difficult conversations and work through it in ways that are going to ultimately benefit our relationship. But particularly for care experienced young people, that can be really daunting because they're used to kind of

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building relationships that are then kind of broken because they might have to move. And so having that relational certainty is not necessarily something they would have experienced in the past. so building that, I imagine, took a lot of tenacity, a lot of... I think that's absolutely it. People who have just repeated levels of

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broken relationship and a reason to distrust people and hope in attachments and situations, but kind of repeated disconnection. So to begin to offer model and keep providing assurance around connection and what that means, what it is and what it isn't, because that's also quite hard, you know, in a professional relationship to say this is the line and to have difficult conversation when it's due.

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was absolutely essential. Yeah, I wonder if we can ask you a little bit more about sort of that connection with human learning systems. And to what extent do you feel like human learning systems gave you an opportunity to kind of really focus on equity or to articulate that centrality of equity and inclusion?

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I think although I'd been doing what I do for quite a long time, you know, I'd been working in voluntary sector with children, young people and families for like 20 years. In many ways, I felt very unprepared for this opportunity. I felt really enthusiastic. I felt hugely motivated. It really mattered to me. But I sort of observed myself after a while a bit like a magpie.

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in terms of kind of learning and inspiration and help along the way and finding other thinkers that were going to kind of nourish and feed me. Not that everybody in the team needed to be aware kind of theoretically of process or approaches or mindsets, but that was really essential for me in terms of my role and holding the whole thing together. In terms of using human learning systems with equity.

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I guess just fundamentally beginning to get my head around and then share some of that understanding with others about everything operating in complexity and in relationship to

everything else. And thinking about how much we can and cannot influence and thinking about being able to like, kind think on that really, really big picture of

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I think this was quite, if I had some of the project workers on the team on this call, I think what was often quite hard was them saying, is this good enough? Is this what it looks like? Is this success? When do we know? Is a bell going to ring that we've achieved something? It's kind of really, it's such an undefinable destination, this kind of work.

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that human learning systems helped me to, I think, help a team to understand those dependencies about attributing success or good outcomes to just one system or just one project has been completely fallible. And there was kind of relief. There's a bit of relief in that. And then there was always more to do to understand more and work better.

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in terms of the interconnection with all the systems and partnerships and stakeholders and, you know, to go back to what saying at the beginning, not ruling anybody out of that. I think it's K.A. McCurtcher that says, I'm paraphrasing badly, but something like bring the circus, like also invite them. Really think broad in terms of achieving better equity in your approach to enable systems to have better outcomes for people.

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Yeah, and I think there's something really interesting in your example of practice about kind of perhaps this thing about agency and sort of understanding what is my sphere of influence as a young person or as a practitioner. I think often we're kind of perhaps a little bit limited in terms of imagining what that could be based on our previous experience, but I think what really stood out from your

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example of practice is that you did some really interesting work with say training job center staff, you know getting involved with Ofsted inspectors and so on and so forth so kind of also having an impact on other systems. Well yeah absolutely so we I suppose yeah maybe I was kind of underselling some of the stuff we did we're giving you the small examples we also we were also

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successful in co-creating, like I didn't design this learning content, people with lived experience of growing up in the care system and Brent did. So co-creating really impactful learning for the newly arranged inspectorate for supported accommodation for Ofsted. You know, they really actually did that. And that's

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I suppose that our reputation didn't come first. We weren't asked to do that and we weren't invited to do that. We made relationships. We knew what we were about. We were able to talk about how our work was informed. And I suppose that gave us kind of integrity. And it meant that when we were suggestive or we had opportunity to

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have influence on somebody who has influence on a kind of interconnected and very powerful and important part of the system that we were compelling and we were trusted. And I think probably, you know, some partnerships like Ofsted did take a bit of a risk on us, but I know that they think it paid off. And what was the what did you say in the young people who were involved in this? What did it do to them to have these kinds of opportunities? I think it was

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You know, probably most memorable is that sense of like, we've been asked to do loads of stuff like this before, but it's never really come to anything. And I'm thinking of one young woman in particular who would just sometimes kind of almost jump up and down and be like, Anna, we're actually doing this. We're actually doing it. We don't just talk about it. We don't just kind of pointlessly sit around thinking about it and...

