

For The 1 Podcast by Freedom2: Episode 1

Host: Mel Manning

Guest: SPACE

Mel Manning 0:03

I'm Mel Manning Welcome to the for the one podcast. This week I'll be talking to the organisation space.

SPACE 0:12

Grooming and I say this a lot is the silent driver in county lines. It's the silent driver behind the youth violence as well. And if we're seeing adults frequently getting taken in by scammers, tradesmen, builders, you know, dating websites, you name it, why do we find it so hard to believe that children won't be sucked in.

Mel Manning 0:35

This is season one of our 'for the 1' podcasts 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 one 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.

Mel Manning 1:21

Space is a self funded organisation founded in January 2018. Responding to the national prevalence of county lines child criminal exploitation, which has seen 1000s of children and young people exploited trafficked and trapped and entrenched into organised crime, serious harm and violence. Spaces primary mission is to raise awareness making recommendations to improve inadequate or failing professional responses to county lines exploitation, collaborate with charities and statutory services to enable necessary changes which will better safeguard county lines affected children and young people and their needs, train and equip statutory and non statutory professionals to recognise signs of county lines and gain an understanding of the wider context of this exploitation. Space works anonymously due to the nature of their work.

Mel Manning 2:14

There is a warning for this podcast as there will be discussions around grooming, exploitation, and modern slavery. So please take care of yourself. So welcome, Space Welcome. Thank you so much for joining us on our for the one podcast.

SPACE 2:32

Absolute pleasure to be here! Fantastic to be working with someone like yourself, thank you for having me. Okay. And it's and like I've said before, we actually haven't met in person, but we've tried lots, haven't we? Yes. Isn't it weird, actually, that it's, you know, so many like minded people now fall in that category who I've not met, but really connected really, really well with? And yeah, it feels as if I know you, quite frankly. Yeah, quite a while, which is quite bizarre. Given we've never met, you know, we've had a lengthy phone, phone conversation. But yeah, it's really strange. But you know, I can really, I can really tell from having spoken to you that you know, you and I stand for the same kind of thing, which is brilliant.

Mel Manning

Absolutely. So the pandemic has had a massive impact on how we live, our routines have changed, life has changed for many of us. And there's been some difficult times, what has been your moment of joy during the last year?

SPACE 3:37

What a fantastic question that is, honestly, because you know, you don't really hear the word joy in the same sentence as locked down. And there aren't many good news stories, in my kind of work, to be completely honest, as you can imagine. So to see a glimmer of hope, in some exploited young people, no matter how short lived was a really, really big bonus to come from the lockdown to secretly hope and then hear that locked down, offered some exposure children a good excuse not to leave the house.

Therefore temporary respite from their horrific activities, was actually a real joy that they stepped into a brief holiday mode, if you like back into their previous carefree state of just being children, acting their actual age was immense and a massive cause for celebration for parents. I know that they reported their children's excitement that redefining themselves, pre exploitation, hobbies or interests, seeing the light of day again, reading books, playing games like any other team, and not only just you know being present in the home, which is unusual in itself, but present for family meals. And you know being a typical teen going through stacks of snacks at home. unparalleled feeling for parents returning from

supermarkets knowing their child will be where they left them at home in their bedroom and not missing it. Siblings also overjoyed not to walk past an empty bedroom, which was the norm for a long, long time for lots of families. Were many, many good times or once had, you know, thrilled to have their partners in crime home to mess around with watch TV with laugh in a home that won't have heard any laughter for years, in many cases, sadly. So that has to be the top moment really, in lockdown. years are really isn't it? It's it's stuff most people will take for granted. Really? Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's why it's so important to think about those moments, because actually, we can get bogged down with all the difficult times that lockdown has brought for some people. Yeah, no, absolutely. And, you know, lots and lots of

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people who are living this nightmare have said that actually, what's, you know, what's a real problem for some people during lockdown? Just wisdom by It was nothing. Because what you're used to going through as the norm prior to any lockdown happening, that existence is so horrific, that actually you're you're kind of ready for anything after that. It's a very bizarre way of living, you know, you're on high levels of alert as the norm all the time.

