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**Season 1 - Awareness**

This season of dialogues concludes our initial investigation into local inclusion and diversity to build 'awareness' of our subject. Beth has drawn on friends, who are also local professionals, working at the heart of the grassroots in Caderdale to look more honestly at aspects of community like food, growing, biodiversity, supporting vulnerable people, disability, engagement and youth. We begin the first stages of social mapping to tease out the problems, solutions and ideas that are collectively highlighted through the interviews.

**The conversations**

**Aine Douglas**

**Calderdale Food Network**

***Good projects don’t put you in a position where you feel less worthy than someone else…***

Can you briefly summarise your role in the community of Calderdale?

*“My role is* ***Calderdale Food Network Coordinator*** *– its my responsibility to bring together all of those within our region who have a connection with food or where food and nutrition has an impact on health and the sustainability and wellbeing of the region. The vision for Calderdale is accessible to all. So within that, inclusion is absolutely key, and recognising diversity is key. So, we're looking to support and promote a sustainable food economy and to celebrate good food”*

What does inclusivity and diversity mean in relation to your work in Calderdale?

“*We'd like to create access to good healthy foods, which then has an impact immediately on well-being and lifestyle, throughout the region. This good food culture- is not just for white educated people who have already learned the benefits and have access, either to land, to finances, to their social situation, but it's about actually creating that culture to become essential thinking across all of Calderdale so it's accessible to everybody*.

*We recognise that the food system is rife with unacceptable racism and racial injustice. “This is for you and its about you” etc. Our work is about encouraging everyone’s voice in how we take it forward. It's very much a bottom up approach, and it's very much about listening. It's about trying to encourage people to bring their message through in the way they best know because we do have a great deal of diversity within the region, and one size doesn't fit all.”*

***The one common language we all speak is food. Everybody, regardless of their circumstance, their colour, their ability, their money, their education, it doesn't make any difference -We all eat! Food is a wonderful way of breaking down barriers***

What do you think the key problems are that we face in meeting people's differences and including marginalised people in Calderdale?

*“The challenges are accessing diverse communities, diverse individuals, individuals from a range of different backgrounds and cultures, etc. and abilities. The second challenge, and it's becoming bigger is making sure that when we have got access to good food or when we have good local producers, (and there are a lot of them), that's shared throughout the region. Equality is key to us. Trying to eradicate food poverty within the region, trying to recognise that fundamentally at the basis of all policies we've got to see that we do have huge anomalies, and discrepancies around life expectancy, around overall health, mental and physical, and that much of that is related to diet and access to good food.”*

*It's essential to have a structure that is sustainable. So access to money and directing of funding and finances in various ways has always been a challenge, and they remain one. And sadly because of COVID-19 it has become a bigger challenge, because rightly, funding is going into different reactive responses rather than a proactive more long term response.*

*Education is a challenge. The hard thing is to encourage people who are unconfident about learning and haven't had the learning opportunities to actually up-skill and build their knowledge, and their experience, in a way that's right for them; in a kind of a small, slow, but steady way.*

You briefly mentioned successful stories like Freegan Boxes, and Incredible Edible. What are the key things about those two projects that you think address inclusivity and diversity?

*“I think that what's really important is that if you choose to participate in any of those things you don't have to commit to being somewhere at a certain times every day; you show up if you can, you don't show up if you can't. You can do it in a way that suits you. You can find a group that you are comfortable with. So I think that the first thing, probably, is to make the entry level very, very easy and very, very non-committal, and very, very supportive.*

*I think it takes away the stigma that some people might see in accessing something that they feel is either leftover or free. And I think one of the challenges we have with accessing good food is creating that healthy attitude with that and just because it's not being used and being sold at the top price in the market, doesn't mean it's not good quality, and it doesn't put you in a situation where actually you're less worthy than somebody else.*

*So many people back off because they are so afraid that something will be expected out of them that they can't deliver and at some point they will feel that they are a failure. The one common language we all speak is food. Everybody, regardless of their circumstance, their colour, their ability, their money, their education, it doesn't make any difference -We all eat! Food is a wonderful way of breaking down barriers, and in countries all over the world if you're sharing a meal, even if it's a bowl of rice, it is a fantastic way of bringing community together.”*

***I certainly think everybody has felt at some point a genuine fear of the unknown and how they can take life  forward***

*“Judgement is actually the most destructive word. When it comes to tackling inclusion and diversity I think that's where the crux of all wars  - whether religious or whether they're to do with diversity or anything, they're all about judgments. It's the assumption that somehow our choices are better than somebody else's. And I think that's the key to moving everything forward is to recognise that we are all right in our own way and we all do things differently. But at the same time there are much more commonalities than there are differences.*

*Everybody's word matters, everybody's lifestyle matters, everybody's opinion matters, and everybody's feeling matters. I think once you decide that you know that that we're all right, even though we may disagree slightly, I think it makes it far easier to move forward and to have a completely inclusive and diverse society.*

*The best way for us is to show people and encourage them to introduce, slowly but surely, a little bit more of what's good for you. And then the ability to be able to source it is key.”*

So in terms of the recent COVID-19 lockdown stuff, what do you think has significantly changed for working in food and food poverty?

*“There are lots of people who will access things online and campaigns that are accessed from your home, but many, many, many, many people, need the message to come to them.*

*And there are many people dying at the moment who have other health difficulties, who are not accessing the medical care they need because of the closure of the surgeries and a fear around going into settings like that. Some of the issues relate to food.  Health issues such as diabetes, and obesity, and heart related issues, are becoming worse. And being ignored, unfortunately, because the fundamental access to health professionals, is just not there. So, they're all huge challenges for us at the moment. And I think they could be the key ones.*

*I think there's a profound fear, even if it's sometimes underlying among all elements of society about the fact that our world has changed dramatically.*

*I certainly think everybody has felt at some point a genuine fear of the unknown and how they can take life  forward. ”*

**I think it's really, really key that we celebrate. I think that's what's important is celebrating good actions that are happening and making access to that information so that everybody knows it's happening.**

What are your main ideas for impacting diversity, inclusivity and food in Calderdale?

*“I think that fundamental to bring forward is the need now to launch the Calderdale Food Charter properly.*

*We are very keen to facilitate projects which focus on creating skills, and knowledge and understanding, because, while on the one hand it's important for us it's great that we've managed to work with Fairshare, so they are now operational throughout Calderdale; it's great that we have the Real Junk Food Project and other similar initiatives, like community fridges. In addition to making those things accessible to people, it's really important for long term improvements that we give people the skills, the knowledge and the understanding to actually be able to make the changes more long term for themselves.*

*I think we also need to engage with some of the established successful businesses throughout Calderdale on a big scale, not necessarily through the food related, but to maybe share some of their time on a monthly basis to some of the more local small producers that need help. It might be financing help, it might be helping do a bit of marketing or just some way to strengthen their capacity, really.”*

*“I've worked with a lot of children who were very, very, very much marginalised. But one of the things we did was we went to the farm a lot, we went horse riding a lot, we grew with them. We did all of those things and the way progress is made in those settings is beyond anything. You can't even describe it, it's been incredible. You know within a day, you've got a change in attitude, which can't be replicated through doing anything else. Fingers crossed, we will try to encourage systemic change so that when there are opportunities to promote something, to put power behind something, to put money behind something that goes into those types of projects which are 100%, inclusive and accessible.*

*That has to be the key. And that has an impact with multiple messages, you know, like you said before food is associated with mental health and health inequalities. You can address all those through one project, but the key is, it is free for all, and there's an invitation now without commitment. You walk in and you experience something, and you become part of the community, without significant expectations and you create those expectations yourself by that engagement. Great! .”*

**Mark Simmonds**

**Co-Op Culture**

***It’s sort of a secret - there is a way that we can come together and meet your mutual social & economic needs***

Can you briefly summarise your role in the community of Calderdale?

*“My livelihood is mainly around delivering development support to co-operatives and community businesses, so that's businesses that are owned by and accountable to the people they trade with; that trade with them either as workers, tenants, customers, even investors sometimes, or businesses that are owned by their community like community owned pubs, community shops, community owned bookshops, etc. And I do that all over the UK and even a little bit into Ireland as well. But actually the thing that really interests me is developing co-operatives that enable people to take control of their livelihoods. ”*

What does inclusivity and diversity mean in relation to your work in Calderdale?

*“Although I work with co-operatives, which are traditionally grassroots responses to the economic needs of communities, there is culture within that tends to be white middle class hippies that set them up, rather than communities that are at the lower end of the various scales of deprivation; or communities with large BME communities. I mean, there are some exceptions to that. So, for instance, the UK Credit Union movement was largely started by the Afro Caribbean community who bought that tradition with them.*

*The challenge for me and the co-operative development sector, and the co-operative movement in general really, is the de-colonising of that; to get away from that thing that it's what middle class hippies do.  Because it's sort of like a secret really; that there is a way that you can come together to meet your mutual social and economic needs****.”***

***“Oh Co-Op’s that’s what hippies do!”***

What do you think the key problems are that we face in meeting people's differences and including marginalised people in Calderdale?

*“I think it's partly cultural. And that might even just be cultural within the valley. So as I said before, if you think of Calderdale as this as this frying pan, where you've got the Halifax at the bottom and then the sort of radical hippie uplands up here on the handle: Calderdale has actually a very high density of co-operatives. We've got over 30 co-operatives in the valley. So those are independent autonomous businesses. But nearly all of them are up at this top end of the valley on the handle. And that's something that really needs to change. And partly that is cultural again: "Oh co-ops! That's what hippies do!" And also, you basically tend to get more stuff where stuff is already happening. It's accessing, what I saw in a post referred to yesterday as “capital light” parts of the community, or the BME community.*

*So that's a challenge, but also where you need capital to start stuff up, if people haven't got any capital, where do we find that? And also, people who haven't got any capital are very risk averse as well, despite the facet that there is plenty of money out there to do this stuff. Borrowing £100,000, which no one's ever going to ever ask you for back if it all goes wrong, is still quite a hurdle to get over.”*

Well, this is the thing that keeps coming up - about that cultural divide in the valley. How do we engage and how do we create awareness with such a divide?