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and know kind of creating prototypes of things that don't go anywhere. Look at us. We're on a train. We're going up north. We're delivering this. We're on a podcast. Look at how many people have listened to them. And I think the other thing is when I think about that young colleague in particular, I'm thinking about what happened when the project closed and the kind of amazing careers that those young people are now having and the sorts of jobs they could apply for and how successful they are in doing what they're doing now.

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as a result of the work that they did with us. Because I think that was another really important principle, is that it needed to have a good impact now in the work that we were doing with the people we were with. And it needed to be kind of good overall for the system in terms of learning. But it mustn't, not only must it not be to the detriment of us directly as people within the team, but it must also have good impact for what was coming next for those people.

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Yeah, and you started a movement quite clearly. So what would you say was that difference? Because you're mentioning there like that young person had clearly been involved in a few initiatives that led to nothing. What do you think was different about this? What turned it into a movement ultimately? I think the really key thing that turned into movement

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was nothing to do with me, but was to do with the of the relevance of the project workers, the lead project worker and her team were just so relevant to those young people that grew up in the same places, understood all of those contexts and had like just genuine credibility with them. But also like a connection which was able to flourish very, very quickly.

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And an approach to doing her job professionally and safely, with in a really generous way, in a really generous way, where she was not only willing and able, but enthusiastic about wearing lots of different hats for people to be their auntie or to be their careers coach or to be their, you know, to, you know, have that kind of firm word, that tough love.

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I think if she was on the call, she would talk about tough love a lot and just how meaningful that is and how much of a difference that creates. So I think the movement grew up around her. She was really, really loved. And then the love kind of spread between groups of people who developed kind of interrelationships with each other. And I think also because of what I was talking about at the beginning, not everything we did grew out of sitting

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in workshops following a design. Some of our work did follow this process in a kind of more predictable way, but sometimes we're just having an incidental conversation and somebody says something to one of us that sticks and we think about that and then we have opportunity to reflect on that and then we say actually that's absolutely key, that's absolutely vital insight. So for example, what we noticed pretty early on is that food is a great

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people love to come together to eat and everybody needs to eat and we all loved eating together. But with somebody saying, what I really want to do is sit at a table like other people do with a family. That's what I really want to do. I want to eat like a family. And I couldn't, you can't, I'm forget that sort of thing sometimes. And so what grew up out of that was a kind of weekly cooking and kind of eat like dining together.

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group and it was called Vibes in the Kitchen. There was a lot of dancing whilst doing the washing up. It was absolutely lovely at kind of key times of year like Eid or Christmas. were big kind of, it was a bit higher end, shall we say. Like we spent a bit more, we had even more food than normal. We had more music and dancing and we were also intergenerational. We had opportunity to be intergenerational. People came with, sometimes with their foster carers, sometimes with their birth families, certainly with their own children.

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So I think the movement definitely grew through the authenticity and the meaning and how kind of genuinely committed those relationships were, how the credibility of the kind of youth workers at the heart of that. And then the fact that we weren't too serious or we were quite responsive

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to mobilizing things based on what we heard. And those things were made a difference because they were so rooted to the experience of the people that were going to benefit from them. And we were able to do that because we spent a lot of time together. We did a lot of relational activities. sometimes they were bigger things like going camping for a few days. Sometimes they were just like grabbing a bite together.

44:19

the range, there was a whole range of things that we did. Sometimes they were fun, sometimes they were risky, sometimes they were scary. Yeah, that's lovely. What's really coming through for me is just how much care was at the centre, how much it really was about the wellbeing of people, you know, not necessarily just because of the project, but

also just wraparound support for everyone involved, whether that was the care experience, young people, whether that was

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the teams working with these people that's really coming through. I wanted to ask about partnership with people model that came up from this work. so that was a radical relationships, relentless inclusion, intentional environments, redistributed power and learning iteration that was really core to this model. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that and what you think others could learn from.

