

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

**Today I'm speaking with Afam who is one of our Co-production partners. Co-Production is when we work alongside people with lived expertise to design and deliver services that affect them. We have a team of co-production partners here in Edinburgh and we are so fortunate to have them help shape our work. You can learn more about our Co-production work by visiting the Turn2us website. Please enjoy this really lovely conversation.**

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

Good afternoon, my name is Afam and my surname is Ejimbe. I have other names in between but to keep the day short Afam will be fine.

**Thanks so much Afam. So you are one of our co-production partners, what first attracted you to being involved with Turn2us Edinburgh Trust?**

Yes, I do remember, it's a good question as well, but I do remember I was working with a certain charity in the heat of battle trying to get grants in and looking for alternative financial avenues. I came across Turn2us, the website for assessing benefits and also the Trust itself and I thought who is this mysterious group here. I don't know, I haven't seen any advertising or anything but there was something about you guys that was very laid-back, very quiet, understated but very firm and very good funding for my clients. So I think I came across you then and my manager then said, "you know, keep on to that but don't use them too often because money's finite."

**So was this a few years ago then?**

This was January.

**Oh of this year?**

Yes.

**Oh wow. So what drew you to the co-production work and also how did you find out about it?**

Right, so the co-production work, I'm with the CCP, the Capital City Partnership and I was, well kind of still is, the co-chair and I saw a brief come through and there was something about Turn2us, the term, that caught my attention. Because it's a lot of times you get these acronyms and I just thought this sounds really interesting and then when I read a bit more about innovation and support and more long-term and just different ways of working, I couldn't get the email out fast enough actually. I was really impressed and hopeful to be working in a different way which is badly needed.

**And how has the co-production work been so far? Because I know it's relatively new. What has the experience been for you so far?**

It's been really interesting, only for the fact that it's not new in a way but it's one part of my life is in the commercial world and the co-production is an important step for charities in

general, still behaving like businesses. They've actually got to look inwards and start including the clients as part of the production and also the fact that we're all co-producing individually.

So I thought Turn2us is doing something quite important here. It's becoming, it's looking in on itself and bringing in the clients as well and really appreciating the staff as well as the service users. It's a joint affair and for me that's more emotional investment in what's going on and less mechanical, buried under acronyms and systems, which makes things more interesting to work with, I think.

**That's nice, yeah, thank you. I feel really drawn to what you'd said there, like just about looking inwards. Yeah, that really spoke to me there because I think it's rare. So is there any issue of financial insecurity that you feel particularly passionate about?**

Where do I start? If I take it upon myself, which I should, I think the financial insecurity is almost emergent. It's something that people see on the surface, react to. I'll give you an example of financial insecurity that sticks with me to this day. I was working in a particular, well no, actually I was volunteering. I volunteered for about four and a half years in a children's home, working with young children looked after. And Christmas Day I was there and a young child aged seven was particularly upset because he had no family to visit him because of the situation he was in. And I was the allocated worker, and he was lost and I said right, I opened my wallet up, checked with the workers first and I said "well I've only got five pounds in my wallet, what do you think you could do with this if we were in town in a couple of weeks?" And his mind sparked into different things that he wanted.

I just realised then the money is immaterial, it's an avenue to open up new ways of thinking and I think financial stresses are a surface of a lot more that's going on underneath and I think a lot of the times with charities now, naturally there's a lot of over-focus on finance when actually it's the intervention and the type of practice behind it, particularly with Turn2us and Edinburgh Trust where there's a lot more going on, feeling included, feeling that there's someone there helping you with the money is important. So you could throw a thousand pounds at someone and they can burn through it very quickly or you can give two hundred pounds to a family with support and it could go a lot further. So I think the financial situations and stresses are important but it's just the surface of the iceberg of issues.

**Thank you for that. That's come up a few times from conversations that I've had, is that the money is important but it's not the be-all and end-all and there's a real feeling that it's what happens around that is so important, around support and around how the person is treated as well. I mean I know I talk a bit about our grant-making model but around dignity and agency and respect and having that being treated like a human being.**

Absolutely.

**Can I ask you what your hopes are for the future, so I'm gonna break this into two, so for yourself and for the people of the city and you can include your work in that, the people that are supported, anything at all that you think you'd like to add?**

Right, I think positivity is something that's expressed by a lot of people who want to talk about the future. I've always personally swam upstream, wanted to affect change mindfully and at the moment there are some very big issues around working with charities, how charities behave, collaborating, co-producing, these are words that are so important that I think got forgotten a long time ago.

So for me the future would be the very project I'm involved in now but it's just a macrocosm of something much bigger where you have different charities working with each other, big ones and small ones. Collaborating should be throughout the entire system. At the moment that isn't happening understandably, but so my hope in the future is that there will be a natural coming together and supporting of each other charity-wise which will then reflect with service users as well, getting access to more varied quality with regards to the type of work and support that they get.

**Can I ask you to speak a little bit more in collaboration, because not everybody does like collaborative work or co-production work maybe more clearly. What are the benefits to this kind of collaborative co-production work and getting the insight and the wisdom and experience of people with lived experience? Could you speak on that?**

Yeah definitely, that's a good point actually. To reflect on that I can look at the citizens panel that I've been with and also just being co-chair, the responsibilities of treading two worlds at the same time. Working with the Parliament which was interesting.