*“So there's a co-op called 'Bread and Roses' in Bradford running a shared workspace, right in the centre of Bradford and engaging right across the communities. and also there's a really inspiring project called 'Brick Box', which is an Community Interest Company that is arts based, which includes people from Bradford who basically went down to London did loads of amazing stuff, but then got priced out of London really. Their work was particularly around taking on buildings and turning them into vibrant community spaces. So they thought 'actually, let's go back to Bradford where there's loads of empty property, and just started doing stuff: holding massive street parties, they've taken over and run a pub in the middle of Bradford. You go in there and, you know, they're really vibrant, cross cultural, quite radical spaces.”*

***It's all around getting community businesses to fill the vacuum that's left by the state withdrawing from civil society really***

So how has COVID and lockdown changed things in the region?

*“The COVID response has been really interesting because we've had all these mutual aid networks setting up, some of which are now sort of saying, "well, actually, this is not just for COVID. What can we do to extend this?" I mean, some of them were existing organisations that switched into COVID mode.*

*So for instance a great group I'm working within in Hull that are looking at how can we actually recreate our economy, a bit similar to what we had with the 'Calderdale Bootstrap' and over in Kirklees with the 'Kirklees Solidarity Economy Network', who have really got involved in that mutual aid network, supporting the vulnerable within the community through the lockdown, at the same time as setting up a new care co-op in Kirklees. That is definitely grassroots working class stuff going on there. And this did happen in the 19th century. It was the people who had a little bit of spare cash and a little bit more time, and who were very political.  So the early co-operatives were set up by Chartists.*

*As co-operation moves South it really got his foothold here. In 1844 they first set up the co-op shop in Toad Lane (Rochdale). Within four years we had a co-operative society here in Hebden bridge. But then as it moved further down south, it was the slightly wealthy working class emerging particularly through the railway. So railway workers were a little bit better off. They were often key in setting up their co-operative retail societies within their community. And it grew to over 1600 co-operative retail societies.”*

*So, basically every significant community would be looking to have a co-operative retail society. And when you go to places like Oldham and walk around as you look up all of those amazing buildings in Oldham, and in Hebden Bridge, were built by the co-op. Yeah, a lot of our civic society was created by the co-op, which then became more municipal and local authorities and things like that. You know, again, a bit of a forgotten history really.*

*In the Covid crisis, people have been funding local projects, you know, the 'Trade's Club' just pulled in lots of money and people really want to support it. It's an amazing facility. It also makes me wonder if there should be some level of responsibility on a place that's affluent, like Hebden Bridge, to support the wider community. But it's all around getting community businesses to fill the vacuum that's left by the state withdrawing from civil society really. One is that they don't really have the capacity to do that. And two, there's still a whole load of that sector really addicted to what we had before, which was 'we're nice and doing a nice thing, give us some grant money'. So they're still very much grant focused. But it does mean if you're a worker co-op setting up, in order to take control of your livelihood, you don't fit that definition of the thing that needs investment, and you're not even seen as being a community business, even though you're owned and run by people within the community who are trying to take control of their livelihoods. That's something I'm particularly keen to address.”*

***Rather than it being fluffy, retired colonels buying their pub type community business, it's actually real people creating real jobs within their community that they own and control.***

What are your main ideas for impacting diversity, inclusivity in Calderdale?

*“So one thing that I'm particularly interested in (I've got quite a few irons in the fire), one is I want to try and find a more sustainable method for funding co-operative development and purely co-operative development. So rather than it being this more sort of like, fluffy, retired colonels buying their pub type community business, it's actually real people creating real jobs within their community that they own and control.*

*The other thing is building on local solidarity economic work that's going on. The surge of work was coming out with people like 'The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES)'. CLES are working with the new co-operative Council Innovation Network where they're really looking at strong, place-based, local economic development. And Preston is often held up as a co-operative example, we've got Plymouth as well. It's actually trying to carve out a bit of time within my work to bring that back into Calderdale and sort of jumpstart Bootstrap' or equivalent and start doing something like that as part of the Network, with the groups in Hull, Kirklees and Preston.”*

**Suriya Bibi**

**Halifax Opportunities Trust**

***How can we open up the opportunities for newly arrived individuals to participate actively in their communities?***

Can you briefly summarise your role in the community of Calderdale?

*“My name is Surraya Bibi and in my professional capacity I work at the Halifax Opportunities Trust. It's such a pleasure working for a charity that believes in strengthening the community, to kind of anchor our organisation in the heart community that we're based in, I think looking at projects and ideas that will help communities to develop their skills, gives the very needy the kind of opportunities they need, whether they are new arrivals or whether they form part of the kind of settled communities. It's really good to be part of that, In particular I manage the inclusion and integration programmes.*

*We have delivered a series of programmes over the 11 years where we offer opportunities on a wide scale for individuals to develop & enhance their skills in order to improve economic participation chances. We foster & harness partnership working opportunities that enable us to ensure correct alignment of services remain. We are proud that the Trust is quite unique in the way we deliver our services however we do recognise the importance in collaborative working. We stand out as designing our own bids allows us the flexibility to respond to local need but more importantly to ensure all projects allow the alleviation of barriers & improve access to provision. We think that's key because mainstream provision doesn't allow that. We recognise the restrictions of astringent eligibility criteria that more often inhibits access to education & training opportunities & how this causes detrimental impact on communities. Our projects, allow the instant access upon arrival to the host society (for newly arrived communities) thus enabling immediate access to education, skill development & strengthening access to economic participation.”*

***They need the language. Without that, how do they go out and about you know? It can be immensely difficult.***

What does inclusivity and diversity mean in relation to your work in Calderdale?

*“So It's all about instilling that level of connection so when you come to this country you have a sense of belonging. But how is that demonstrated in a practical way. There are practical ways that you can encourage people to change, unfortunately there are still misconceptions that certain communities hold for BAME communities in particular, that they do not want to be involved. Do they want to come here to work, do they want to be involved? Well yes, of course. But I think it's those very vital opportunities that they need upon arrival and doors to very important funding streams that will allow projects like that to flourish.*

*I think the word ‘empowerment’ is key for us. You know empower individuals, to think, “I really understand the geography and the history of the UK, this is my life now. How can I best place myself in this country, it's by being involved.’ And I think it's that bit that we do really well at the Halifax Opportunities Trust that gives us such good results. During the pandemic we were thinking ‘how do we sustain our position’? And we've gone from that transitional phase from face to face to offering successful remote learning. Obviously new to everyone, a whole new kind of world of working on the best results, for people who are digitally excluded, getting them on Zoom and doing all sorts of things is amazing.”*

What do you think the key problems are that we face in meeting people's differences and including marginalised people in Calderdale?

*“I think if I talk about new arrivals. They don't know the environment upon arrival, but until there are organisations that will open the door of opportunities to allow accessibility to information, (I don't think that was there, you know, a good few years ago). I know funding constraints have really hampered the way organisations can deliver their services. but also it's about specifically designed opportunities or programmes that will enable those opportunities to happen. They need the language. Without that, how do they go out and about, you know, it can be immensely difficult.*

*The lack of opportunities, financial constraints. And I think more partnership working, would help. Its the lack of resources I mean, the number of problems that I've kind of just touched on that we would say this is our specialism However, if we don't work in collaborative form, how will our beneficiaries or service users benefit? You know, money is not always the solution. Sharing resources can be in different shapes and forms. I mean, we created our own thing. Well, a social space. I don't know whether you've had a chance to come to our fantastic Staying Well Hub  - come and have a look, the groups that we created, facilitated community consultation groups to identify local need. We identified the need to create a social space for people to meet up. We involved our local people to help design & identify activities. It's giving them that voice.”*

***If we can make individuals increasingly self-reliant, they will participate, they will contribute. That’s the key to empowering local communities!***

*So how can we kind of use one project as a platform for the next? That's the hard bit when things are short term.*

*“It's been a great challenge however our success is due to the Integration projects – one example to give you is, we placed a programme in the Minster specifically to mitigate  stereotypical views of Muslim women joining in. People said “what are Muslim women doing in the Minster”. And I said, “Well, where does it say that they can’t ”. We did a school project, school pupils & our clients working together on a craft project making cassocks & through this collaboration they were all exchanging learning on Islam & Christianity.*

*We’ve had partnership projects with York Minster in order to harness interfaith opportunities we took groups of women to visit the Minster at Christmas time. A pre mass going on, and people said “you can’t go in there – there’s a mass going on” and the priest was pleasantly taken aback &  joked  “I'm surrounded by all these  Muslim women I'm going to get in trouble”. And I'm saying, “No, they're eager to learn. And the only way they can learn is by being involved”. You know, those kind of areas where you need people to help them learn and see how they can be involved. And we did – we were bold in many ways.*

*But you have to be. You have to be.*

*I mean the food bank for example we got women to work doing volunteer work, like four hours a week, at the local food bank because we wanted to raise awareness. They're actually shocked to see that this is Britain, why have they got food banks? To help educate them, although not an area that you really want to teach, you know. People said that this is a church. And we said, yes, and then we decided to that year raise funds to create a ‘dough’ project*

*For Neighbour’s Day the women ran a stall selling food in the Piece Hall & raised funds for the food bank for the Ebenezer Church. And every time, people came to the stall and asked, “who you raising funds for” and we said “Ebenezer church” and they said, “we're very confused - and are you not Muslim? How come you are raising funds for a Christian church?” And then we stand there and said well okay you have the conversation with them now. It was just amazing to see that interaction, you know, they were having that dialogue. I'm saying ‘everything is fine. Well it's okay for us to work for a church, it's fine because we feel that that church is part of our community’. Do you see what I mean so again it's those kinds of opportunities that you have to create that in return give positive outcomes.*

*If we can make individuals increasingly self-reliant, they can go back into their communities and by being actively involved they will give back they will participate and they will contribute, that is the key to empowering local communities. So in a nutshell, you have empowered that one individual to go back into their communities and be involved.*

We mentioned a little bit about how things have changed during the COVID crisis. So I'm wondering, have people become more marginalised or have your activities shown that people can become less marginalised, as a result of some sort of difficult event?