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You're not sleeping, you're stressed, you don't know if you're going to get that phone call, and actually locked down kind of provided a level of peace. As bizarre as that sounds. So yeah, in many ways, it's all relative to the person that's living that lockdown. Really? Yeah. And I think there'll be lots of different stories, as we sort of emerge from lockdown of different people's journeys through this time. Yeah, totally. You know, it's just, it's not a one size fits all. And it's almost like a sounds awful, really. But it's, it's it is like that holiday mode when everybody's together, and you've got a little bit of happiness, which you know, for a lot of families is just, it's just not there. While they're going through this, it's just a very, very alien existence. So

Everything becomes bearable, I think when when you've got your child in front of you, who frequently isn't in front of you, and is missing or at risk of harm or at risk of death. So yeah, it's a really strange way of looking at things. But there you go. Tell us a bit about your background, and what made you want to start space? Well, my background is actually, I have 34 years in international law enforcement, including safeguarding child protection, vulnerability and modern slavery.

My insights into British county lines and child criminal exploitation is from about 2012-13. And that's what led to Space being launched in 2018, that I was actually already working to change the response before we formally launched in 2016. So about two years prior to launching, I was already operating but not a space, I saw there were massive wrongs in the way that criminally Exploited Children are being statutorily responded to that it was a clear injustice and immoral issue. And I set about trying to improve it. And the aim really was to provide, as you said earlier, education and training to those agencies, inadvertently or otherwise exacerbating the harm to those children, but also to campaign for and change the current policy on how they were treated. So you know, we've done a fair amount of stuff.

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You know, missing is a key component of county lines and childcare exploitation. We've done a lot of work around what best practice should look like when dealing with missing episodes, we brought the subject of trafficking to normal families. And sadly to all also to a lot of professionals who are just unaware of the relevance of trafficking within child criminal exploitation. All within county lines, I should say.

We wanted to target all the areas basically that directly influence the fate of these children, including the criminal justice system. Now, we also saw there was zero awareness of county lines and child exploitation in courts, be it family, courts or criminal and one of our key aims was to provide an expert witness service for victims. There was an immediate overwhelming response. I guess, as soon as we went live, we were getting referrals, you know, from statutory professionals, police and social workers. Referring parents into us, also charities referring parents into us desperate parents that

These parents were also researching themselves and found us themselves. And this turned into really, unintentionally, because we didn't set out for this piece of work at all, it turned into our largest and most demanding time consuming role. And currently that that remains the case. So we have a free service for parents,

We could charge them, but we have no intention of charging parents already dealing with a really horrible situation. And we wouldn't want the service to be dependent on whether they had the funds to access that help. That's not what we're about. And of course, that service doesn't fit into, you know, neatly fit into a nine to five Monday to Friday role, as you can imagine, because children are getting arrested, missing, taken into protection taken into care at all hours all over the country. And the toll that this takes on parents is fun imaginable. So we might receive an

urgent email at three o'clock in the morning. And we will respond if we see it, because we know Parents need that information at the time they need it. And the difference it will make if they don't get it at that time, because things will proceed down a different route. So that's that's really how we came to be.

And we are now dealing with lots and lots of different areas. But our core mission remains, as we started out, you know, it is very difficult to say no to parents, we're not funded. As I said, For this, we have more parents on our books now than any national charity that's being funded for this kind of work. But we know that what we're doing isn't offered anywhere else in the way that we're doing it. And it just isn't just not on the cards related to shut that down. Because there's nobody else picking that up. So we've carried on with it, and it's growing by the day. And yeah, it's tough, it is tough. It's a very unique service and dynamic service. And just don't have the heart to really say we're unable to do any more. So we just carry on.

So when you talk about the young people that are involved, what age are these children? And is there a type of child I'm sort of playing sort of I mean, obviously, I've got an understanding of, of this area, but I just think for some people, they don't really think about who are these children and young people and where did they come from? Children are getting younger and younger. You know, I think we're seeing that reported repeatedly now in the press. But kind of the usual age now is the damage is already occurring by age 14. So a lot of these missing episodes, etc, that that's when a parent may become aware of the fact that there's a problem. You know, that's kind of the average point. But actually, by the time that a child is going missing, the damage is already done, because it means the grooming has already occurred, which has led that that child to actually go and so there is a lot of questions around what's the pull factor? What sort of child what you know, what happens in a home, what happens outside will? Why do they get sucked into this?

