

For The 1 Podcast by Freedom2: Episode 5

Host: Mel Manning

Guest: Penny – 'I got Shoes'

Mel Manning 0:03

I'm Mel Manning Welcome to the 'For The One'. This week's guest is Penny from 'I got shoes'.

Penny 0:12

If a child doesn't have shoes, they can't go to school and Ugandan. They can't show up to school and flip flops. And so when we started finding this out, we thought, hey, let's do something. Let's start a charity and we named it 'I got shoes'.

This is season one of our 'For The One' podcast and I'm Mel Manning, the founder of the charity freedom team. We are an early intervention service helping teenage girls to know their worth and significance so they can reach their potential and empower others. Why for the warm, because we can all make a difference and reach out to help at least one person. It doesn't require you to be qualified and you don't need to be an expert. This podcast celebrates the stories of individuals and organisations that have seen a need and reached out by helping the one that had been instrumental in making changes in their communities and beyond. Join us as we journey through their stories. Penny is the founder and CEO of I got shoes, a UK based charity that provides shoes as stepping stones to education, working alongside vulnerable women and children in Uganda. Along with her husband Gary, she has worked in leadership capacity with a nonprofit UWS here in the UK for 26 years. Five years ago, she took her first trip to Uganda and the people want her heart. Teaching pastors and leaders through school of ministry of Uganda, she has seen the need firsthand for helping create a shift in cultural thinking and to raise awareness of women and children's need for education, security and dignity. Penny is mom to four fantastic adult kids and spouses. Lulu to three grandchildren. So welcome, Penny, welcome to for the one podcast.

Penny

Great to be here Mel,. So exciting.

Mel Manning 2:06

And what a beautiful day as well. today. The sun is shining. How are you feeling today?

Penny 2:10

yeah, really well, and I can't believe that's about to become 70 degrees here. It's I mean, I can't wait to enjoy it. Yeah. So it's good.

Mel Manning 2:20

And so the last year has changed us all. I think, cousin it. What has been your moment of joy through this time? Oh,

Penny 2:30

my goodness there. There are so many male but hands down. I think we had been into the pandemic about seven months. And there was a little window of opportunity that I could fly to America to see my 87 year old mom and I had not seen her in a year so to be able to see her in person hugged her and spent a month month with her was incredible. And we even took a trip to the beach and just created some priceless treasured memories that will be forever etched in my heart sitting on the beach watching sunset, holding her hand just knowing that she was safe while the world is going through such a crisis. It was really a gift to be able to be with her. Yeah. Yeah.

Mel Manning 3:21

I think people have missed that relationship side. Haven't I ever been able to see family? Friends spend time together? I don't think we realise how much that was going to impact us.

Penny 3:31

Yeah. And just that that idea of physical touch. I never. I'm from Georgia, in the south. And our greeting is you say Hey, honey, and you hug somebody. So I had to learn to adapt that when I came to this culture, of course. But I've missed just yeah, that physical proximity and just being being with family, friends, people. Absolutely. There's that on your to do list then when once we go Yes, yeah. Yeah, cuz I mean, we've, we've also had a newborn granddaughter born during the pandemic. So that was a highlight being able to see her and hold her for the first time. Yet on the other hand, her aunts and uncles, my other children have not even met her yet. So they cannot wait. I think, yeah, the restrictions have changed now. So they can be outside and I think they're lined up to meet each other. So yeah, we're, we're thankful that things are shifting very much.

Mel Manning 4:35

Yeah. Yeah. So do you think that you will do anything different coming out of the pandemic? You learn anything of you? Oh, my gosh.