*“It was challenging because we became frontline operational right from the onset of the lockdown. And so it was about identifying creative solutions as to how we could sustain what we do throughout all the programmes that we offer at the Trust. We work with the most vulnerable communities that have expectations & as we have found this pandemic has increased the vulnerability & in particular for BAME communities.*

*Our service delivery saw a massive change from face to face to remote learning. This in itself presented huge challenges however again it was about the importance of sustaining our services to avoid the risk of our services users becoming further marginalised.*

*However, whilst the clients appreciate the delivery being sustained they do miss the interaction with staff & friends etc. I think the emotional well being has been hit hard. You know where people have lost loved ones there's been a lot of sorrow & loss faced by our service users. As new arrivals one can understand the likely barriers the pandemic is to cause.”*

The amount of small-scale projects that have a big impact is absolutely immense and I think it's under documented. How you do get vulnerable people volunteering and interacting, supporting one another. going back into the community, having more confidence, feeling more included? It’s simple stuff.

***Some businesses recognise that there are still marginalised communities and that there needs to be more diverse ways of bringing these communities together***

So I've got one last question and I think probably will draw together some of the stuff that you said before, which would be, you know, in your ideal world, what would be the main ideas for impacting diversity and inclusivity in in Calderdale in in the future.

*“I just think, more fantastic programmes that are specifically geared around inclusion and integration. I think the local authority do recognise that we are a diverse community. However, in terms of opportunities for communities to improve ‘ social integration’  how well does that happen in practical terms, I think there needs to be more. I think more needs to be done.*

*We have our Elsie Whitely Business & Innovation Centre which is ideal.  Businesses come and hire the space, and we currently have such a diverse range of companies based there so the advantage of introducing business ideas is great. A number of companies that are new to Calderdale find it an amazing locality to introduce their business ideas “this is amazing, we didn't realise this is what Calderdale physically looks like, the community. How can we be involved?” Ackley Bridge Film production are in Calderdale & it’s so exciting to see people from the community being selected from different diverse backgrounds. That’s a great start.*

*And then you've heard of Northern broadband Haven't you? Yeah, we’re working quite closely with them. They seem to be kind of really harnessing on the work that's already been done in Calderdale, and specifically for Park Ward, looking at deprived communities where they can, again, pull in resources and I just really welcome that again because I think, again, they're recognising that they need to place resources in areas that have not really had doors, they recognise that there are still marginalised communities and within that they recognise the fact that there needs to be more diversity approaches in bringing communities together.*

**Mary Clear**

**Incredible Edible Todmorden**

***We're interested in the small people, the silent people, and the local people***

Can you briefly summarise your role in the community of Calderdale?

*“Oh, so I'm the chairperson of Incredible Edible Todmorden. But I'll give you what the chair is. My job is to make everybody in the team (when I say the team, I'm talking about the board) is to make everyone in the board feel that their job is irreplaceable. That they are irreplaceable. But what they are doing is fantastic. And for me, my job is to be a a talent scout.*

*My job is to keep the organisation open, to use my background skills of working with drug users, mental health, social work, to make sure that we're continually transparent. And I would have said five years ago, my job is to be a spokesperson. But I've changed my mind on that, in as much as there have been, over the years, incredible opportunities to travel. So, I just thought it would be so much wiser to say to other people, naturally, people say, can the chair come and address this conference? And we say, No. so and so good. So Gig (from The Golden Lion pub) went to North Korea. Judy went to Japan.  Chris went to Belgium. So, we've shared that out. In fact, she knows she's called Kai Paignton know. She works for the National Trust. So some really flashy magazine wanted an article writing. We just said to her (she only volunteered twice) do you want to write the article? She said, sure I do. So we see that people can make career moves. They can, that and other moves, if they've got a business, by being part of us, and we want them to exploit it.”*

But that's also this dynamic inclusivity because it's pinpointing where people can take something and move it in to a new direction, you know, or take into a new realm, and identify it.

***Gardening is by the by in my work. That’s all. We’ve got a reason for people to come together and it’s gardening.***

What does inclusivity and diversity mean in relation to your work in Calderdale?

*“So you know, it's great to have a farm and to have outdoor school, and you know, Forest School and to get in touch with nature. That is fantastic. But, as much as I would love to go work on the hills, or in the forest, or on a farm, but I have to think of the person who can't walk, the person who can't talk, the person who's got severe anxiety. So, every single activity is built round, the slowest person's needs.*

*We we weave all of that care of those vulnerable people in silently. Normally, if you're an organisation, you tick a box - 'oh, we had some Asian people, and we write reports - Yes, we've got three people with learning difficulties, 5 drug users and 2 alcoholics, and you talk about those things, but we don't talk about those things ever. Because we don't need to because we are not taking the dollar.*

*I think the current models that everybody use, which are based on growth, they're based on the new. Whereas I actually think small, is beautiful. We forgotten about the small; small and really local, local people being equal with other local people. And I believe that there is another way to operate in communities. And I believe, actually, wholeheartedly that I've achieved that. And I've shown that it is possible, with or without money to make a difference. So I think small, local, beautiful, flexible, and well grounded and connected.”*

*You know, the feeding of people, which we did until COVID have every gardening sometimes men cooking a meal for 50 people. Now to organise two hours of gardening for 50 people, 40 of them have no idea what their fucking doing whatsoever; minding those people and having no staff, no one to  boss about, is all based on absolute cooperation, and self management, is a really complex thing. So we have to think about that meal, we have to think about the person who's 80 and a hands shake; if we use a paper plate, they wouldn't be able to manage that paper plate, so we're going to use China plates. We have to think about the planet; we have to think about the food we serve. So we've never ever cooked meat, so that we don't have to worry whether someone's a Jew or someone's a Muslim. All of that's done away with. So every detail of what we do is built up over years, remembering we've got one person who comes who has no language whatsoever. But he does like to push a wheelbarrow and he will sometimes come with these carer. So everybody knows, has anybody held back the wheelbarrow for Alex? That's built in - it's the history of the group.*

*Gardening is by the by in my work really. Gardening brings them together.  We're not in the slightest interested in gardening. Honestly, gardening is just the handbag we're dancing around. That's all, we've got a reason for people to come together. And it's gardening.”*

***During COVID we’ve got people listening for the silence and listening for who needs what***

You know, I love the fact that you just said that. It's a handbag that we all dance around, because I think that's an absolutely brilliant expression for a lot of work that happens and people forget, it's about social connection. It's about communities built on stories.

*“And, and our other really lovely thing that we do, because we're open about recovery. So it's spoken of openly know, when we've got those 50 people, we'll shout down the table to someone, 'Oh, how did you last detox go?', 'Oh, not so good!' Yep, we want an open conversation, which is really fantastic.*

*That's actual therapy, you know, compassionate therapy, and that's the most productive form of therapy. We say, we accept you as you are and life is a journey. I was talking to Aine Douglass (Calderdale Food Network) the other day about food and well being and if we accept that everybody's on a journey, and we make choices based on that, no one's wrong. You know, we have to say that we accept people at different stages, otherwise we get fed the same story that we're not doing things well enough. What we need to do is have some self worth that we can do things better, not beat ourselves up about it. And, you know, most people don't know how other people's lives are, and how hard they are. And simple things like asking the question makes a difference. ”*

So I was going to ask you, how do you think things have changed since COVID-19? Do you think people have felt more excluded?

*“Yes, it has been amazing. Yes, it has. It's been a great leveller. And a great show of kindness. Yes, it's been fantastic. I think, the little libraries are a little seed that's been so spread all over town.*

*The one on Ashenhurst, which is the one we only really care about, because that's the one where people laughed at us and said, 'Oh, they don't read up there'. And it's got a constant somebody monitoring the library, talking to the children, even taking requests or books, and then gathering those books.*

*So I think the food hubs demonstrated that  kindness is so powerful and that those food hubs were the people operating them you know, we're showered with home baking and gifts every day. I mean, the kindness every fortnight 14 masks are left on the doorsteps, still beautiful homemade masks to distribute silently to people. Last Monday, Adam (Real Junk Food Project) sent over three pallets of surplus food with the with the free paid Freegan boxes. And we don't need to advertise. We've got someone who knows poor people that don't go to the food bank; some went to Nikki's project in Oldham; some went to a poor school.*

*We've got other people listening for the silence and listening for who needs what.”*

***If people are coming in to invest in that kindness, hopefully they are actually investing in the community and not just buying a property***

I've got I've got friends who are working full time, and we're still running free business services to help older people get the food; take them food and celebration packages. And it's funny because people get disappointed that that might reduce after COVID after COVID. But it proves that in every crisis, we've got this like muscle memory now. You know, we need to build that muscle memory. We need to respond to need.

*“In the first two weeks of lockdown they did an analysis of which towns would fare the worst and Todmorden was at the top of the list. Todmorden was on that list of 30, who knows what it's based on probably gobbledygoop. Then COVID hit drastically, but more and more shops have opened here. More restaurants are opening. I mean, the absolute opposite has happened here. In fact, the property market, there is not a property available. So, you know, they've got that wrong too, because they never factored in, that people saw all this kindness, saw what was going on and thought, 'God, where do I want to live? Manchester or Kind Town? Yeah, I'll live in Kind Town'. Do you see it was always based on good schools, computability, job availability, so all that's changed. All the traditional measures of property value has changed.”*

If people are coming in to invest in that kindness, hopefully they are actually investing in the community, across the board, and not just buying a property.

