

#UNHEARDVOICES PANEL: CHOOSE TO CHALLENGE SUMMARY

The #UnheardVoices: Choose To Challenge panel is the second event within the previously established #UnheardVoices campaign. As it was International Women's Day (a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women) on March the 8th, we subsequently decided to accelerate the discourse surrounding gender parity by hosting the event which aimed to explore:

- The barriers faced as a woman (prejudice, misogyny, shattering the glass ceiling of the patriarchy)
- Personal history as a woman, and how this has influenced and shaped your career and life
- How you feel now, and how influence and power is used to serve and help the #UnheardVoices

We hope that the panel brought more awareness to the inequities faced by women in a personal and professional manner, and demonstrated how it is possible to rise above prejudice, assert autonomy, and find success, power, and influence.

Annemarie Ward (CEO of FAVOR UK) - Host

It is important to remind everyone that stepping into becoming an influential and powerful woman can be tricky and frightening at times, especially coming from a background where having that power is frowned upon, never mind far from celebrated.

- Questions whether class makes an innate difference to the professional and personal experiences of women
- When we open up and share with each other, at a deep level, it's healing - and those men who have learned to express themselves, & share with the women in their lives pass on that healing too.
- Getting funding acknowledges the value of work that is done within the recovery landscape
- So much of female value is put on how we look, and how people perceive us, rather than coming from within ourselves.

- Vulnerability is more acceptable for women - but we all, men & women need this for connection, especially when trying to change the world - it is through hearts and minds, so we need to be vulnerable and share our stories & vulnerability with each other to do this.

Karyn McCluskey - Chief Executive of Community Justice Scotland, and former Director of the Violence Reduction Unit

Worked in very male dominated environments, and *whilst equality sounds like a nice idea, it has yet to be fully realised.*

Thinking of Sarah Everard, and several other women who have gone missing, or have been murdered, we are far from equality - and far from women being safe, especially when going out at night.

Try not to think about things that oppress me (her) too much because it is paralysing, and you are constantly wondering what other microaggressions are people committing or experiencing.

Personal experience:

- Child's nursery time started at 8, the same time as her meeting with the police force - Karyn asked for the meeting to start 10 minutes later (was not essential to start this meeting at 8 anyway) so that she could drop her child off at nursery - this suggestion was dismissed/ignored. As a result, Karyn joined the meeting 10 minutes late for a year and a half.
- This led to feelings of being on the backfoot, and that she was constantly trying to catch up and work even harder.
- Now because people are more aware of women in the workplace, people aren't as directly dismissive as this - however, microaggressions still exist i.e left out of email chains, and you never feel like that you are an equal in the situation.

It is important not to take slights to heart, or nail yourself to the cross. Have to learn how to forgive your own mistakes, and become more comfortable being in your skin. There is an inner drive to always be better, but it does not make you any happier - feeling so driven, that it causes stress.

It's the small stuff now - lost count of the number of rooms, where it's only men present. So many women finish their careers without reaching their highest level/full potential, and are still judged to a different standard.

Is walking into the workplace now, different?

- Depends who you are - promised herself that when she was in a position of power that she would make it easier for parents, and make a difference.
- Kids comes first, make sure your kids are happy, and if you have the power to control how you work, work is more success because attention isn't divided.
- It is better - but gaining equality is at a glacial pace. Women are still judged to a different standard - we need more.

For the next generation of women, how do we give you the step up that we never had?

Rose Latham - Empower The Invisible

In long-term recovery, and for her, it has been a long road. Told all her life that she will never amount to anything, and lived in a household where there was every abuse imaginable. Blamed for own outcomes in life.

“No one ever asked me if I had any dreams, or any goals.”

Decided whilst she was raising her children, that there has to be more to life than ‘this.’ Went back to college when she was 33, did not have a clear plan, but used it as something to do. Completed GCSE, and A-Level equivalents (after leaving school at 14)

Psychology tutor put her forward for a national award with the Helena Kennedy Foundation, and there were 20 given out in the UK that year, and Rose was one of them. Went to university and got her degree, and eventually started working in the recovery/substance abuse field.

Told by someone in the board meeting of a recovery organisation that she should not let it be known that she is in recovery herself. He said it “*wasn’t becoming of a lady to admit to that kind of stuff.*”

In 2019, Rose co-founded an organisation called the Empower The Invisible Project. We have a massive intake of women, and some women. Works with people who still carry the legacy of trauma, particularly from childhood sexual abuse. Many of whom are still in active addiction - mental health services won't deal with them because they are still in addiction, and addiction services won't help them because their mental health is bad.

Someone contacted her business partner (who is a man), bypassing her, with some idea that they want to do and, and left Rose out of the loop. She challenges this behaviour.

Introduced herself as a case study - responses were negative - then revealed the case study was her, and received a standing ovation. Men aren't judged in the same way.

Rose is not inspired by movie stars, or pop stars, or people who were born into a beautiful life, but women who she works with. Inspired by women who have survived childhood abuse, or addiction, and who are in recovery and still in pain, yet come and see her week in and week out. They give her (Rose) trust.

"It's not a job, it's a vocation, a calling"

Women languish on waiting lists for therapeutic intervention - decided to become a part of the solution, trained to do it, and became the best person she can be.

Imposter Syndrome - Is this really me? Am I good enough?

"I might come from a background of lived-experience, but I am so much more. I'm a wife, and a mum, a nan, a sister, a teacher, a learner, a friend, an auntie. I'm all these things, but right at the end of that I also happen to be a woman, who throughout her life, her childhood and early adult life, had a lot of trauma. It doesn't define who I am, because I am all those other things before it."