I think we can over obsess about that and overanalyse. And I think there is enough case studies to indicate actually, it is every child, you can be a child from an affluent background or deprived background. It can be a black kid, a white kid or an Asian kid. Every child is susceptible, and it's the groomers job to find that way in. And a lot of these ways in are not rocket science. And that's, you know, that's the key message here, really, grooming. And I say this a lot is the silent driver in county lines. It's the silent driver behind the youth violence as well. And at the end of the day, if we're seeing adults frequently getting taken in by scammers, tradesmen, builders, you know, dating websites, you name it,

Why do we find it so hard to believe that children won't be sucked in? But that's where we're at. People just don't seem to want to. They don't want to hear that, you know, sadly, society wants to see these children, as drug dealers decides he wants to put the blame on the children having somehow done something wrong, that led them there or their parents did something wrong that led them there. And actually, what we're seeing is there doesn't have to be anything wrong in a family. You know, you can have the most perfect parent, the most fantastic parenting will not stop your child becoming exploited into county lines. And that, you know, is the message I would really like to draw me

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To people don't look at somebody thinking, Oh, well, I'm not like that. So it won't happen to me. I don't do that with my children. So that won't happen to me, I can assure you, this has happened to all sorts of families. And there is nothing you can do as a parent, when that harm is beyond your front door. And it is absolutely hell bent on making sure it gets its way. And the way to do it. And to keep it very simple and successful is through grooming. You know, children's minds are susceptible to it, it works. And, you know, if it's gonna work on adults, why on earth do we think somehow shouldn't work on children? They should know better? But we never say that about our friends, our relatives, our neighbours, who get conned into something? Do we kind of say, Oh, God, they must have been really, really clever to have got past you?

Well, if they were really, really clever to get past you as an adult, what do we think is happening to children? That's going to be a doddle, isn't it? So it's quite scary because it's out there. And you know, it, we mustn't think that it's, it's children who can't somehow think straight, or there's some kind of something lacking in them, or they're, they're have a weak constitution, or, you know, they just weren't streetwise enough. That just isn't true. Just isn't true. The grooming is clever. And of, and you can see that from the types of children that are sucked into this. You've got children, you know, who were doing fantastically well at school, academically able a star students, very streetwise, they got groomed.

So, you know, there's a real message there. And I think it is dangerous to think it won't happen to my child, or that kind of thing doesn't happen in our town, or, or that kind of thing. You know, the same goes when whenever I talk about modern slavery, or human trafficking, and people say to me, what that happens here, you know, they seem genuinely surprised. So do you, do you feel that we're still fighting to educate people around CCA and human trafficking and these forms of exploitation? Absolutely. Most definitely. I mean, you know, British, and modern slavery are not words that go together. They just aren't.

You know, Joe public thinks human trafficking is what happens to people from overseas brought over in boats, planes, you know, lorries, they're not people from the UK.

If anything, it's people from the UK that are doing the bad stuff and bringing them in, etc. So there's a real kind of image already there of what a modern slavery victim looks like, you know, it's somebody who's poor, deprived, possibly from overseas, and there's almost that sense or image of that ball and chain. And if that ball chain isn't there, then you can't be a victim. You know, if you're not acting a certain way, you can't be a victim. And I think that's the problem, because within county lines, a, you've got British victims. So there's your first challenge. But secondly, they are the most furthest removed from your perfect ideal looking victim because of the grooming. Now, they will be fouled, they will be aggressive, they will use disgusting language, they will be acting like many adults, in the most fastest way possible. And that is down to the grooming that is down to wanting to mimic their negative role model. So it is very difficult to get past that kind of aggression and arrogance that you're going to get from them. And you know, I often say asking a police officer to see through that and find the victim in that kind of person is going to be a challenge when they're being absolutely foul to you. And of course, they're, you know, committing the crime. So, they are severely challenged to be seen as a modern slavery victim. And I think also, we just didn't have that language about modern slavery within that British context. And if you did ever hear about British victims, it was more around individuals that were disabled, or had special needs who are being used by other people.