45:14

that model in terms of how they could be more equitable in their own work? So I think just as you know, just as the things, just as what I've described really, we didn't sit down and say we need a model. Let's workshop this. We worked together over time. We were, we resourced being able to reflect quite well. And we

45:43

were always active, but we didn't rush a response. So that model was very emergent. We certainly didn't have it at the beginning. I know that kind of like conventionally, it's also much more reassuring to work in a service that knows what it is at the beginning. We didn't have to do that. So there's something about this model which taught me that it pays to work in uncertainty for as long as you have to. I think

46:12

That was often my role was holding people through uncertainty and finding different ways to manage that. But I would I think that's that's not to be underestimated in terms of good impact that we had was being able to stay in the gray and tell people, yes, that is what's happening. No, we don't know it's going to be OK because of and we're going to follow this process. And I think.

46:41

When you're saying what was parent to you was about care, I think the other thing about being able to lead teams that can tolerate uncertainty in their work, if you're in a position of leadership, is to be a bit, to be quite clear and protective when the system begins to ask something or want something or demand something, which is actually a counter, is the odds with your ethos or what you believe or your values.

47:09

So there's something in leadership here about saying no to things and repositioning things based on the fact that they're going to risk the values in your work. So the model, yeah, was emergent. It came out over time. And I think, I mean, it came together quite quickly because when you think about something for a long period of time, sometimes you just begin to have a few moments where you see things a bit clearly, don't you? If you're kind of following a creative process, especially.

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And it just seemed to be suddenly in quite a kind of relatively short period of time that we were able to articulate this now. never, never, it wasn't part of our plan that we'd do this. It

wasn't kind of part of my operational planning. And then in the third quarter in this year, we'll do that. It was emergent. It, but it was, its test, I think was in the fact that it was both useful, relevant and

48:07

relatable to everybody. So whether you were like the head of children's social care and you'd been doing social work forever and you understood documents and plans and processes better than anybody else, or whether you were a 17 year old child who was seeking asylum and didn't have anybody else in London, you could understand and apply those things and you'd also be able to point to where you'd see this happening in the project and that was the kind of test of it.

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I could find ways to demonstrate how we achieve things against each of those pillars, but I could never say that we perfected any of it. It was a kind of guiding force. actually, still use it. do quite, you know, I work in a different place and have a different project now, but those are still the right things.

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And it's a framework of, I think, what important looks like, but in a kind of never finished space. Yeah, I'm really hearing what you were saying about working in a grey and I can only imagine how that...

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must have been or could have been challenging, particularly when you're working with system partners who are used to like the status quo and a very fixed way of doing things because this is the way things have been done. You've already said about kind of leadership and the importance of saying no. What else was important in practice when it came to helping people to get comfortable with this emergent way of working?

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I think hopefully my availability. I think that fear and panic and sometimes upset, like you can feel kind of criticised when you're working in the grey that you're not doing the serious stuff. You're not doing the heavy lifting, kind of doing these kind of fluffy nice to have things, but people find them bit hard to understand. And so you can kind of question yourself, like, I really making a difference? Am I doing the thing I said I'd do?

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So kind of availability to and willingness, I think, to go through that and to keep going through that and to be held through that is really important. I think at other times, I mean, I think some of the wording, I was looking at the partnership with PeopleModel again, before we came on this call and remembering how we put some of those words together and not that we kind of over engineered it.

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But sometimes there's a kind of tension in how kind of important and structural some of the language is around kind of inclusion and barriers. And then sometimes how playful it is. You



know, we talk about being a bit mischievous. So there's this kind of juxtaposition between the really flipping hard edges of life and actually what we can

51:13

also suggestively bring as individuals and groups of people to work on this and around this and survive this. Because this work is absolutely brilliant, but it's completely exhausting. Yeah. I also wanted to ask, so one of the things that you said in your, in the case study was when collaborators with lived experience began to feel the difference and trust the process.