Penny 4:44

Yeah. Yeah. For me, Mel, I think just keeping the ability to focus on what is truly important and letting go of what's not. is so key. I think all of us had to reprioritize when we We got thrown into the pandemic. And usually what seems so urgent distracts you from what it's what's important you have this To Do List you're running around, trying to fit. I mean, as a woman, I love to multitask. But yet you sometimes can be burning, you know, energy on both sides. And it's to me, it was a time to pause to think what's important. And especially now I think the people that are close to us, we've met neighbours gone to a deeper level with them. That has been amazing where before we were just in our own own social bubble. And so it's been good to be able to, yeah, just pause reprioritize people, you love family, friends. And even with work, I've learned to not let it dominate my life. That's hard, because you want to do your best you want to give everything. But also realising that time with others is a gift time every day is a commodity. And it's the one thing that we can't stock up and save. But if you waste it, then it's gone. So we're given a set amount of time with each day. So I'm learning to prioritise what's important, work hard, play hard. It's always been one of our family mottos. And I have this little note on my Blackboard that I'm staring at right now in my office, and it says, choose your priorities, or they will choose you. And so yes, every day just go right. What's the key thing that's live well, and do our best?

Mel Manning 6:45

Yeah, I think I've enjoyed the slower pace of life, you know, even at weekends, when Normally I'm going in around the children at clubs and, you know, in the car out the car and not having to do that. It's been quite nice in some way.

Penny 6:58

That's true. And, you know, we live on a T junction and a bus route. If you're ever buying a house, don't mind a bus ride. I wish someone would have told us that 20 years ago, the noise and you just get accustomed to it. But once in lockdown, I think that's one of the thing I prefer things I appreciated was the stillness and how it was calm. And yeah, I enjoy less noise.

Mel Manning 7:26

So I love chatting, as you know, with people who are a bit like what I did with freedom, too, is that you saw a need, and you thought, What can I do? And that's the whole sort of premise of for the one now on your website. For your organisation. I got shoes. You asked the question. Have your eyes ever been open to something that once you see, you can't unsay? So what was your experience? And how did this lead you and your husband Gary to starting a charity?

Penny 7:55

Yes. So my husband Gary had been training pastors leaders in Uganda for the past 11 years. And once we became empty nesters, my husband said, Hey, why don't you come with me? So we had to get training. We're working with a group in Southampton that once you get certified, you can go and they have resources and centres all over the world. Uganda was in my husband's heart. So that's where I said, Yeah, I'd love to go with you. And Mel, it was on one of these trainings. One of these times we were teaching. We had just finished training leaders and pastors in tin gumbo, Uganda, and that's near the Congolese border, we were heading back to our accommodation. And we noticed a group of women working in the field in the heat of the day. And as we were driving, I actually asked our driver, Hey, could you just stop I'd love to chat to them if we could. And so I glanced over waved at them and they immediately stopped what they were doing and came over. And if you can imagine now, these women working in the heat of the day, and they were ploughing up a field, they had babies strapped to their back and as I said, women left to multitask. They were fluently multitasking. The tuna melt when they came over, and I saw that my heart sank. Because they were walking across hard ground, this soles briars, and they were barefoot. And I couldn't forget what I saw. And it's one of those things that something stirs and it just won't go away. I even dreamt about it that night. And as I woke up the next morning, I just kind of this thought came to my mind if this is a real need. Then let me see 100 people when we drive back from intern gumbo to Kampala, which is about a five hour trip with no adventures, which sometimes it can mean an eight hour trip in Uganda. cuz of the roads and conditions, but within an hour, I started counting one by one, just noticing who didn't have shoes. And not only did I count to 100 that I saw, but 200 mil in an hour, and it, it just made me realise that this is a validate this is real. And we can do something. And our belief is, hey, let's do something, something is better than nothing. So we started learning that, oh my goodness, when you're in this sub Sahara continent that there are so many diseases that are caused from being barefoot like hookworm, chiggers, and it's painful, you can, it's excruciating, painful, but you can also even lose your limbs from it. But yet it's treatable by a simple low cost solution, which is shoes, and then even realising and learning now that if a child doesn't have shoes,

they can't go to school in Uganda. They can't show up to school and flip flops won't happen. And so when we started finding this out, we thought, hey, let's do something. Let's start a charity and renamed it I got choose,

Mel Manning 11:22

which is perfect. Isn't it love it? Yeah. And so you've touched on it slightly. But why you ganda? And is the vision to always be in Uganda? Or will you? It will go further afield?