As you know, under labour exploitation, etc. So, that was, as far as you heard, but it was extremely rare. And of course, from that, we've gone to having the modern slavery legislation where we've got the NRM, but it still is the case that it doesn't apply to British nationals. And you know, we could bang our head against a brick wall several times a day, hearing parents coming back to us and saying, well, we did what you asked us to do. And a police officer doesn't know what you're talking about. The police officer hasn't heard of an NRM, the social worker says are you sure we think you've got the wrong end of the stick Mrs. so and so. So you know, that is in two it is still happening. And, you know, of course, you know, yourself that, you know, we've had this legislation for for a number of years now and statutory first responders should really know what their obligations are. But of course, it's absolutely standard fair for us to be speaking to a parent who may have been in that statutory maze for a good six to 12 months by the time they contact us, and they're at their wit's end. And of course, the first question we'll be asking is, has your child been recognised or being seen as a victim or a perpetrator? And has he been referred because it is usually a he? Has he been referred into the

NRM and your heart just sinks? Because the answer is always what is the NRM, which means nobody's referred them? And if they have, the parent hasn't been told, which is rare again.

So that is still happening today, despite the fact that this this subject is in the news all the time, you know, even in the guise of serious violence, if nothing else, because it is all connected. So yeah, it's an absolute battle. Absolutely not a battle. And I think, you know, there is a real issue with the fact that legislation says one thing, but actually, society, and you know, that has to include certain agencies, statutory agencies, do not see these children as victims. So there is a real disconnect, and parents are just stuck in the middle. You know, they're just wanting what the law says they're entitled to have. And actually, when they go and knock on that door, there's some pretty awful gatekeeping going on into the NRM, which is not what's supposed to happen. But why should it be a parent's gift to know that? Why should it be down to them to understand the modern slavery legislation? If anything, they should be told what the situation is, by the people that they're going to help not the other way around. But we are seeing the other way around. We are seeing parents saying, you know, things like, Oh, hold on a second, can you just speak a bit slowly, I need to write all that down. I don't understand any of it. It's too technical for me. But I need to write that down because I need to repeat it to my police officer. And actually, why are we Why are we making parents do this? It's not for them to do this. When they raise a concern, it should be down to the statutory services to say, it sounds like your child is a victim of this type of exploitation. And this is what should follow if that's the case. But we're not seeing that.

Sadly, you know, I would love to be able to say that's what we're seeing. But it just isn't true. You know, it just isn't true. And so, it is a mountain to climb, just to be even having a conversation about exploitation, because it is being battered out pretty quickly. No, no, no, he's choosing to do this, in essence. And that might be something that you would think immediately if there's a huge background, criminality background, but actually, how do you square that if it's a child from the opposite background? Very law abiding background? No, no, you know, nothing, not not any issues at school, just straightforward, normal, coming home, going to school, doing their homework, not a peep out of them. And then all of a sudden, you've got a monster in the house, who you don't recognise as a parent, and you've got police in your house, and to be told, oh, you know, he's making a lifestyle choice. He likes this stuff. And the parent is say, Well, hold on, where does that come from?

And it just, it's not going anywhere. That conversation is frequently not going anywhere. And I think that's where we're going wrong.

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So, yeah, it's an absolute mountain to climb the whole modern slavery thing. And, you know, it's it's difficult, I think, for people to reconcile those words with, you know, little Johnny down the road. That's the problem. And you know, you'll even get, oh, now hold on, for it to be modern slavery. It's got to be cross border. No, it doesn't. It doesn't children can be trafficked internationally, nationally, locally, from street to street from house to house, and from room to room, if it's for the purpose of exploitation. And it really shouldn't be down to anybody else to explain that to somebody who's a first responder. And I have a level of sympathy with first responders because I think they've just been dumped in it by the government. There's been no training whatsoever. I mean, I come from the same background. And I know what that looks like, you know, it will be some kind of elearning course and then Off you go. It's just nonsense to expect people to be able to navigate this complex area on that level of training, but actually, you know,

Everybody's got to put their hand up, then Haven't they and say, actually, this is not good enough, there comes a point where you can wing it. And there comes a boiling point where naturally, you just can't because you're damaging things by winging it. And that's what's happening. So just explain for people who maybe don't know what a first responder is what is their sort of their main role. So there is the National referral mechanism, which is basically the system which will identify whether somebody is or isn't a trafficked modern slavery victim, for example. And there are designated people whose job it is basically to identify if somebody is an exploited or potentially exploited victim. So in context of, you know, overseas nationals, for example, one of the key first responders is border force, there will be police within the British context, there isn't as many first responders because, you know, there are charities also some some charities work for foreign nationals who are also designated to act as first responders. But for the purposes of county lines, which is predominantly British, as I said, it is really only a police officer, or a social worker. So police, local authorities who can refer a child or young person into the national referral mechanism, which in essence, is a form, it's an online form. And they've got to fill that in, and they've got to show why they why they think somebody may be exploited. And it's a very low threshold, a very low bar, at that point, and for good reason.