Equality should happen everyday, women shouldn't need just one to be celebrated
(reference to International Women's Day)

Melissa Rice - Author of 'Sobering,' and Co-host of BBC Radio 5 Live's podcast, 'Hooked'

Assumptions based upon accent - people draw assumptions of who you are and where you come from.

Identified as an alcoholic in recovery - her past understanding is that as a woman there is a lot of people-pleasing, and a lack of boundaries, and a lack of challenging bad behaviour which then becomes internalised, leading to poor self-esteem. These behaviours become entrenched.

Was able to go to university, and become a primary school teacher, felt like she had to perform as a maternal and nurturing character - felt fulfilled in some way, but it was the idea of being a 'perfect' woman - performing to this image. This led to feelings of guilt and shame when struggling with addiction, due to playing this 'role' and having this career.

“It does not matter what job you have, how much money in the bank, who you are, where you come from, addiction does not discriminate. I struggled with the shame that I was a woman who turned alcoholic at that age. Would I have been judged the way I was, if I was a man in that position?”

“Nothing anyone could say to me would be worse than some of the things I would say to myself.”

Was not eligible for public funds (access to treatment) but did manage to get into rehab based on a bursary from *Action on Addiction*. Felt very vulnerable, and went to a female-only service for second phase treatment. Struggled to connect with other women, because ***she felt less than a woman*** - really grew from this experience, and showed the importance of women supporting women, particularly within recovery.

Shared the same sadness and shame, because they *are* women experiencing recovery and addiction.

“I am quite open and honest, and because I can be quite sensitive but not in a way that's unprofessional but I'm just a caring person, that was seen as a weakness. I don't feel that being a compassionate caring person is a weakness.”

James Docherty - Community Justice Scotland

Grew up in a male dominated, hyper-aggressive environment. Not a safe environment to be a man who is aware of femininity. Men are unconsciously intimidated by women who carry a natural feminine power. Women often have this natural power stripped away by men.

Women carry too much stress in their culture, and men need to acknowledge this, and own this. If women could lead, then men could nurture.

There is an authenticity to being led by women, which does not happen in the same way when being led by men.

When was the last time a man opened up himself to you, openly and honestly?

“When we suppress and oppress people, you traumatise their worth.”

You shouldn't have to fight people, places, or things to demonstrate your worth.

We should continue to celebrate women, and men should have the humility to be led by women.

Fiona Duncan - Chair of The Promise Scotland, CEO of the Corra Foundation

Grown up being a rule-breaker, without being conscious about it. Directly challenged gender stereotypes - conscious of this, but not self-conscious.

Big period of childhood and early adult life - Margaret Thatcher was in power. Thatcher was someone who lowered the cadence and depth of her voice, wore neckties, and behaved in a masculine way to delineate authority. Fiona is aware of how she sometimes does things not traditional of femininity.

“Structure of work assumes that men are the main breadwinner - the sense that our operating environment is designed for men, by men.”

UN Woman on the impact of COVID - women are doing more chores, and could take the women's movement back 25 years. *Does the pandemic act a reset?*

Conscious that her childhood was not like her friend's childhood - *how many of the judgements do you carry with you forever?*

Uses her power as a CEO to create a positive work environment where people can become the best versions of themselves.

There is a risk of a person with lived-experience being defined by this experience in a professional setting, rather than accepting that there are other facets to this person. It is important to reduce the demarcation between someone who is 'professional' and someone who is 'lived experience,' as people do not automatically fall into either category, but may be someone who *is* a professional, *but* also has lived-experience.

Everything we say, and do should be guided by making the *right choices*.

Natalie Logan MacLean - CEO of SISCO

Women are naturally powerful, men are naturally forceful. Power and force collide. Hold onto your feminine power.

Personal experience:

“If you ever run back into the arms of your abuser, because they made you believe it was the safest place to be. I have. Until..

‘I got strong, that thing called power’

People didn't like that I found my voice, that I could speak up for myself.

Men are threatened by powerful, and strong women - especially when using their power to give the voiceless, a voice.

To any man who harmed me, criticised me, or judged me... I forgive you.”

Q&A and audience comments

Moir

To all of you who have spoken tonight, it has been amazing listening to you. Shouldered a lot of guilt from being partially blamed by her son for his addiction.

Women traditionally have been relegated to a large extent, and careers have suffered, “I have always felt that we lose momentum because we are the child-bearers - making the choice between dealing with the criticism of being a working mum, versus a woman who stays at home raising the children also deals with criticism - how do we deal this?.”

Importance of teaching our daughters, and granddaughters how to be a woman.

Malcolm

Didn't grow up knowing how to deal with emotions, and emotional situations. The 'feminine' side buries itself due to gangs and the outside environment. The lifestyle that was lived, you couldn't show that side of yourself.

Bringing up his daughters to know that they can achieve anything in this world.

Andrew

His company is tailoring job applications more towards women i.e flexibility, people who are single parents.

As a gay man, he can identify with some of the points made by the panellists, in terms of oppression, and professional experiences (lack of diversity, and representation).

- Fiona: In Corra, huge things are put in place to help with flexibility. Specific adaptations occur especially because of COVID.

Nikki

Professional with lived-experience. Also a daughter of someone who does not see themselves as a strong woman. Watched her mum being controlled by her dad. Her mum was told she wasn't good enough, and the legacy of this trauma is clear. Nikki tried to empower her mum from an early age, which came across as being cheeky.

Nikki was empowered by a nursery teacher to go to college. This differed to the familial expectations that were placed on her.

As we move on, all we can do is keep chipping away at inequality.

Uses her power and influence to help the next generation.

ENDS
