

The Environmental Fundraiser's Handbook

Building community and wellbeing

[00:00:00] **Natasha:** Hello, and welcome to The Environmental Fundraisers Handbook, a video miniseries from the Environmental Funders Network and the Green [00:00:15] Fundraisers Forum. This is a series about why environmentalism isn't broken, it's broke. I'm Natasha Ratter and I run the Green Fundraisers Forum. And from looking after this community, I know that the need for funding has never been [00:00:30] greater, and yet fundraisers are navigating a system that is stuck, shaped by scarcity, closed doors, and short term thinking.

[00:00:38] **Natasha:** This series is here to surface honest, peer led conversations about what actually works in environmental fundraising [00:00:45] and how to do it without burning out. We're recording here in The Onion Garden in Westminster, London, a small patch of green in the middle of a busy city, which feels like a very fitting place for these important conversations.

[00:00:58] **Natasha:** So wherever you are joining [00:01:00] from, you are very welcome. Let's get to it.

[00:01:02] **Natasha:** One of the most important things I've learned during my time, both as a fundraiser and running the Green Fundraisers Forum, is how seriously burnout is affecting those, doing this work. Fundraisers are juggling a lot, writing bids, managing budgets, coordinating across teams, telling stories, building relationships, and that's before you add in the emotional weight of the job.

[00:01:25] **Natasha:** Finding support and recognising that you are not alone is a big part of [00:01:30] what we do at the Green Fundraisers Forum. We also help people find a community of peers to learn from, to ask advice, and even have a good moan with. In episode four, we explore how you can find your community, how peer support and shared [00:01:45] learning are the key to successful fundraising, and how to prioritise your wellbeing so that you don't burn out.

[00:01:52] **Natasha:** Nature needs us here for the long haul and nature needs us to be well.[00:02:00]

Meet Jo Musker-Sherwood

[00:02:01] **Natasha:** Our first guest is the wonderful Jo Musker-Sherwood activist, mother, facilitator, coach, and Founder of The Rest Of Activism. Jo supports individuals and organisations across the environment sector [00:02:15] to build healthier ways of working. As Co-lead of the Working Well Network, she also champions cultures of care, collaboration, and sustainability within environmental movements.

[00:02:27] **Natasha:** So welcome to the Fundraisers Handbook. Jo, it's [00:02:30] really lovely to have you here.

[00:02:31] **Jo:** Thank you.

[00:02:32] **Natasha:** I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about yourself. so, perhaps a bit about the journey that you've been on that has kind of led you to the work that you do now.

[00:02:43] **Jo:** Yeah. Great. Yeah, thank you for [00:02:45] having me and for that great introduction.

[00:02:46] **Jo:** I feel like I need to get that off you to use that as my bio.

[00:02:50] **Jo:** Um, yeah, so I came to climate work really young. It was my first job out of university and I think because of how urgent things are and the sense of urgency that kind of surrounds all of climate work, I found myself co-founding and leading an organisation at in my early twenties, which was just a fairly insane experience.

[00:03:15] **Jo:** Like I loved it. I felt like I was doing something really meaningful, but I was also totally and utterly ill-equipped for what I was doing. And I suppose that's one of the tough things about this work is you do find yourself doing things where you think, I haven't had the [00:03:30] training, I've not got the experience, but this is urgent, so I just have to do it.

[00:03:33] **Jo:** And I think over time, that began to take its toll on my nervous system, both in terms of like just the pressure to get it right. but also, yeah, the

feelings. Of the feeling of kind of how high [00:03:45] the stakes were, and in the end, I had this kind of really profound burnout experience. Which took me by surprise 'cause I've always been somebody, up until that point, that was like a copier and I could, yeah, kind of do anything and [00:04:00] blast my way through anything.

[00:04:01] **Jo:** And it kind of, it started with just joylessness and just noticing that I didn't feel any joy in anything. Then my body started talking to me as like couldn't shift colds and [00:04:15] viruses. And then I started to get some really serious health problems that actually landed me in hospital. And then one day I literally just couldn't get out of bed and that was it.

[00:04:22] **Jo:** I was done. and I thought I was gonna have to leave environmental work altogether. There was a funder that kind of [00:04:30] got wind basically of my situation, and they had noticed that the movement was losing so many activists and people in that space to burnout. And so they approached me and said, you know, if we fund you to [00:04:45] recover from burnout, would you use that as a kind of living experience, or a living experiment into what is gonna help people, to, to stay doing this work?

[00:04:55] **Jo:** And so that's how I ended up doing what I'm doing. That's what I've been doing since. [00:05:00]

[00:05:00] **Natasha:** Wow. Well, firstly, really appreciate, the vulnerability in sharing that. and also what an incredible example of when philanthropy gets it. Right. Oh my

[00:05:12] **Chloe:** goodness,

[00:05:13] **Laura:** yes.

[00:05:14] **Natasha:** And how [00:05:15] amazing, yeah, the right funders at the right time can be.

[00:05:19] **Natasha:** Yeah. Thank you.

[00:05:20] **Natasha:** So I know that fundraising and kind of anxiety around fundraising was a major factor in your personal experience of burnout. and so what do you feel are kind of some of the big issues when it comes to the fundraising and the funding landscape? and do you believe that there's any kind of changes that can be made to improve the culture and the wellbeing of the sector?