So yeah, it's just somebody who is whose job it is to spot indicators, and do the right thing, basically refer them in. But of course, there's a challenge there. Because you know, police have a vested interest in fighting crime. And you're asking an agency whose job it is to fight crime, to look at criminals, as victims. So that in itself is going to cause issues clearly. And we're seeing the same kind of challenges with the local authority as well. It's not in their interest to take these kids in as exploited, you know, they've got their thresholds, they've got their case loads, which are

just, you know, falling apart. there's every reason not to treat these children as victims or see them as victims. So, there's a lot of, there's a lot of holes there.

Mel Manning 27:32

So it sounds from what you've been talking about that it sounds like your service is a lifeline really, for parents, you've touched on it a little bit, but just thinking about grooming, and do parents recognise that their child's have been groomed? And are there any warning signs?

SPACE 28:20

I mean, sort of, I suppose maybe parents have been through it, do they then look back and go, Okay, now I see the signs, but at the time, they didn't see that at all? Well, like in any area of concern, really, you have more clued up parents and less less clued up parents. And trouble is in CCE, the initial indicators of counter lines involvement, can easily be confused with, you know, teen angst. And hormones. Grooming is very insidious, and it creeps up in parents who are not so hands on, may miss the signs. I mean, we're all busy, you know, we're but we're all getting on with different things, multitasking, etc.

And some of these initial things you might just put down to, oh, he's just asserting himself, you know, he's just showing his kind of teen self now, etc. But there is a point where you start seeing in your child behaviours and characteristics are simply not theirs. And you start questioning whether becoming a stropky teen, is there a satisfactory explanation, given your concerns, and I think that's when parents kind of start thinking, Well, hold on this, this is a little bit too way out now. And this doesn't add up. And you know, yeah, okay, we all went through x, y, and Zed when we were their age, but we didn't start bringing home, you know, machetes or drugs or what have you. So there is a tipping point where actually, you can't really excuse that kind of stuff anymore with the usual rationale. So yeah, there are some very clued up parents, and, you know, some of this can go on for a while, you know, before anything happens, and it's really important to be keeping an eye on what's going on. But equally, there are parents who just haven't seen it, you know, throughout. And, you know, I'm not bringing any kind of judgments their way whatsoever. We know we all as I said, we all live our lives differently. And you know, if you've got a parent who's barely at home because they're trying to, you know, hold down two or three jobs and you know, that they're simply not There to notice the changes, what do you do then? So yeah, there's people, you know, parents at both ends of the spectrum. And lots and lots of parents don't join the dots because they are not expecting the reality to be anything like that they may have imagined, I, when I've done parent talks, it's, you know, my heart sinks, a lot of the time when I

do those, to be honest with you, they're really quite dramatic, because there is always always parents in the room, who are living it, and haven't told anybody. And they're almost hoping it isn't true. And then when they hear me describe certain things, they know, it's exactly what's going on in their house. And then equally, there are parents who have had that stuff going on, and they've not really managed to find an explanation.

And then they're in tears. Because it's just dawned on them, what they've got going on at home when they when they return. And that's a shock to them. You know, it's people think this is just something that's happening somewhere else to somebody else. But actually, I can tell you, I actually left us a session one day, and the person who organised it contacted me and said, I've had seven people come up to me after you left today, disclosing that they're living through that right now, that seven people is too many. And nobody knew about. So you know, this is endemic, and there's a reason why you're not hearing about it, who's going to share with their next door neighbour or their friend down the road, that their son is a drug dealer.