**What was that work with the Parliament?**

It was the budgetary scrutiny project. Scottish government has such wisdom at times which I don't think they appreciate. It doesn't matter which party is involved of trying to be more transparent and including communities and so we were brought in to help sort of shape that that service, the procedure behind it and I remember talking to a number of MSPs in one of the conferences and the most moving thing I found is that the MSPs had completely forgotten that they are part of the community. They were deeply moved when we included them as part of the conversation of what we're about. No othering, the community's not over there, it's here, we are part.

I made a point of saying that the Parliament is actually a big community centre. You'd want to have more meetings here, you know, dragging in the members of the public and that would be the collaboration starts because collaborating can just be sitting in and listening. There were a few tears which I found quite moving and I think that for me it was a the beginning of change really. Luckily Scotland's very small population-wise so it can affect some changes but I think this collaborative approach is something that's been around since the dawn of man with regards to working together as a family, you know, it takes a village to raise a child, we're social animals and we need each other even when we don't and without that there's a high degree of fear and misunderstanding so it's for me it's only natural. It's almost like we're going back, I think with Turn2us and Edinburgh Trust. It's pointing back to what community supports about for me. You need to collaborate.

**That's really beautiful and I'm moved by that and the thought of like the Parliament being a community centre as well, you know, and that feeling of being the community is out there, the community is happening to other people, the community is something that other people belong to rather than the community is right here. That's really beautiful. What does Edinburgh mean to you?**

Right, yes, it's a good question.

**I know it can be a very varied and big question.**

Wow, Edinburgh. Funny enough, I thought you might ask that.

I've been thinking about it for a couple of days, and I had the standard answer, and I got rid of it very quickly and one thing that dawns on me when I've been here since 2000 and I love

Edinburgh for maybe all the wrong reasons. I like it when the tourists are not here. I like it when it's grey and damp and when I'm wandering through Greyfriars and it started to really sit on me why I love it and Edinburgh for me, like the part of London where I'm from, it's a testament to, it's a legacy.

It's a shadow of what was before and even in my home, 150-year-old cottage, a number of families have been through there, so it reminds me of just how temporary things are and that it's, I think what, 100 billion people have passed before us and we're sitting atop of a pile of other lives and we're just a snapshot of living. I think when I read gravestones or go through museums and walk through Edinburgh, I'm immensely sort of amazed at the testament to what humans can do and also the amount of responsibility we have to make things better. So yeah, so Edinburgh for me is a bit like the top of a Christmas cake. It looks great but I'd like to know more about the filling, what's underneath there and when I do look at it, it's rich with mistakes and Burke and Hare and so I love it. It's a very rich place but I think there's a lot of good old will as well as present will, and we've got to be mindful of that. So yeah, it's home. It's my home.

**I think I'll forever look at Edinburgh as a Christmas cake now. I really got what you were saying with that image. I was like oh yeah, because there's like richness and mystery, you know, and like well if you're thinking about Christmas cake covered in like marzipan and icing, I'm like what's in there? There's layers to it as well.**

It's an astonishing place. I remember the first day I arrived in Edinburgh at London Road where I was living and I came out the door and I kid you not, a Land Rover went past and I looked and I said to my partner, "I said that's the Queen." She goes yeah and she was just driving up London Road. There was no, I think there was one security vehicle behind her but I just thought this is what Edinburgh's about. The Scots are not really too perturbed about the Royalty being around.

**On your first day as well as coming out.**

Wild, honestly. So yeah, potential. Scotland for me is about potential and about trying to make a change from a deep history of wanting to be believed and understood.

**Is there anything else that you'd like to add to our conversation today?**

Yes, I promised my son this one actually. 1990 at NASA, the Voyager 1 spacecraft was on its way out of the solar system passing Saturn and Professor Carl Sagan, astrophysicist, amazing guy, now long gone, I think he instructed or asked or was partly involved of making a special request. And he asked for the spacecraft to turn 180 and take a selfie of the earth and the book he produced from that was called Pale Blue Dot and it's a faint little blue dot of us in the middle of nothing. And for me, I cannot quote what he said but you need to go and check it, it's very moving but it's the sum total of who we are and what we are on in that little pale blue dot and all we have is each other and so it's one of the most moving critical pieces of observation I've ever had and keeps me going because all we have is us. So next time when I pass people who are asking for money or cigarettes because I smoke unfortunately, I give more than I can because you know I'm one pay check away from being there myself and so you know I just hope at some point we realize just how important we are to each other and so Turn2us, this is the twist, it caught my eye in the very beginning because I think the initial instruction was to turn the spacecraft around and take a reflective shot of earth so it's almost like a full circle. Stunning.

**I'm very moved, full disclosure, I had a little tiny tear in my eye there. I love these conversations for so many reasons, I love them for how we talk about the issues that are in Edinburgh, how we talk about the work that we're doing but every time I sit**

**down with someone something gets in on a personal level for me and I am very moved and inspired and I'm really, really grateful for your words.**

I'm moved too, actually being here.

**What a wonderful, and I guess in this interview I'm saying more than I usually would but we're talking, you're talking so eloquently and beautifully about you know we need each other, we're relying on each other, we're in it together and then like we're sitting here in our office in Edinburgh across from each other both feeling moved by that human experience and that which unites us and that is very, very special to me. Thank you for your time, thank you for your energy, thank you for the work that you're doing in Edinburgh across the city and I'm very, very grateful to you Afam.**

Thank you. Thank you very much for putting up with me.

**It's my pleasure.**

Thank you.

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

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