*“Beth, I would like to say that I do believe in the power of the table. 100%. So I can tell you this is that our numbers doubled in six months, the minute we made eating part of our activity. So we don't want separate tables. We have a long, long, long table. Yeah. So you know, where you see separate tables, you see cliques. Where you see a long table where no one's got a place reserved.*

*And that and that's so simple for Equinox. They could make sure that they have a canteen where you have to sit down and it's a long table. Stick into the small and the beautiful and just making relationships happen.*

*Joyous stuff, because it is joyous work. And for years, people go, 'oh, how do we reach the unreachable? It's always been problem talk, but, actually, it's so joyous.  One of our volunteers, a Romanian guy, he came to see me and said, 'Mary, I can't go gardening on Sunday, so here's 20 pounds'. I said, for fucks sake why are you giving me 20 pounds. But he said 'I love it so much. It's worth it.' So I just gave the 20 pounds to Heather, who'd cut a deal with the hospice shop, to sell her books, children's books for 5p for her little library on Ashenhurt. And it was just just so fantastic. He wanted to pay for the joy he was missing.”*

***Joyous stuff because its joyous work!***

*“All this Equinox wandering around? What should they do? I tell you what they should do? Put their money where their mouth is. Because it's easier for them. They could hire a building where it's most needed. And I'd say there's nothing in this town. 15,000 people and some of the poorest people in the Upper Valley. They have got the ability in their office to pay the rent, and have a booking system, and say repair cafe you can have it on so and so, you can have it on so and so. Boom! And Brand the whole thing up as theirs. If they did that for six months to see whether it would work they'd be doing an amazing thing.*

*That's it. We need like, good compost distribution, teaching people how to make their own compost, and then paint recycling stuff. We don't have these recycle centres, and  bigger spaces that we can just provide things.”*

**Jenny Slaughter**

**Peninne Crop Share /**

**Burley Food Links**

***The project crosses the Yorkshire – Lancashire divide, which has always been sort of a red line that no one crosses.***

Okay, so can you please briefly summarise, your role, and your organization's role in our community of Calderdale?

*“Right. Well, the umbrella organisation I work for is actually called Burnley Food Links. It's a not-for-profit company, and it was set up in 2004 to link producers of food with consumers more effectively on a local level. We set up as a company, because it preceded the new community companies like community interest companies.  We've debated whether to be a charity, a cooperative, or company and it was literally easier at the time to set up as a company, and it seems a bit strange that we were set up in Burnley but it's due to my background. Initially, I worked in Burnley as a dietician/nutritionist, so my background was in food, and the community I worked with at the time was in Burnley. Burnley Food link is still our umbrella organisation, but we've run a number of projects around food, since 2004.*

*So, basically the current project is Pennine Cropshare, and that is an organic vegetable bag scheme that supplies veg locally and crosses the Yorkshire Lancashire divide, which has always been a bit of a sort of red line that nobody crosses. We're quite pleased that we still deliver our bags to Burnley and Pendle because, one could say, arguably, that there has been a greater need in terms of access to affordable organic vegetables.*

*We don't we don't deliver door to door because of environmental factors and to keep the costs down for people, so we deliver to community hubs. The reason for bags is important actually, rather than boxes that is, because they can be picked up by hand and carried easily, whereas boxes, you really have to go back to a car. We are really very aware of the environmental impacts of what we do.”*

***People need to have food cooking skills which is the limiting factor in most people's diet***

*“The way that we run the business is  by buying in organic vegetables from as local producers as we can. Supply is a real problem because there aren't that many local growers. And it's once you get to do this work that you want to support local growers and you realise that, unfortunately, it's such a hard job that they're not there to support in any great numbers. There are outlying farms that do have the economies of scale to produce field scale crops. We also buy from two depots if you like, one is Organic North which is a cooperative that gathers produce from all the local farmers and distributes it to people. This is a kind of a wholesaling effect, where they act as a bit of a hub for the local farmers. We did try to go and collect directly from farmers but you spend your life crisscrossing the country trying to collect food and it's just not feasible. Organic Pantry, based in North Yorkshire is another wholesale type place. They're a farm themselves, so a lot of the stuff comes from their own farm, but they also act as a depot for surrounding farms, and they deliver to us. So we have those two main deliveries every week. And we also try to engage with what we've got locally.*

*Interestingly, due to the COVID crisis, our customer base increased from about 100 to 300 so that was quite big. You know, we had to scale up quite drastically and we found that there was lots of doubt about whether supply chains were going to hold out, where the drivers would get ill, or the packers would get ill, or the farmers would get ill. We felt we really could rely so much more on the very local resilience and the  local supply chain was much stronger, and that's what we want to build.”*

I think you've touched on so many things. I'd love to spend a whole conversation just unpacking what you've just said. Do you want to add anything to that?

*Well, I should say something about my own background of working initially in a hospital. I was at Manchester Uni and, after that, I was studying a science subject, and then I got together with a group of people and set up a whole food shop in Manchester. This was a cooperative called 8th Day. I'm a founding member which I'm very proud of it because it's certainly been a sustainable business and served the community very well. That was what got me interested in whole foods, which were very new at that time, and it was very much a vegetarian ethic and finding new ways of cooking.*

*However, laterly, and for 10 years, I was working more in the community as a nutritionist which got me into community development and working with allotments and cooking skills in a deprived community of Burnley, mainly the Asian area. So, that's how I met people that we eventually set up Burnley Food links with. And so, my reason for concentrating really on distributing and encouraging more vegetable growing at affordable prices to people is because I basically feel, from the health angle, that people don't eat enough vegetables, and a lot of people constantly make excuses they can't get hold of or use. I’ve been heavily involved in the five-a-day-programme trying to encourage, particularly children and families., to eat more fruit and vegetables. People need to have food cooking skills which is the limiting factor in most people's diet. You know they're lacking in vitamins and minerals with not eating veg, so that's where I'm coming from really. With Pennine Crop Share, as well as supplying bags to the pickup points or people, we are doing a newsletter every week with a recipe, explaining to people how to use the vegetables that are in the bag. Sometimes they're quite unusual and people haven't cooked with them, and even if it's a familiar vegetable like kale, people want multiple ways to use them or they get sick of it.”*

***We want to make jobs for people that are worthwhile, not bureaucratic, and where everybody feels it's really a worthwhile thing to be involved in.***

*“The other strand to what we're doing at the moment is the crop share book. You'll know from coming to visit us that we've got a team of people who mainly work on a Thursday and Friday. We do the packing on Thursday in private, and delivering on Friday. And it's been really nice to have quite an informal team development; very informal. It's changed over the years, and at the moment it's working really well. It's non hierarchical, and it's a pleasure to work with people. And it also gives some people the opportunity to earn a living, not perhaps a full time living, but a living to supplement what they like doing, which might be some form of art. Issie, for example, is an artist, Mel is an artist. Cathy also. In fact, they're all artists. And it's quite hard to earn a living from just that. And so it's one of the other things that we wanted to do; make jobs for people that are worthwhile, not bureaucratic, and where everybody feels it's really a worthwhile thing to be involved in even though the work itself; the weighing, the packing and the distribution in is quite mundane it feels very worthwhile. And we haven't been successful so far; really it’s been about getting more local growing. But as we are doing better and continue to do better financially, then the ultimate aim has always been to reinvest in getting more growing locally.. And that is the big goal. More, more, more, more produce grown locally. And I think our producer that lives between Hebden and Tod has shown what's possible. You know, they are quite high up in these hills, but with the help of polytunnels etc things are working.*

*We’ve also got an offshoot group collaboration group now, which includes us and Valley Organic.*

Food sustainability for Calderdale is where we are going to struggle if we go through more lockdowns and our food security is changing with Brexit. Localised production has always been very difficult, but it's not impossible. It just takes a different type of growing. It takes a much more coordinated approach. It takes a lot more training on specific growing techniques. And I think it's a really interesting story for Calderdale.

We know some techniques to regenerate farmland because that's a big part of the issue. It's not just the weather, it’s the land. It's so compacted, or it’s rocky, or moorland, or damp round here. There are lots of techniques we need to teach and invest in. If there is compaction, we need to put heavy mulches down and organic matter on and encourage the worms to come up and through to aerate. Coupled with taproot plants it can actually change the soil very readily for growing. I think it's funny because that could have been teaching more about, so people can grow in stage effect, which is different to how most growers perceive vegetable growing where the produce is decided first.

*If I could go back to just tell you something that I found quite inspiring from the London lot, the Hackney people. Well, one of the things they do is they don't have a problem with supply of organic veg because the farms in the southeast and south of England are all driving big lorry loads of stuff. But because they want to encourage the greening of the city as well, they subsidise a grower to work just in London in Hackney, and they've collected bits of land, like a patchwork farm.*

***Food growing has often been tokenistic and this is an unsuccessful business model.***

*Yes, bits of allotments, bits of parks, bits of derelict land. They have a grower who then grows and they concentrate on and specialise in Hackney salads. And so they grow all year round with different salad leaves, but even that there's a lot involved in it. You, as a grower will know that, with rotation you can't grow the same things again and again. And so they really go into knowing what leaves to grow at what time of year to make a good salad bag and they rotate it all around every week or so. That means the organisation is supporting urban growing, and the local community can get involved. So that's something we've also thought about, plus we've been offered a little bit of land here and there, but they each won't produce massive quantities. But, if you collected a few you could do something like that.*

*I once went to a conference, which was organised by the Soil Association. several years ago now. The Soil Association and the Federation of Community Farms and Gardens and what they were looking at is how do we marry these two principles, organic farming to scale and bringing the community into it. I was involved in a community farm in Burnley, mainly centred on allotments. It was absolutely brilliant for the community participation, and as I said, mainly in the Asian areas, which is really a good way of engaging people, particularly the women out of the homes and it felt I was able to do stuff that was really valuable work, but it wasn't producing on any scale.*

*So, obviously there is a middle road. So Cath who works with us, you know Cather Baker. Well, she is part of the growing group, but she really wants to do therapeutic gardening. That's her thing, just the process of gardening and getting in touch with the earth and producing things therapeutically, in lots of ways. And I so agree.*

*But you know I've met people who've been into therapeutic gardening who’ve  said “well it doesn't matter if we don't produce a radish”. As long as people enjoy being there, but actually we want to produce more radishes!”*

I think the thing is, veg production can be therapeutic, but you can't rely on volunteers and people undertaking therapy to create a product. That can’t be the primary goal. They can be married together and that's very much my interest. But I think there are different levels of engagement with therapy and production.  So, you've got people who come and it's much more about nature connection and mindfulness, and then there’s people who are involved in productivity. Both can be therapeutic but they are different. Another level would be learning enterprise skills and that can be very therapeutic as well and at the same time help people vocationally, which has a knock on effect for autonomy.. But we have to be clear of the goal for ourselves as organisations, and with the people accessing the project.