Because that's the reality. And you know, society isn't going to hear the word exploited, they're just going to hear the word, drug dealer. So it's really, really hard for parents to share this. And of course, what we're seeing a lot, and this is really quite sad. Lots and lots of families are reporting that they are falling out with their own families, because they do not understand what's going on. So grandparents, uncles, aunts, just saying, Well, why does he just snap out of it? Does he not realise what he's doing to you? Does he not realise this is wrong? Does he not realise he's going to get criminal record? And you know, we'll try and explain to your family members that actually, he's being groomed. And you know, people just don't understand it. It's just Well, why would he be groomed? Why did he say no? So it's, you know, you can only say that so many times to people. And so you know, where we're hearing from lots and lots of families, there's the additional trauma of actually falling out with family members and the trauma of actually then just being isolated with it on your own. So yeah, it's, it's, it's horrible. I think that's why, you know, I think it is so important that we know we do continue to educate. And for services, like yourself, that are doing all this hard work is so important, because, you know, parents that that, like you said, coming to a meeting and hearing for the first time that actually this is something we're going through, and we couldn't quite put our finger on, we knew something wasn't right. But now we understand. So it's that education that will help people I think, and it helps us to tackle this in a more effective way. Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, knowledge is power. 100%. And I don't think we can shy away from, you know, hiding that the bits that are uncomfortable for parents. And you know, when I do talks at school, I will often say, Are you wanting me to say it as it is? Are you wanting me to dilute it? Because, you know, there's lots of parents who don't want their children exposed to the real, harsh realities of life.

And, you know, it's really, it's really difficult. Should the school say no, can you not talk about the stabbings? And can you not talk about this than the other. But thankfully,

I've always managed. When I've done these talks, I've always had schools who've said, No, be as real as you have to be. Because, you know, we don't want that on our watch. We don't want somebody who heard half a message, but the other half couldn't be heard. And then actually, if they'd heard the full message that their child might have been saved if they'd known what was going on. So I think we need to stop.

We need to stop kidding ourselves on what's going on. And we need to kind of call it what it is. And, you know, children, children are quite resilient. And what we think were hiding from them is rarely the case. They are seeing far worse stuff on social media themselves, through their own peers. So the stuff we think is going to be really damaging or upsetting for them. They're ahead of you. There's no doubt about it. They've seen you know, they've seen and heard things that you will be shocked by so we kind of need to just say it as it is.

If we're going to go to the bother of actually doing these awareness sessions, yeah, it you know, this needs to be rolled out in every school. But this leads nicely actually on to talking about funding, because in an ideal world, that would be what we would do we go into schools, and we talk more and teachers and parents and, and that would be the way forward. But space is actually self funded by yourself. And there's many organisations in similar position where they're really struggling to get the sort of the right funding and access that money that they need. So what changes do you think needs to happen for more funding to be available or for you to continue the service that you're providing at the moment? Well, first of all, I think the money is there. So you know, it's not a case of all there isn't enough money to go around, money is there and money is being wasted? Money is being wasted on things that simply aren't going to work. I mean, you know, there was the absolute nonsense with the chicken boxes, if you if you remember that from an inch initiative by the home office, putting those stories in the chicken boxes, which was absolutely slammed, you know, how many hundreds and 1000s of pounds went into that. And then it quietly just went away when when there was a, you know, absolute rocket thrown at that particular initiative. So the money is definitely there. I just think there's a real issue with what I call repetitive funding, going to the same organisations doing the same thing, you know, that actually, if all of that was working, surely, then the problem would have disappeared. But it isn't. It's still there. So I mean, somebody you know, who's doing the funding really needs to be asking the difficult questions as to why are we continually funding this, I mean, we shouldn't be in this space to be continually doing something, it should be with a view to eradicating certainly, in the context of my work, you know, I don't want to be sitting here in you know,

1015 years time having the same conversation with you, because that means I've failed in my mission. As much as I, you know, I can influence it. So Ours is a unique organisation for many reasons. It's partly from lived insights. So we have more cases, as I said, on our books, then organisations were funded for this work. It isn't that we apply for funding and are unsuccessful, that isn't the case at all. We are unable to apply for funding as we are anonymous.