Penny 11:35

Yeah. Now that's a great question. So for many, many years, over 12 years, Gary and I have actually sponsored two children with other organisations with compassion, and shares Uganda. And to see a child go through education has been our heart, we even visited the facilities when we were in Entebbe, and from a distance got to see our child to we had been sponsoring, and that is probably what planted a seed about how beautiful these these people are. And I don't know if you know, but Uganda is one of the poorest countries where over half the population live under the poverty line, that's roughly under \$1.90 a day, and they barely have enough to meet basic needs of life. And many are just above that threshold now, but are very vulnerable to falling under the poverty line. They're farmers and literally live day to day wondering, where am I going to get the next meal, women working two, three jobs to allow their families to have have enough to eat and we just see it, I got shoes, that education is the key to equality, that it opens the doorway to greater opportunity and freedom. So that's our hearts that we don't just pour money into something. But if we give them that opportunity, on a equal playing field equity to be able to go to school, learn, have dreams, have goals, then their lives can can change, the trajectory of their life will change. And that's what we're a part of.

Mel Manning 13:22

Yeah, that's fantastic. And I think I mean, I've heard other people who've started charities and different organisations, and they start with an initial need, which like for you guys, you know, you saw the need for shoes. Yeah. But once you start to unpick that it opens up other things, doesn't it like education, and what are the other needs within that person's life?

Penny 13:41

So for us, we initially just targeted shoes, but then we quickly realised like you said, you have this vision, and then the strategy the way you work it out, changes and adapts. Oh my goodness, Mel, if you imagine we started this vision during the pandemic, we started the charity during the pandemic. So in June, it was a perfect opportunity to launch some people were like, Are you crazy? What are you doing? And we just knew that never would we have so much time to be able to focus on this. So we started with choose shoes, we started with shoes, and then we quickly realised they also need school uniform, and school fees paid. So we have two facets really male of our of I got shoes, and one is sponsorship. So sponsorship says you can provide shoes, school uniform, and school fees for a child either one or all three aspects for 70 pounds. So it's it caught quickly. We're working in a remote area, a school down in rock ice, so it's completely impoverished area in Uganda. And if you imagine the cost to send your your kids to school is unimaginable. What really hit me now is you realise that because the cost is is so exorbitant, if there's a choice in a family, between a boy or girl, the boy will go to school. And this is what really just did the idea of, of the one and bringing that value that women and children, especially girls are valued, they have significance they have worth. And what happens, a family will choose the boy for education and the result. Now girls 1314 are leaving school, they either become housemates, they're married off, or horrifically they end up in prostitution. And it's at this time between primary school and secondary school that it happens. So if you imagine the dream of a parent would be to get them through primary education. And that's it. So these these young girls especially are 13, and 14. And then they say, we don't have enough to go to secondary school, and their education is finished. So our heart is we provide sponsorships, but we have a new programme we're launching that provides scholarships, and especially it's for young girls that would be vulnerable in this situation. In fact, today, our school down in rock, I there are 14, candidates taking their primary leave exam today and tomorrow are cheering them on praying for them, they'll do their best. So once they take this exam, they have the opportunity to go to the secondary school. And we're setting up this scholarship that isn't just based on academics, but it's based on aptitude, attendance, and even giving back to the community. So once they come back during, you know, in between term times, they're going to be mentoring, they're going to be going back to the school that they started from and helping they're so it's pouring back into the community and building this, this ethos that our generation can actually help bring life and sustain a community. And a Scott and the scholarships are 32 pounds a month. So whether you can pay 10 or 20. By pulling the money together, we're going to provide scholarships for these 14 down and rock high. And then we also have five girls in Kampala. So 16 girls and three young men were praying will sell through their exams, and we can get them into Secondary School,

Mel Manning 18:09

which is fantastic, isn't it? Yeah. And what we do a lot with freedom, too, is when girls have attended our programmes, we encourage them to become part of our ambassador programme, where they then support their peers, which sounds very similar, that actually you're, you're equipping them and you're giving them confidence. And then they think, actually, I can come alongside this person who may be two years younger than me, and and be a source of strength for them as well. So I think that's fantastic.