I think in Calderdale, and you know this is a national issue too, growing food has often been tokenistic and an unsuccessful business model, and therefore has fallen into this health and well being category of supporting people to get better. Whereas I think we really need to define our terms, and that there is meaningful and purposeful activity, but with the clear goal of making an income. I think that is a very big step for us and I think, across the board in Calderdale there is a massive movement within food and we're all very aware that we need to make things a lot better so that we are sustainable and we can support people in all these different areas of their health.

***The trainees didn’t want to eat any of the things they had grown and nor did the families***

*“I think it works on a more community supported agriculture model, where customers take more responsibility. Some weeks people would get more in their bags and other times, they'd get less, depending on what was available. So that's one way you could possibly go, and on the whole customers are really sympathetic, but others are critical because they go by supermarket standards. It's hard appeasing people and explaining to people. Like this week is a case in point right. We had celery, and this celery was all leaf, it was green celery, all leaf. It wasn't the celery that is forced. And so, one bloke wrote he said "lovely bag, except for the celery which is all leaf and no stalk" so I have to sort of explain that the sort of celery that this farmer, a particular farmer grew was grown, mainly for the leaves and green celery, which is really nutritious and you do different things with it, you know. So I suppose I'm saying it's also a lot of education about what can be expected.*

*Where we were based in Burnley was called Freshfields and it just said it was a horticultural project. Mainly a lack of outdoor space, mainly polytunnels, but it was the equivalent of Manor Heath. You know, it was a council site that was let to the project to train people with learning disabled adults. So they grew in there, but the trainees didn't want to eat any of the things at all, nor did the families. It was occupational therapy for them really. There wasn't anywhere for the produce to go, which is one of the reasons why we started the Veg Bag scheme there to sort of find a way of distributing what was grown and improving what was growing in there”*

We haven't mentioned the words, 'inclusivity and diversity' very specifically, but you have pulled that into the conversation. We have definitely stated how you address inclusivity and diversity, spanning across Burnley and the Calder Valley. And actually, upper and central Calder Valley too, which we know is one of the issues; that they've become quite separated. You've also talked about making work accessible for people part time farming type-model in your organisation. You’ve stated it's not just about being the person selling the food on, it's also about recognising that you need to support producers in the process, and that you can't be without the producers. We’ve touched on working with different groups, about specifics like race or age or physical abilities, but in addition that it’s actually about people's choices. That this is as much a part of diversity in terms of how people eat vegetables, how they engage with foods. Is there anything specifically you want to pull out in relation to this and the terms inclusivity and diversity.

*“I find that hard to be specific actually because it sort of permeates everything you do really. I mean, I suppose, when one thinks of diversity, you know one tends to think of it as you said, race and culture.”*

I think you’ve already covered it. It's not just about these physical forms of what inclusivity and diversity means it's actually how we think and how we act and that can span food, it can span health, it can span how we engage with the environment. And I also think you've said something that we will follow up on next year: how do we include the environment in the processes of our work? How do we change the landscape, so our environment is right, and how do we use pieces of land to grow food on, that can support people for their health and well being in the mental and physical sense?

***People really want the security of being able to pick up fresh food without relying on supermarkets.***

So, how have things changed during COVID? Obviously you've grown massively because of COVID and people have been buying more food, more bags. Is there anything else that's changed?

*“Well, in terms of business we had to. We had to move, right in at the beginning of COVID, into a bigger unit, which was a risk because it was a much bigger rent. So, we couldn't really function in the small unit that we had. So that's one thing. When we originally came to Hebden bridge we were using the Nutclough Housing Coop, but we outgrew that we've got our own unit, but it's quite a small one for Windsor Works, where you came to to take photos. Now we’re in a bigger unit, it's got a lot of capacity but it’s taken a bit of a risk because we didn't know how COVID would play out. I think everybody has gotten more excited about the importance of what we do to get food. People really wanted to have the security of being able to pick up fresh food without relying on the supermarkets. So again that’s how things have changed, for the better.*

**Martyna Krol**

**Food Growing**

Can you summarize your role in our community of Calderdale whether that be professional or vocational?

*“Well, for the ease of things I usually say I'm a gardener. But, I like to grow, so I would like to call myself a grower, but at the minute it seems I'm growing for other people, whilst also doing bits of gardening. I think my primary interest is to increase other people's interest in growing, and broaden the perception of how you can grow, even in difficult times and difficult spaces, because the space here is not the easiest to grow in.”*

So what does inclusivity and diversity mean in relation to your work vocation, or passion/interest, to you in Calderdale?

***I will never feel Polish enough to be Polish, and I will never be British enough to be British', because no matter what I'll do I've been half of my life there and half of my life here.***

*“Well, to start with, I'm Polish so that kind of puts me, maybe a little bit outside of the usual bracket of Calderdale, because most people here are British. I suspect. But other than that, I don't know, I feel quite blended in with a place so I don't always think of myself as a foreigner or as somebody from outside that came in for something, because I've been here in England for 13 years. So it's almost like you have to almost blend in. If your accent is a bit off, and sometimes people say 'Oh, your accent is different'. Rarely it happens now, but sometimes I almost forget that I'm not from here because I feel I'm a bit stateless, because I don't feel Polish. Well, I always say to people, "I will never feel Polish enough to be Polish, and I will never be British enough to be British', because no matter what I'll do I've been half of my life there and half of my life here. Even when I go to Poland sometimes I forget the words that I haven't used because I don't speak Polish to anybody here. And sometimes I don't know the words here, so it's almost like you're in the limbo in between. I mean, because I'm an outdoorsy planty person I don't really need to think in English and Polish.”*

In terms of food growing, because I think this is really important, food growing is still a little bit of a middle class thing to do. Why do you think that is, and how do you think we can include more people?

*“I think there's many reasons why that is. I mean, the first thing is you need the land and I was actually thinking about this, especially now with COVID. Everybody woke up and realized that the allotments should be treasured, and there's not enough of them, and suddenly the waiting lists went sky high. It was always a thing that Gentry had; people who had land had gardens, and they could grow food; they had people to grow food for them on their land. You know if you were poor, you were eating bread crusts or whatever leftovers that you had. Only later, when allotments came on and, this whole post war era, suddenly the ordinary people started growing. Another problem that we have now is that the crap food is so cheap. There's no land, people have no time. I mean if you're working, you know, whatever shift pattern or something, when are you going to do it?”*

I don't understand why we haven't got more community supported agriculture projects in Calderdale where consumers collaborate with farmers, and then they provide people's social meet-ups on a farm, whilst producing larger quantities of food to share. Allotments are great, but they are quite limited, and you have to have the knowledge. And you need a support system if you go away, or you can't go to it at some point; you need to be friends with people that can. And a lot of people who are marginalized, don't necessarily have the support system for their day-to-day life nevermind supporting an allotment.

*“Yeah, and they don't have a car or the five quid for a day bus return. Then to wait for a bus to take you to the top of the hill, where the allotment might be, or in another town. I mean there's hardly any allotments here, and the access is difficult, often there's no water. I mean, another problem that's really difficult and even for me who's an experienced grower is the weather. Like, you can say whatever you want, but last year it was raining all the time, nothing grew; it was wet, it was sluggy and it was difficult. This year we had a nice heatwave, which then turned into drought, so if you weren't in there two to three times a day to water, your crop was gone. And then it was wet again.*

*I was talking to my partner and I said, "Look, you know, we can't grow here because, to grow here, you need to have land or an allotment. Okay we'll have an allotment, but then you need to have everything; polytunnel or a greenhouse, because otherwise you don't get the heat, you get the winds, you get the water. I mean how many people can afford to do that. On the other hand, people who have land or have big gardens, and, you know, I'm not saying  the rich people have an easy life, they work their ass really, because they sit in front of computers doing some job for something, and they don't have time to enjoy their outdoor space. I mean, the problem with food and growing now is that society is completely built in the wrong way. You're working too long hours, for not enough money. Government stuff aside, food growing needs to be more accessible for people.”*

**The problem with food and growing now is that society is completely built in the wrong way. You're working too long hours, for not enough money. Government stuff aside, food growing needs to be more accessible for people.**

That's why we have to work together more collectively in the valley. This year I've got more food growing than I ever have, but then the success of each crop is limited.  I just think maybe we should set up more as this person's a pumpkin grower, this person's a bean grower, and we do more exchange but that has issues. Do you  think Community Supported Agriculture is better? You do need enough space, and then you do need things that support the larger organic system like environmental microorganisms, and compost teas, and all those things really, but everyone can chip in to make them and maintain them.

*“Absolutely, some of the bigger gardens that I have worked at - the hospice being the last one - that was about an acre, and it was huge, and there was plenty of space for you to grow. They have three huge composting bays on one side and two on the other. Like Red Acre as well; it's really big, small plots in the middle, but there is space to do it. And I think about the valley, because it's in the valley,  and you either live on the shady side or on the sunny side, and it's both steep and it's wet, with flooding it's a difficult space to do it, but there are places. It's the access to them that's an issue.”*

So,  what are the key problems we face in relation to meeting people's differences and including marginalized people in Calderdale?

*“I think that the time is the most important, because a lot of people who are marginalized don't probably earn a lot to allow themselves time to have an allotment or grow. So they will be working different shifts patterns, they'll be caring for kids, they often would be from, especially if you're talking about Asian community, they often look after the elders, so they're not just going to finish work and go and chill out because they have a mum to clean and bathe. Whereas a lot of white people can afford care homes or assisted living.*”

And actually, that's not about money, it's about a value system.