37:28

You know, due to the nature of the work we do, there are safety implications there. However, we are delivering a service and nobody is in the way that we do and we're doing it uniquely. And we're making a direct difference to victims, via parents, but also through national education, awareness and change. And what we need really is more organisations like ourselves with such challenges to have a route to be able to apply for that funding, we are in a really bizarre position, because we are nationally recognised, our work speaks for itself. If our knowledge, insight and service were evaluated, it would shock many what we actually do when we're a legitimate organisation and the likes of the home office policing. Local authorities Ofsted, you know, DFE have all worked with us, but we can't get past the first section of a funding bid form. How ridiculous is that? And you know, to date, no funders have offered a hand and said, Let's find a way to bypass that normal funding process for you in the interest of victims and families if nothing else.

And you know, very frustrating when the same agencies who won't support you want your insight at the same time, but not on a paid basis either. So yeah, I mean, you know, it's tricky. Additionally, we don't want funding, if our messages will be required to be tempered, toned down or changed in exploitation or you know, a critical friend should be welcomed. So the response is the best it can be for children and young people, but our messages won't be welcomed by also, it's easy to see why some won't want to fund us. And that's fine as our mission is to speak as we find and that said, I am thankful to those who've been brave enough to invite us on board to speak partner with and work with because they recognise our messages are uncomfortable but needed in their organisations and more widely. So it's those professionals we enjoy working with as they acknowledge changes necessary. So yeah, we you know, there's no easy answers for us really, we kind of just need a really rich benefactor or somebody to come along and you know, just give us a pot of money. We can absolutely evidence delivery, we can evidence, you know, we're doing a phenomenal amount of work with nothing.

But actually that's kind of like a real big national shame at the same time that you know somebody's just left to kind of carrier national burden and that's exactly what we're doing this is a really difficult place to just say actually can't do this anymore it's too much because the whole load of families will just be walking away from that that's the difficult bit I know what will happen to them so it's yeah we're kind of stuck in a corner of having to carry on despite these ridiculous challenges but I think we've shown you can do the right thing with nothing just your knowledge and your insight and a passion and you know money can come later I kind of hope it will come soon mind you.

Mel Manning

Yeah, absolutely no I agree, so with that in mind and with the work that you do, are there days when you feel overwhelmed or kind of 'I don't know if I can do this anymore' and what inspires you to keep going?

Well yeah definitely those days are a regular pattern unfortunately because I'm preaching to the converted but actually that's not my target audience it's a mountain to climb everyday you know the public is generally unaware of the nuts and bolts of CCE and we worked tirelessly to educate around this not being a lifestyle choice by children that it's modern slavery and trafficking that children cannot consent to the our own abuse exploitation and slavery you know yet one commentator can take you 20 steps back with whatever you might have you know achieved in terms of public understanding. It's really tough you know it's really tough. Not everybody wants to see the change we want to see which is shocking in itself but challenge and injustice inspired me to keep going. You know whilst both exist in CCE my work is not done inspiration is as easy as it is heart breaking too many cases of devastation all around parents crying on the phone constantly parents doing the heavy lifting children ending up in prison or dead, siblings broken, mental health spreading through the family one-by-one like wildfire, education lost, you know for the main child exploited child and then siblings jobs lost for parents while whilst they deal with the single most devastating thing that they will ever fight for their children. I feel very strongly that you know this is all wrong, so it becomes very easy to keep going despite undeniable obstacles. That there should be any resistance to improving child exploitation responses is a shocker but there it is. You know that's part of the package unfortunately.

Mel Manning

Yeah, and once you start I know for the work that we do with freedom2 it's is something you can't walk away from because you have seen an impact with those people. You've worked with all those young people and you see there's still a need and it's very hard to just walk away from that isn't it.

SPACE

Absolutely and you know you're invested in that and you want to see it come to a good end and you know, I don't feel comfortable walking away from something knowing that the end result might be death and that's what we're talking about here you know I don't want that on my conscience and I shouldn't have to see it that way. I'm one person and you know it's it's really not one organisations responsibility to make sure that that child doesn't meet their death but you know this is this is what we're dealing with it's you know that Child Exploitation that there is nothing like. This is absolutely devastating for families and it just ends badly there's no doubt about it and yet nobody's hearing you talk about it all you know it's like you've made it up and it isn't as bad as that and yet the evidence is all around us it's on our TV screens you know kids are dying but it doesn't seem to it doesn't seem to matter, and the more I say that the more I just think no well that's wrong then gotta keep going.