Penny 18:35

Yeah. Because Do you know, Mel, when, if we really believe and I'm sure you do, as well, that every life has inherent worth. And people that are in poverty aren't just victims, but they're individuals with creativity, imagination, and they have the power to change their environment, when they're giving the opportunity. And that's what we want to do. And like you say, when you give out, you actually become stronger. You believe in yourself, it helps bring life to others.

Mel Manning 19:09

And it sounds that you've moved so quickly in such a short time, because to start with this initial vision, and already, you know, you can see the fruits of you know, investing in young people and women you know, I just think that's amazing.

Penny 19:23

Yeah, and, you know, one of the coolest things is that we provide school uniforms. And of course, you start doing the research, we had the opportunity to bring them in cheap, you know, from another country. And then we realised there's women, tailors that could earn a living. So we have hired local women tailors to do the uniforms for the children. So when one school down and Raka we sponsor and it's we sponsor 250 kids, and we're fully funded for that which has been incredible. And then we have a sister school in Kampala. In the cod bondo district, it's a slum area. And we're sponsoring 150 kids there. And we are currently at 41%. So we have 61 Kids sponsored. So if it's something that anyone listening would like to help, whether providing shoes uniform or fees, there are other students in Kampala to be sponsored.

Mel Manning 20:28

Yeah, no, definitely. So it sounds like that you're empowering a community, not just, you know, start with that, like I said, that initial vision, but by being able to equip women to be able to then make a living through making the uniforms. It's it's spreading, isn't it the impact of what you're doing?

Penny 20:47

Yeah. And it's, and you learn, you have to, I think one of the biggest things is to ask a lot of questions. So even those hard questions, we have a weekly meeting with our Uganda partners, and thank goodness for zoom, we finally got it figured out. So we can communicate, but even asking those hard questions, because there's a culture that we want to help make a cultural shift that women and children matter. So when you say a woman Taylor's working, you have to ask the hard questions, how much you paying them? And how much would they earn in a day because what a woman might earn versus a construction labourer is hugely difference male and female. So we're trying to bring almost like a different blueprint. And you have to do it ever, so honourably carefully, ask questions, but then mutually agree, hey, this person working has value, this person deserves money. So that's been a huge learning curve. Yeah. But it's, it's good. It's good.

Mel Manning 21:53

So do you rely just on people donating? Or do you get funding in other ways?

Penny 21:58

Yeah, gee, you know, to date, all of our donations have been from people we know, or people that have told their friends. And so that's exciting. Also, from organisations like churches, thankfully, we've been here 25 plus years, and we've got connections in the states and here, but yeah, the the funds are coming from about half and a half from both countries. So yeah, but we haven't done all the grants, we need to get on it. So anyone listening if you have a heart for doing grants help us. Yeah, we

Mel Manning 22:34

always need help that way. Not that detail. No, yeah. So do you ever feel overwhelmed by the need that you say, and what inspires you to keep going? Because, you know, I'm sure when you've had your visits there, like you said, you saw those women in the field. And you can feel overwhelmed, you can almost feel like what can I possibly do? So are there moments like that?