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we gained momentum. And I was wondering if you could just talk a bit more about that and what that opened up.

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I think it opened up a lot for the kind of inverted commas professional people on the team because they'd been living with this fear that we were doing nothing or achieving nothing or going nowhere. So it does a lot to you in that moment to kind of inspire you and keep you on and keep going. It gives you, like I said, like the example in terms of being able to train the Ofsted inspector, it gives you work credibility. I mean, I don't, I,

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don't think I could prize anything more highly than our authenticity in Brank Care Journeys and what we achieved together and what we all stood for. And I think it just, I don't know about a systems level, I'd have to think about that, but at kind of our local level, and I hope this doesn't sound cheesy, but it was a very kind of vibrant period of our lives. When you feel, see, witness, experience,

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connection like that between people across all of these barriers and borders and things that get in the way between us. When you begin to see that kind of shift and move and open up, it's just exciting to be alive. It was a really exciting period of time to be alive and to work together like that.

53:14

Yeah, I think it really speaks to, you might be working on a project like this where there's a real need for it and, you you're working with people who have experienced, you know, being a part of the system and maybe traumatized by the system, but there is space for joy, there is space for vibrancy, there is space for care and love and happiness. It's not always about the doom and gloom of what happened, but actually how can you...

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support people to look at the positives and come together about that as well? Yeah, I mean, we, you know, we fundamentally knew that we were going to be around for a set period of time. And I knew at the beginning of that five years that that was going to be difficult at the end. And the only, and you know, the only way around that is to always talk about it, always be honest about it, always frame what you're doing and focus on

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how not just work but relationships and the influences that people and different things that happen in the world have on us in terms of legacy. I think legacy is another conversation, isn't it? But it can be described in so many ways. And just personally, the impact of working with that group of people at that period of time in that place in the world with that mandate has had huge legacy on me and the work I can do going forwards. And like I say, the

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The people with lived experience who became employees and part of our team went on to brilliant jobs that they wanted to be in as a result of the kind professional experience that they'd built up.

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Yeah, can totally imagine that. And I think there's also something about the alternative legacy. It's not just the positive legacy that you've left, but also like what would life have looked like in an alternative universe where that project would have been absent, you know? Yeah, and I'm so excited about the value that they bring to where they work now and the people that they work with, because I know that that's special.

55:21

Before we draw it to a close, I just wanted to ask, there anything else you want to add to the conversation? Anything that you feel like you want to just highlight or anything we've not touched upon? Looking back, it seems really obvious that we had to... Who were we working with? Who were we hoping to reach? Who was our key collaborator in terms of achieving what we wanted to achieve? And it was predominantly young people. And it was just amazing, kind of breathtaking.

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how irrelevant a lot of this work is to young people. So whoever your group is, whoever you're kind of convening a kind of HLS type response around to look at those systems and how we can service them better, like thinking about your kind of relevance and how everything that you do, how everything is structured, how everything is informed, how is it like?

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Is it really kind of true and meaningful and relevant to those people? Because once you kind of go into that space, some of those solutions are quite straightforward. Absolutely. And I think that speaks again very much to that point you've been making throughout about the authenticity, that sense of clear values and wanting to, you know, make sure that young people have a better life, have the opportunity to kind of have some of that power that they've constantly

56:48

been denied to be more actively involved in those decisions and that we actually act upon what they tell us when we take the time to build relationships and really understand what's going on for them, what's important to them, what is the thing that's relevant to their lives. So thank you so much, for all these insights about brand care journeys. It's been a really fascinating conversation. And thanks also to our listeners for tuning in to another episode. We hope you'll

57:17

Join us again for the next one. Thanks. Take care. Until next time.