*“It's culture. Other communities won't allow you to take the elders away to care homes or whatever, even in the hospice I remember it was really rare that we would have anyone from ethnic minority groups at the hospice because it's actually shameful. So, we've been so disconnected as white people from the traditional values, from sitting and eating dinner together on the table where the TV is off, from actually reading rather than just coming in and putting TV on. I'm guilty of it too. And it's crushing.*”

Well, in terms the Wild Flower Collective, are you trying to engage people of different backgrounds?

*“At the minute Wildflower Collective is just the two of us. There's another two ladies who have helped us when the planting was going or weeding or so on. But all of our plans were for March onwards, and then obviously COVID and stuff happened, so we weren't allowed so it was just two of us watering everything, and we removed a lot of dock weeds which previously had been sprayed with glyphosate and we said you can't do it so we'll take them out by hand. So we just watered it, spent hours and hours in spring just watering all these tiny little seedlings when there was the drought. But, we weren't allowed to engage anybody. We wanted to engage mostly parents and people with small kids, because to understand and care about something you need to see it and interact with it.  A lot of kids now, they'll see a bug, and they'll scream, and they'll want to try and kill it, because they don't understand the difference between the hoverfly and the wasp for example. They see a stripy thing and they'll scream. So we wanted to introduce a lot of talks and walks around the parks, talk about species, talk about bugs, and then incorporate some art and draw a ladybird or hoverfly or something, so kids get that understanding. It links with what we did with the Aquagarden, and because we work primarily with schools; with primary schools and high schools. And we worked with adult groups, but the interest was really minimal for that. And it may seem terrible to say it, but it's almost a little bit too late for anybody who's 30 or 40 -odd.”*

Do you think the problems that we're facing have changed or expanded since our recent COVID-19 crisis?

***When you're standing in the queue now, COVID - massive queues everywhere, you look at the people in the queue and everybody's looking at their phone. Nobody's talking or interacting, but you don't just look around and look at the clouds. How many people look at the clouds and know the weather?***

*“I don't think it has changed or expanded. I think that the crisis actually highlighted a lot of problems that were already there; those that were easy not to look at, because we were really busy doing everything else. So maybe let's say, my kid is not interested in the great outdoors because we went to Yorkshire Sculpture Park and, you know, they didn't show an interest. So let's send them to a karate class and the music class, and something else class, and then the swimming pool, and then dinner, and then bed. I mean kids, they don't have this time to get bored anymore. I was told at breakfast 'get out of the house, I'll see you at dinner'. That's it. You have no choice. And if you're stabbing the stick in the ground for four hours, and then you actually notice these beetles around, and you notice there's a leaf you've seen before, or you'll notice something. Honestly, I even sometimes as an adult forget to do it because I work all the time and I'm just constantly doing something. And there was one moment where I sat at the allotment, outside in the spring,  just potting on plants, and instead of doing the same thing I stopped. And rather than just kind of pulling my phone out to look on Facebook, I took time to just zone out for a minute to see what else was happening. I just sat and looked, and I just saw this little head of a mouse,  just sticking from the stone, just looking at me for three seconds, and we just stared at each other, and I moved, then she ran away. But that's the thing that kids miss now. When you're standing in the queue now, COVID - massive queues everywhere, you look at the people in the queue and everybody's looking at their phone. Nobody's talking or interacting, but you don't just look around and look at the clouds. How many people look at the clouds and know the weather?”*

It's very key isn’t it. I know most people that do food growing had that childhood. I had that childhood. I spent all my time in the woods. Looking at stuff; understanding how water works, seeing how plants grow. My parents were growers and it's part of my own heritage. And I think my confidence comes from that, and it  affects my confidence in everything. To just try things and fail, and keep trying, and that's what I feel kids don't have enough of anymore.

*“Because they are being cushioned. There's no failure, there's only lessons. I can say, 'oh well this year my corn failed'. Well no, it's a lesson for me to plant it earlier, or make sure that I protect it from frost, or something like that. I think that the crisis now has highlighted a lot of problems that we have, where we've tried to stick our head in the sand. Yes, it's easy to just go to Valley Organic and buy some nice organic veg if you can afford, or to go to Lidl if you can't afford, but really, at the end of the day, people need to just stop consuming so much, because we don't need that much. So Covid has done that for people. There was no inkling to buy because it's not available. People haven't had to work as much and people had time to see friends, be at home and chill more and benefit from it. And you have a better quality of life, because you don't need the massage, you don't need that yoga session, you don't need to go for an hour's run because you're stressed out of your head from sitting in front of the computer for a day. Maybe what we need to do is actually slow down a bit.”*

What are your main ideas for impacting diversity and inclusivity in Calderdale in the future? This may or may not relate to your own work vocation or passion.

***I think people need to just put themselves out of their comfort zone, and go and do other people's things.***

*“I think it's just engagement. I think people need to stop being shy, and take part in events, and take part in small things; small festivals, open gardens: try something new. I think the connections between people need to be reestablished, because we see each other as individuals, and almost like different islands. And even though you go to an event that might not be your cup of tea, you might find somebody who's also from Poland, or also is black, or something. I think that the people who are not middle class white, they don't want to do these things because they don't understand what's in there for them, and they may not see it as an opportunity to grow, and blend, and use the language well, which immediately makes, me personally, more approachable in other people's eyes. You find it funny or strange with the different ways to speak or behave, or dress, or eat different things. But you have to do it.  It was the same thing when I was hanging out with the Arabic and Jewish community in Bradford . And, you know, we sat on carpets and ate with our hands, with pieces of bread. I thought, where's the cutlery? But then I thought it's not what I know, it's maybe what I'll learn, and actually I quite like it. So I think people need to just put themselves out of their comfort zone, and go and do other people's things.”*

We should be changing our attitude constantly and taking responsibility. You know it's proven that you do more in your community when you work less.  And I think that's interesting for COVID. I think over a period of time, people will have to work more locally, and the effort actually has to go into your local community more. And we are seeing that happen.

*“We all need each other more and with COVID loads of people started having these neighborhood chats. My street now has a Whatsapp group. It started with shopping and people asking if anyone needs shopping dropping off when people go to Lidl. Whereas now people are sharing this and that,**or you ask if someone can feed my cat as I'm going away for two days. And, the community started rebuilding and I only knew my two next-door neighbours and a couple of other people. But now, even though I don't hang out with these people for a cup of tea, it's nice to know what they need, and how I can help them.”*

***We're not separate islands.***

I think that's what we don't really fully understand yet. We don't have to be having dinner with everybody, or always meeting up. Community is based on different types of relationships and support networks that suit the local purpose. I think some people I've spoken to are really disappointed that that's changed back after the first lockdown, but it hasn't changed back. Everything's a transition, so the minute a crisis happens next, those relationships and strategies are there, and we will expand them further.

*“I don't think it goes back, you know. I think everybody learns from it a little bit, and I think everybody understands that, you know. We're not separate islands.”*

**Krishna Francis**

**Ability and Access**

Ok, can you summarize your role in our community of Calderdale whether that be professional or vocational?

“*Well...I'm a cross between a village idiot and an active (male) member of the WI. Since breaking my back I have found myself in a situation where I haven't worked due to having to find my way back into the world. As a result, I've done a lot of volunteering and simple turning up at events. I do a stint at the Town Hall front desk on a Tuesday. This is two hours of greeting and explaining. As a result of this I bumped into Tom whom I know from working at the Food Bank in Todmorden when I was still walking. Tom has been involved in a research project researching people's experience of living in Calderdale under Covid. Tom got me involved in doing some of the research. What has followed on from conversations around that is that it has been suggested that a writing group I run on Wednesday's could do something with the research.*

*That's some of it*.”

**(Krishna broke his back in an accident in May 2018 and is now permanently in a wheelchair).**

That is the best description ever! Knowing you, I'm not sure it's entirely accurate, but the first part really made me laugh. You're not a village idiot that’s for sure, but you are definitely a prominent character.

“*I'm also part of the organising committee that runs a book group named the Todmorden Literary Society. We've been going for two years now despite only starting a month or two before the world became locked down for x amount of time.*

*Aside from that I talk to a lot of people when I am out and about in town. It keeps me in the midst of things so that I receive and share information about what's going on in the community simply as a side effect of being out and about.*

*Next question!”*

OK...By definition, Diversity means “understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies”. Inclusivity means “the practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of minority groups”

What does Inclusivity and Diversity mean in relation to your work, vocation or passion interest you do in Calderdale?

*“I struggle with the idea of diversity. Most people are diverse by increments. It depends on how closely you look at a thing as to how big it seems; how separate the diversion is. Blah. Sorry. I get a bit caught up in what diversity really means. My writing group is a good example. It's mostly able-bodied white people of a certain age and yet they are at a point in their lives when they aren't being called on as much as they once were. So, they feel outsided by the world around them. They don't fall into the perceived pattern of what is considered diverse, but when you get close enough to them you discover a surprising range of stories at work.”*

***Most people are diverse by increments. It depends on how closely you look at a thing as to how big it seems, how separate the diversion is***

I think that's a great point. I personally think so much gets lost in trying to box people into categories. I think this is the key to really talking to people.

*“I often like including the people who inclusive people exclude. I was a friend of Christian Jackson when I lived in Tod. He was the local representative of the National Front. He felt marginalised for his beliefs, and I would listen to him because he didn't deserve that. It felt to me like he wouldn't throw me out of the country once he'd had to engage with me at a human level. If he stopped seeing me as part of a mass, he would have to engage with his own feelings. Thus, the very act of defining groups that need to be included is alienating and, therefore, can be counterproductive.”*

***If he stopped seeing me as part of a mass, he would have to engage with his own feelings. Thus, the very act of defining groups that need to be included is alienating and, therefore, can be counterproductive.***

I know that feeling and that desire to include, even the people that have views that are maybe unacceptable to the majority. I think it's important to have everyone's views, to create common ground where we can and to have that as a goal, and to try and inform ourselves better by recognizing our own bias and judgement, and just listening. We all have our diversity and our lack of inclusion. There must be evidence of difference to also recognise and decide on what’s ok and not ok as a community.