Penny 22:56

Yeah. I mean, it's really funny now, because when we've been there, initially, you see the poverty. I mean, I can remember going in raw Chi, we were invited into someone's home. And I say that in inverted commas. And it was basically a shed in the shed, they had this mattress and it was dark, a young man was aligned there on the floor. And they were asking us to pray for him for healing. And I was thinking, this is out of my territory. And But anyway, we walked in, it was very dark. And it was this one mattress would have been worse, everyone slept in the household. It was probably not even as big as my office smell in the corner is where they kept their animals because otherwise people could take them. So they had some goats. So you can imagine the darkness the smell, but this is this was their home. But yet, you engage with them, and they are so happy. They they have such joy, these simple things, bring them joy. And that was a huge lesson to me in this Western culture that we want more we, we strive for more our importance or value can easily be in what we own or what we do. And it's not. And it was such a lesson for me that they in many ways are richer than me. So yeah, but sometimes I I'm sure you've you've done this, I open up my emails, and the needs are pouring in. And honestly, one time I just saw all these needs and my husband was sitting next to me Tuesday's our strategy day, and I just started crying and he's like, what's wrong? I'm like, there's just too much. We can't do all this. And so it's real important to know your why. Know what your focus is because we can't meet all the needs, but one Now one of the hugest things that we've learned is that of when you know your why you know your focus, that's what you can do well, and then it's easier to point them to other organisations or Hey, contact this grip, or even help them make that contact. It relieves some of the feeling of being overwhelmed for sure.

Mel Manning 25:21

Yeah, no, definitely. And do you have like a support network? I mean, obviously, I'm sure you have trustees. But beyond the trustees, do you have people that can come alongside you and say, Penny, keep going what you're doing? Yeah.

Penny 25:32

Yeah, thank goodness for WhatsApp. Which we're all sick of right? Yeah. Sometimes you look and you think, why do I have that many messages? That's just dumb. Yeah, I mean, we have a working so we've got our Board of Trustees, Gary and I getting to do this together has been great. Because we're at this season of life where, quote, you could retire, but it's like, Hey, there is so much we can do. And it's actually propelled us forward of just the vision of helping others across the world. It's so easy to do. So we have a working working team, we have a great media and comms team, Kaylee and Vicki and we have people that pray for us. So yeah, that's, they're the ones and my family are incredible. They're the first ones to always like Instagram and Facebook and say, and they're really, yeah, that they they have come on board in so many ways. Yeah, it's been incredibly encouraging. Yeah,

Mel Manning 26:37

it's so important to have those two and people champion you and cheering you on. Because I think without that, there would be moments probably when you might give up or at least think you're gonna give up. So I think it is important to have important people in your life, isn't it to ego?

Penny 26:50

Yeah. And go and go back to knowing your why. I'm in fact, on my board. I have written remember my why. Just in case I have one of those meltdown moments. It's like, come on, girl, you can do it. So yeah, that's great.

Mel Manning 27:06

So what I've been the highlights since starting, and obviously you haven't been going that long. But you It sounds like I'm sure you've got the highlights already. And do you have any do's or don'ts for anyone who's thinking of starting a charity?

Penny 27:19

Yeah, I think there's two highlights. Now. Just one, the realisation that our Uganda partner was came to England for the first time, last March, right before the lockdown. He had been here for training and we invited him to come and stay in our home, if you can imagine it was a culture shock for him. He had never been outside of the UK. So he looked at me when he came into my house and said, Do you feel like you're already in

heaven? And honestly, I felt so I felt so almost guilty in the sense of the number of times I've complained that my house is too small. Because where I grew up in the States, you just have more space, more land. And I you know, I yeah, that really kind of hit me. But the fact that our partner Ben came a year ago, and sat in our lounge and shared the nade with us, and four other people. And those four people are now part of our team as well. Peter, Peter Stern, and Fiona and Steven Bannister, they're they're on board with us. But to hear the need a year ago, and already see what has transpired has been exciting to become an official charity to help one school fully funded helping another starting scholarships for girls that might end up into prostitution. We just are excited and to think it was only nine months ago. Is incredible. So anyone listening to this that one thing that I would encourage you, if something stirring, to take that first step, that's all you have to do. take that first step and things start falling into place. One of the the do's, you said I would say that collaboration is key. We reached out to three charities in Uganda, cherish being one of them, and we said we're new, we need to learn and so it's been great. We've gotten advice on finances. We've gotten advice on how to work cross culturally. So collaboration, we also reached out to another organisation, and they're providing training for our teachers, which is phenomenal. We're so excited. In April, they were hosting a big event and said Bring your teachers so it's on a Educational Leadership Training, and it's more holistic. So it's the person. I mean, you're a teacher, you know. So it's not just rote memory, but bringing in new ways to impart vision, allowing them to learn the skills of listening, learn the skills of communication. So we're super excited by having the courage really to reach out that look what happened. We're learning. We're getting advice. And yeah, just benefiting from the big guys. Yeah. Yeah. It's really, really good. So that would be a juice. So action cures fear. Just take the first step.