Mel Manning

So what are your plans then going forward obviously it's been a turbulent year with the pandemic. What we've got left and kind of moving forward and also how can people help you so you know do you have volunteers that potentially could help or what is your need an is there anyway that anyone can help you with that?

SPACE

I think that's a really good question actually as we've just come to a place really now where we're having to have a real good think about all of you know all of the plans. I set out with the missions that I outlined earlier and they remain our core goals and as much as funding would be great for say our parents service that isn't such a win overall as we kind of need to aim higher to have no need for such a service, that's what I would like. I don't want a need for this service and that would be the result really our plans are closely linked to the push back that we receive and there is a lot of push back so finding new ways to be heard and make that difference you know, there we need never really publicised are you know expert witness service for example, when we set out because what happened was you know our time ended up just literally being

zapped by fire fighting for parents which wasn't part of the plan, but obviously one was far more urgent than the other one because it's life and death you know.

So the expert service kind of went on the back boiler but many law firms started contacting us having noted we had a vast amount of unparalleled insights on CCD but also modern slavery in the context of internal and external victims we know that this service will make a big difference the expert witness service to victims but again we need to stop seeing success through this kind of lens and aim higher so no children and young people need such a service you know we could we could earn lots of money doing this forever because you know you could keep the problem running and get rich on it, but that isn't what our aim is here. It isn't it isn't a means to pay the bill it pay the bills. We need to eradicate this problem not keep it going and you know see it driving with xy and Z organisation to support it we need to get rid of it and that's really the aim for us and lockdown is scuppered a lot of our plans same as everybody else but we were looking at offering much needed training beyond the usually delivered training addressing where the real gaps are what's really wanted by professionals currently is leading to poor outcomes through lack of knowledge and expertise and we also really like to find some funding for the little things that will make a big difference to us you know to produce much needed resources and a decent website so we can host more beneficial information for professionals and parents and also one with a donate button because you know we literally have a a DIY website and it can't do much and actually there's a huge amount of information on there and you know it it sees a huge number of people on there but actually we we can do more we have the knowledge to do more through that website but it just can't host it so that's that's something we need to sort out this year somehow then you know lastly completely aware that some of our messages are uncomfortable for some agencies and completely aware that if you throw stones from the outside at your target audience then nobody is going to let you in and we do need to be letting to persuade influence and you know take them with us on this journey but this cannot be at the expense of making our messages palatable for listeners.

This year looks like it will be the year we focus only on those who want to work with us not you know ask coaxing them to work with us and persuading them we spent four years trying to do that with those who need to do things differently for exploited children no resistance can't be ignored and it is exhausting if you're saying the same things 40 years later so i think this is going to be the year that we stop going down that route and actually just focus where we can make that difference without persuading people to listen because time is running out.

Mel Manning

Thank you for the work you do and as a friend I want to say thank you cause I think it's so important and it is hard to continue when you feel like you're not getting the support that you need and so I do hope that you will continue with the fight of CCE and just supporting young people that go through it and their parents.

SPACE

Thank you thank you so much that's really kind of you and you know. Ditto you know what you're doing is absolutely impressive it really is, you know there should be one of you in every region really, it's unusual it's such an unusual thing.

Mel Manning

Who knows, maybe that's our thing for 2022 you never know.

SPACE

Yeah no absolutely you know I think as time goes on there's less and less things like that happening now and you know it's almost the old fashioned stuff that that should still be focused on and that's how I see a lot of the activities that you're involved in yeah.

Mel Manning

Yeah thank you thanks and so thank you so much for coming on the podcast and chatting with us today that's been fantastic.

SPACE

Absolutely happy to, a real pleasure to be here thank you for having me.

Mel Manning

My talk was space highlighted to me the complexity around child criminal exploitation and a lack of understanding on how CCE victims are groomed and often they are failed to be seen as victims of modern slavery. Thank you space for working tirelessly in this field. To find out more about space in their work go to www.bespaceaware.co.uk.

Thank you to all of the young people have been involved in the making today's podcast, Elsa Arnold, freedom2's youth trustee and our Freedom2 ambassadors. The music is written and performed by Jose Beth.

I'm all Mel Manning, thank you for listening please subscribe to this podcast.

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End of Podcast.