If I could reframe the question to make it more personal, what's the one thing that makes you feel most included in our community, and what makes you least included?

*“I feel really upheld by the community when I'm made aware of just how inter-connective it is. For example, I fell out of my wheelchair the other day whilst trying to get into the Fox and Goose. You know what a disastrous spot that is how traffic speeds up and down there.  A whole bunch of concerned people rushed out to help and those who weren't needed went back in rather than gawp. However, that isn't the good part. I was walking down the street (wheeling) when Dave Young, our local county councillor spotted me and told me he'd heard what had happened. He is in talks about getting that junction reorganised to have a wider pavement. It's been coming for a while and is part of a slate of changes to be made to that stretch of road between Halifax and Todmorden. What was really heartening was that he would be able to push the changes to the pavement outside the Fox & Goose up the timetable as there was, thanks to my incident, a palpable sense of jeopardy for human life....!*

*I feel less upheld by the community when I don't get out into it. That might sound ridiculous but there is always some glimmer of hope to be found in interacting beyond our bounds. When I give up I myself am not investing in an idea of myself. If that sounds a bit too good to be true I think I'm saying that It's in those strange moments when we forget ourselves and our needs that we forget others. When I see people walking around in a cloud, A boards on pavements, un-usefully placed, people in cafes causing me to have to ask them to move as they are stretched out but also inattentive…”*

It's also good to hear that help is vital. I think so often part of trying to make things inclusive, is the opposite of helping. We shy away from asking if someone needs the support or actually finding out what is needed because we don't want to make people feel inadequate. Whereas if we came from a place where everyone needs a bit of love and support and assistance, we'd probably tackle all the inclusion issues there are, or at least see more often how it is complex.

Before we move on, in relation to what you said, and probably using the example of disability or 'complex ability' as I'm choosing to call it (because I compare everything to being dyslexia at the moment, and seeing it a vital way of seeing and engaging with the world that's maybe a bit more complex and challenging than the average person), so to what extent does inclusion need to be with the people (in the heart of the community), and be strategic too (like fundamental changes with pavements in your case)?

*“We live in a town that holds a good example of how to proceed at this moment in this hemisphere. It is an active and busy place where the differential between strategic care from the council and care that swells up from the basic needs of a community is blurred. As I said above, because Dave Young and I both go to the same pub and he is on the council, he was able to use the example of my falling out of the chair as a spur to make the council hurry on those strategic changes. In a good community those interconnections are visible and traceable. In the extensive growth that we've seen in the last 300 years in how societies inter-relate we've lost sight of how those decisions that create excess and allow for growth come about. Whilst they are not all either good or bad, what's most important is that they are visible and as a society we can make decisions about how to proceed in light of what we know about the processes that have brought change into being.”*

Ok, next question and a bit of a follow on from that. Maybe even that alone answers it actually, but just in case, what are the key problems we face in relation to meeting people’s differences, and including marginalised people, in Calderdale?

*“I think that allowing some space to listen is the important thing. I do believe that Calderdale is an excellent example of a place where things happen due to the members of the community having a ready ear out for the needs of others. Politically, there seems to be a fight between the left and the right to prove the ineffectiveness of the other side. What would be helpful would be some form of non-governmental group that meets to talk about where things are going awry and organise to get these issues heard where it matters.”*

I couldn't agree more. I'm hoping that's where we are going, so we can delve deeper into this at another time, so I can get your advice and opinion. I love how you are using writing as a way just to capture different people's lives locally. I think the fact we have an active arts community is also a huge benefit for having conversations in diverse ways.

How do you think this has changed or expanded since our recent Covid-19 crisis?

*“Initially Covid caused people to freeze and panic. Then gradually we learned what we were able to give and how we could access what we needed. There were still many groups that didn't get reached but as the aftermath is being assessed and analysed, we are seeing what needs to be fixed. I think Brexit has also had a hand in creating a sense of panic in the world. The buses are up the creek, supermarkets are struggling to stock their shelves, bin collection and recycling are struggling to keep up with demand. In amongst this people just carry on. It feels like, as we reflect on the past two years, we are seeing skills and abilities that were invisible before the scale of crisis that Covid brought us up against.”*

***Initially Covid caused people to freeze and panic. Then gradually we learned what we were able to give and how we could access what we needed.***

Yes, I agree. But what skills are these, are there people mapping them and to what impact does this have long term? Is it just the ability to deal with another crisis or the continuing crisis you point to with brexit and covid combined, or is it deeper than that even? Are those skills applicable to transforming communities and society?

*“Who's mapping them? I really have no idea. There was a really great community space called the Hub in town where the person in charge, Eileen Kelly, was trying to draw together all of the possible resources available to those who needed them. It closed down due to lack of funding. She has since moved on to the health centre opposite the Town Hall. If I know Eileen at all she will still be doing the work of recording what resources there are and where they can be accessed but to get to that list you will have to be diagnosed with a condition that needs treating. So in a way there are those maps but to reach them one has to submit to a diagnosis and be found in need. I can't think of anywhere, other than people like you, where one can act on an internal instinct that says you need help and go and find it. This is what the Hub was very good at creating.*

*Have we simply learned to deal with a crisis? It's certainly a big motivator. A crisis creates a strong mental image of people who need help and therefore one's own sense of what one can achieve. However, I do believe that some of the pick up afterwards will involve discovering what can be kept going and how.”*

I think this is happening. I think something really beautiful happened as a result of covid and I do believe some stuff is sticking around, that we are more resilient and aware and that's one huge step. The problem now is Brexit, energy changes and rising cost of living, so much more, and all the knock-on challenges of managing post-crisis that can stop us just naturally building on learning. To be fair it's all one big crisis now, so there has to be some responsibility somewhere, for someone, to really amplify where things are happening, to help with a positive feedback system.

Last question...What are your main ideas for impacting diversity and inclusivity in Calderdale in the future? This may or may not relate to your own work/vocation/passion. Other than maybe what we just discussed...you have already raised some excellent ideas.

*“I feel like my just getting on with stuff quietly and regularly is a response to the new order of things. I'm helping get a lift installed at the Trades to increase access. I help run the writing group and the book group and this creates spaces where people come together and talk and do things. I work on the Town Hall front desk and find out information that I can then share or share information that I've found out elsewhere... If someone has a bigger formalised idea that they ask for help with I join in willingly. As I'm doing here or in my research work. It seems to me there are strands of this line of thought happening all over the place. Carry on I say...”*

Absolutely. I really love that answer. The more that continues and is brought into fruition, the more the threads plait together. At least that’s what I see. It's not really about alignment or having the same vision. I think the vision is unclear, but I think it's about thickening the lines, making them more robust and just growing the plait at the moment. (Laughing) I think that’s an analogy there!!!

Thanks for your input, Krishna. I'd also like to just say how impressed I am by how you deal with things, your intellect and insight. It really is an inspiration, and I know it's not just me that thinks that. Thanks for your time again.

*“Why fiddle de dee I'm blushing.”*

**Kristan Parry**

**Skillshop**

For anyone that doesn't know what Skillshop is, what kind of service is it?

“*When I started Skillshop three years ago, nobody knew us, no social workers knew us, and everyone that I spoke with didn't know who we were, so my goal was to get our name out there.*

*But obviously then COVID hit, inclusion stopped. Since the restrictions eased, we've been back on track with creating new contacts again and making the service robust. We're back in touch with schools to try and get them back on board with the understanding of disabilities. As you know, my bugbear with school kids at the minute is none of them have an understanding of disabilities. So, if our clients are walking in the park or going home, or out in town, they are vilified, they're bullied, and they receive negative attention.*

*Skillshop is a charity. It's a day centre for adults with high needs. Skillshop was set up back in 2005 by Cath Parrot and Patricia McLean. Cath has a disabled son, and he was leaving school, and he went to look around at what was available in Calderdale. Back then there was nothing. In 2005 day services like this didn't exist. Direct payments was only just being introduced, and it was either you go to work, or you stay at home, there was no in between. No life skills, no engagement, nothing. Cath basically took an investment loan with a vision of buying the premises that we're in now. So, the vision is to create a Skillshop village with accommodation, an on-site swimming pool and a fully functioning garden.*

*One of the difficulties when I started was trying to get staff on board with the vision, which is to promote life skills and to push our clients out of their comfort zones so they can really learn new skills. Two years ago I got in touch with the Soil Association, because I knew where we wanted to go with it, but I couldn't see how to get from where we were with the state of the gardening and how to move it all forward.”*

I think it is nice just to touch on the conversation we had about engaging people with higher needs and learning difficulties in activities that grew different capabilities instead of focussed work placement, where people we're almost working for nothing.

I know you said it was basically slave labor. I always loved being at Skillshop garden sessions because there is so much scope for learning - social, nature connection, coordination, creativity, and the life skill of growing and eating well. I have to say your garden is one of the smallest, most productive and focussed educational gardens I have come across in Halifax. It's so pleasing to know it's there.

*“Work placements were mind draining, monotonous... Currently when our clients join every year, they write their own goals, and we do regular updates. They will have a three-month goal, a six month, or 12-month goal. Some have a five-year goal, depending on what the goal is. For example, we have a client that comes four days a week, and her goal this year is to tie her own shoelaces. She's been wearing slip-on shoes for the last 40 odd years. Now, to some people, to some employees and to some hierarchy and council, that's not a goal. A goal is getting somebody from unemployed to employment, but this doesn't often encompass the adults we work with.*

*So, my argument with the Director of Social Services who promotes employment and tries to get all our clients into employment, is this. If one of our clients’ needs to go to work for six months, at Morrison's for example, to stock shelves or trolleys or even on the tills, they'll need support. After those six months, is there a guarantee that that person will be offered ongoing work with no support. And there isn't. There's no guarantee. Speaking to Mr. Morrison, (Ken Morrison), he gets exactly where I'm coming from because there is a job that needs filling that adult, even with six months’ worth of work experience, will have to compete with another 10 candidates from the Job Centre, and he's still going to choose who he feels is the best asset for Morrison's not what is the best for social services. So, it's a catch 22. So we enable our clients to pick their goals, whether it be, I want to learn to play drums, I want to tie my shoelaces, I want to learn to open a tin of beans, or I want to iron my own clothes.  The world's their oyster basically. You can come, and you can choose what you want to do, and we'll try to get it so that you can achieve that goal.”*

And at the same time trying to push them outside their comfort zone like you said, not too easy for them to tackle; it's something that makes them think a little bit differently, and challenges their self worth, and all the things that are part of creating a fuller human being.