Mel Manning 30:43

Any don'ts? Oh, yeah. I've learned where you live. Oh, definitely don't do that.

Penny 30:49

Yeah, I'm kind of in the same way. Don't talk yourself out of it. I have another thing on my board that says, if you can talk yourself out of it, you can talk yourself into it. So if it's really pressing, and you think, you know, oh, my God, we have one life, we have so much here. And it's so easy to help. I never in my wildest dreams, Mel. I mean, I love shoes. I have a closet full of always love shoes and handbags. But I never thought by simply providing one pair of shoes is like opening the door, to access to education, to breaking the cycle of poverty, to help, you know, help preventing health issues for future generations. It's phenomenal. So definitely, don't talk yourself out of it. And don't go alone. There's a great African proverb that says want to go fast, go alone, want to go far go together. So that's what we're trying to do.

Mel Manning 31:57

Yeah, no, it's good. But I think people do sometimes feel overwhelmed. They see a need. And I think I don't I don't even know where to start. And I think it is that thing of not putting pressure on yourself and thinking you've got to do these big amazing things, I think sometimes is starting really small. And it might be just to your neighbour needs to do to go and get some shopping for them. And that's how you start. So I think it is not getting overwhelmed. Yeah, that's good. Yeah. And just doing something because something is better than nothing. So if people are interested in getting involved with I got shoes, you talked a little bit about donating. Are there any other needs? Or is any other way that people can help you or even spread the word?

Penny 32:35

Yeah, we'd love just helping raise awareness of I got shoes because we're new. We're kind of you know, I look at us like a biplane compared to a jumbo jet. But we're, you know, it's great. But raising awareness through Instagram, Facebook, sharing with friends, just yeah, reading our posts, liking them, sharing them, going to our website, which is I got choose co.uk gives the backstory, as I shared earlier what we're doing. And I love the fact that right now people are helping us creatively raise funds. Recently, we had a family that their two young children sold their toys before Christmas. So didn't sell all of them. They sold some of their toys. And from that they raised enough money to sponsor two kids. Fantastic. I was it was beautiful. Another one did a birthday celebration and said I don't want presence I have enough gift to I got to choose. And recently two neighbours have said that they would do sponsored runs for us. One the Jurassic Coast challenge, which is in May, and another one is planning to run around Brentwood, which believe it or not, the perimeter is 17 kilometres. So I love the creativity. So helping by either just a fundraiser or joining others who are doing that, that would be fantastic.

Mel Manning 34:12

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. Penny, thank you for joining us today. And it's been so really interesting. Find out I got shoes, I knew a little bit but just to find out a bit more, and just for people to find out if they can help in any way. So thank you.

Penny 34:25

Thank you. It's been great Mel and we love what you're doing with freedom too. And just appreciate your heart for the one because that's that's really what life's about giving out. So, thank you. Thank you.

Mel Manning 34:40

I loved hearing Penny's journey from firstly having a heart to help children in Uganda to get an education to going a step further to actually starting a charity to further this work and help communities. I definitely felt inspired that we can all make a difference somewhere. For more information about I got shoes, please go to www.lgotshoes.co.uk .

Thank you to all of the young people who've been involved in making of today's podcast, Elsa Arnold, Freedom2's youth trustee and our Freedom2 ambassadors. The music is written and performed by Josie Beth. I'm Mel Manning, Thank you for listening.

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