*“One of the key comments that has come to service was from about a month ago, we tried to promote more life skills. Because the sun was shining, we went out and painted some benches, and tidied up the garden. The photos went out on Facebook, and off the back of that, we got a letter saying how fantastic it was that we'd managed to get the client to do that because, at home, they struggle to get them to do anything. Although it's not what the council envisage of getting everyone into employment, it is about creating achievements and creating the life that they're entitled to.”*

I want to know what your interpretation of inclusion and diversity is and what it means to you. I think we've kind of touched on that already - that people are entitled to live where they set their own goals and achieve those goals; an entitlement to full life; but it would be good to just talk about the requirements and needs of your client group. So, thinking about complex needs, what are they and what does that mean in terms of inclusion and diversity.

*“I think a lot of people have a different take on inclusion and diversity. So, a prime example at Skillshop is that we believe, if I can do it, our clients can do it. But not everyone has that same mentality. So we've had hiccups and we've had roadblocks, particularly where staff have created complaints. We've even been reported to the council recently, with a complaint that we were doing things that we shouldn't be doing. When we've been investigated, we've actually been shown to be doing better than what you should be doing, because we're enabling them, we're including them in decision making, their setting the tasks and we're not just saying, "right, we're doing this today and all nine of you are doing it too". We're giving them the option, we've giving them the tools, the resources, and we're really thinking about them.”*

So, a fundamental thing to you is the ability for clients to co-deign their life choices in what they do, which is interesting because the fact that you provide so many different opportunities and they rotate around all those different things, it could be said that you are inclusive and diverse with this approach. Yet, by taking that one step further and saying, 'you can choose exactly what you do within all those different opportunities, you can design different aspects of those skills you develop (there isn't one route to success) you are providing a highly individualised and inclusive service.

*“What we've done in the last three weeks, we've profiled our clients so we can see who is high needs, medium needs, and free roam. Now, the free roamers are the ones that want to.  They put their hands up for everything and anything. The staff view, for quite a while, has been that it won't be done right or we can't do that because they won't be supervised effectively, but what we've done instead is provide the support, with social services, to the right clients.  We've now got roughly a 50-50 split, but we've got two sessions running, but we've also got four or five clients that can come in and make much more defined choices. They might not want to do some of the activities, or direct what they do within them, so they ask to do jobs.*

*For example, we've got a client called Paul. He used to work for gardening services, so he's been working outside here. He comes and gets his job list, and if there's not three or four jobs on there he'll come back and ask for more to be put on. That's what he wants to do, so because of that we have introduced a payment scheme. So even though the council pays for him to come, we now give him lunch and coffees, free of charge. To him he's getting paid through saving that money, and he gets that sense of achievement.”*

And also, we need to have some level of risk. They need some risk because that reflects life and if they don't experience it, they can't go out into the big wide world.

I think it's interesting, when I work with schools on projects around gardening, I take an un-learning approach. Kids will come in with their teachers, and the teachers will be very specific about lining up, or in the way they engage, but I want them to engage with the environment in a way that is natural. I want them to climb and fall and be themselves so they can learn the reaches of their own capabilities, have confidence, make informed choices for themselves and their peers.  I want children and adults, and the elderly people I work with to assess their own risk. And you know one of my own bugbears with working with elderly people is I want them outside in all different weather, obviously within reason, but not wrapped up in cotton wool like you said. When I've worked with stroke patients, I want them to go outside and feel cold air on their body, assimilate to different temperatures, activate their nervous system, engage them with choice. It's crazy what we take away from people in trying to help them.

*“It's where a level of care stops being given, and then there is deterioration because the independence isn't there. I mean, my partner used to work in an old people's home and I couldn't get my head round, how some people could move in and be totally independent and then within two or three weeks, be ill, and that's because they're not having the engagement, they're not stimulated.”*

They are not making decisions and not using one's brain. That's the thing you've got in good balance here. I think where you allow people to make their own decisions, allow them that space to discuss that, get support where it is required and make sure that they're getting their needs met properly in that process of decision making, that's where people are generally thriving.

*“It comes down to best interests. If someone came and asked if so and so could do that, we know each of our clients so well, I could tell you exactly if they could, how they could, or how much support they would need. And I think that's what makes us who we are. We know what makes our clients tick.”*

Again, we've touched on a little bit of this, what are the key problems we face in relation to meeting people's differences, and including marginalized people in Calderdale, so if we're talking about your client group, we've talked a little bit about bullying and even about work placement.

*“Yes, it's about acceptance into the community. Although it's not what it was 20 years ago it's still tough. When I first came into the care sector probably 15 years, maybe 16 years,  there was a massive lack of understanding around disabilities. It has improved, but I still feel that unless you have someone in your family or someone on your street, with a disability, then there’s a lot of ignorance against it.  They're different, so I'm not going to engage.  I've been in this situation. S*

*o, if we were to go down to the park to play football, we've had dog walkers where they don't understand, and they've asked our clients what they are staring at and approach them in a manner that they wouldn't have done if it was a normal person. Once you spend a couple of minutes explaining they understand. When I introduced the lanyard thing with our guys it was a breakthrough. People can see that someone has a hidden disability. So, I did a lot of work with our guys trying to get them to wear them so people could engage with them effectively. Unfortunately, I feel that that has now had a negative effect because there's too many people using the lanyards.*

*We have a client that does independent shopping, and we'll get a phone call to say that is stuck in Tesco, and he doesn't want to go outside because there are teenage boys and girls outside being nasty to him. That's because he'll stand there and stare, he understands he wants to make friends, but he doesn't understand the concept of age. He wants to be friendly with them, but they don't understand who he is, so they're being nasty and then that can create safeguarding issues and could be a massive, massive thing. So it's now about looking for a different way of dealing with it. That's why I've gone to the school and said 'can I come in and do an assembly?' and I'll take a few of our guys in and show people how difficult it often is to tell who has a disability, with the opportunity to explain.”*

I think that's the thing isn’t it. Even with more inclusion in school, we either kind of integrate people with things like dyslexia or autism in a way where it's not actually that often talked about. So, there's integration without discussion, which works on some level, because it's actually quite inclusive. But, at the same time, we end up with a lack of awareness and knowledge, and then when you come across something different it's a challenge. We really need to build up people's tolerance by exposing people to different things and we don't do that enough, not in schools and not in communities.

*“I mean if you said to somebody, 'do you know what autism, or do you know what a disability is?' They will often go back to the last person with a disability and that's not always reflective of what's going on. Despite people's disability, even if people can't speak, we still engage with them like everyone else. We're just starting wood work again. My theory is that it might take David a week to make a bird box and it might take Susie 12 weeks to make a bird box, but it's not about the time. It's how we build their goals, the journey whilst also working as a group. Together they help each other out. They aspire together.”*

Which is pretty much what we should be doing in communities anyway. We should be bringing people with us, and we don't know how to.

So how has this changed or expanded since the recent COVID-19 crisis, so we're obviously that bit further on than when we started doing the interviews and second wave lockdown and now, we're kind of back to pretty much a similar reality, you guys have done a lot in that time haven’t you?

*“Well let's talk about the award. We won Charity of the Year. So in March 2020, Boris Johnson came on the news and said you've got to overwhelm and COVID hit. So, when the news came out that services were going to close and we were going to have to think outside the box. The council basically rang us and said 'close, we will continue to pay if you come up with a plan to deliver your sessions throughout COVID’. So at the start of COVID, we had quite a lot of resistance from staff. Everyone was under government guidelines, and wanted to stay home if they could, and it was quite a big challenge to try and get a lot of the staff members to come into service.*

*Now my theory was, we offer care, we offer support and we can't do that from home. And if the council is going to pay us we need to be offering that service. So we started offering online sessions and I started with a fitness session at nine o'clock every morning. It would go live on our Facebook page. We did online quizzes, the we dropped lunches off to people, we dropped plant pots, and compost and seedlings off, and we had a sunflower growing competition, and the council basically said you're doing okay. As soon as restrictions started to lift, we went and visited our clients and took them out in a safe way. The Council were happy for services to make a call every day, but It wasn't just about that. My job was hard over the last 12 months to try and embed the charitable element into staff and to appreciate what we're doing more. Could we notch it up and go above and beyond? We set up a link with Tesco, who donated food. We also then created food parcels and dropped the food parcels with clients. We also created food parcels for Focus for Hope, a homeless charity, and created that link between us and them, because they were affected massively with COVID. So yeah, basically July, I got an email to say that we've been nominated for Charity of the Year. We were up against three other charities in Calderdale and I wasn't expecting it. I'll tell you here, the charities that were awarded did an amazing job. I did the Zoom call with them and at the end of the call they announced Skillshop was the winner. It felt like it was amazing.”*

Did they give a reason why they picked you over everybody else?

*“It was basically the fact the council had asked all services to do an online service, but we did more than that - the food, the  plants, we got more resources and just kept going. If we can do it, why not, was my theory and I think they acknowledged that. I think we set a standard because off the back of that the council asked me to do a matrix to help reopen services in order to make sure clients were just going to one service to reduce COVID infection. That's when they realised not all the services were contacting clients and taking care of them when Covid hit. Off the back of the matrix, clients were asking to come to us instead of the other services. Since then we've had way more referrals and clients.”*

As always Kristan, it’s a pleasure to chat to you and hear your enthusiasm and hard work.