[00:05:45] **Jo:** That's a great question. So I think the toughest thing is being, as a fundraiser, you are the bridge between the amazing vision that your organisation has or your project has, and then the resources to actually do it. [00:06:00] It feels so much like it comes down to you personally, because especially when there's really specific projects that you're trying to get funded, and so there are a lot of factors outside of your control and you're, you're trying to figure out how to package this thing up in a way [00:06:15] that's really gonna

[00:06:16] **Jo:** give your organisation the best chance for me on to do its vision. And then you pile on top of that the fact that it's not just the work that you care about and the vision that you care about so much, but it's also, it's your salary on the line and it's the people that you care [00:06:30] about your colleague's salary on the line.

[00:06:31] **Jo:** Like when I was leading my organisation, I was the CEO, but I never had more than six months job security at a time for six years because we could only get funded one year at a time. So I was trying to run an organisation, be really [00:06:45] passionate, focus on the vision, and underneath it, thinking like, am I gonna be able to afford to live in six or seven months' time?

[00:06:51] **Jo:** One thing I would love to see shift is more openness about the fact that it's not selfish to say, we're gonna have to lose these people. We're worried about our job security. [00:07:00] Like it doesn't always have to be impact focused because if you're taking care of people, they can do better work. so yeah, and it's, it's also tough because

[00:07:10] **Jo:** you're having to make that judgement all the time within [00:07:15] yourself as a fundraiser of how far of your own integrity you are actually willing to like let go a little bit so you know that you can tweak things, tweak the truth a little bit. At the worst point in my fundraising [00:07:30] journey when I was under

the most pressure, I'd walk into a room and I would just see figures over people's heads of how much money I might be able to get from this funder or that funder.

[00:07:36] Jo: And I felt horrible about myself for thinking in that way. And the dehumanising, effect of being under that kind of [00:07:45] pressure, the work that I do of trying to foster relationships between grant makers and grantees, like it isn't all on the grant maker. Like a lot of it is on the grant maker to. Think about funding in a more long-term way, reduce the amount of [00:08:00] reporting that's required

[00:08:02] Jo: try to be responsive to the needs of, of, of the grantee. But there's also something about grantees taking that courageous and bold step to be more authentic with funders, to really [00:08:15] ask for what they need. When you connect on that human level with funders, actually much better conversations happen.

[00:08:23] Jo: It was much better for my wellbeing. It was much better for the work. Actually found that I was like, just as successful with [00:08:30] fundraising and, and it's not always safe or it doesn't always feel safe to do that but wherever you can, I think it just takes the pressure off a bit.

[00:08:38] Natasha: Absolutely.

[00:08:39] Natasha: I wanted to also ask about, eco anxiety, and the role that that kind of has played in your experience.

[00:08:48] Natasha: 'cause I remember a few years ago when, when that word kind of hit into the mainstream and actually was sort of ridiculed, I think, or that was my impression, but I really saw myself in it. and I [00:09:00] thought, oh, there's a name for what I'm. Feeling that I was also sort of seeing it a bit derided. and I thought, okay, I'm just gonna have to, internalise this maybe.

[00:09:11] Natasha: but yeah, and increasingly as I have gone through my work and my [00:09:15] life, I, I, I just, I can't anymore. I feel deep grief and, yeah. fear, it

[00:09:25] Jo: does that to you, doesn't it? You're

[00:09:26] **Natasha:** just like, no words awareness

[00:09:27] **Jo:** so scared.

[00:09:28] **Natasha:** Yeah. And [00:09:30] that sort of sit alongside irrational hope and all kinds of things and joy as well.

[00:09:34] **Natasha:** But I wanted to ask specifically about eco anxiety within the context of this work.

[00:09:40] **Jo:** Yeah. I think. so eco-anxiety? [00:09:45] Yes. I quite often talk about as eco distress, because it's, it's anxiety, but it's also all those emotions that you were talking about and also numbness and shock and paralysis and I suppose the, the dis like for a lot of [00:10:00] us

[00:10:00] **Jo:** something that soothes eco-distress or eco-anxiety is doing something about it. But of course, that is exactly the kind of conditions that lead to burnout. Actually understanding how to work with your own emotions and your nervous system, I feel [00:10:15] is it's not like a soft skill, it's an essential skill. And there's all sorts of frameworks for doing that. One that I really love is the idea of grief tending. So the idea that the grief and the distress that we feel about the world rather than [00:10:30] being something that we need to put in a box and shove away, is something that we can actually learn the skills to get out the box, work with lovingly, tend to it like it's a garden.

[00:10:39] **Jo:** It's a real skill. Grief tending. You have to build up your own capacity, your own nervous system [00:10:45] capacity, know how to safely enter, know how to hold space with others, know how, then to like soothe it again, so you're not going back into the world in a raw way. And there's, there's other frameworks as well, like I love Joanna Macy's, 'Active Hope'.

[00:10:56] **Jo:** Yeah. Joanna Macy's philosophy is, hope isn't something that you have or don't, [00:11:00] it's something you cultivate so you pick, you know what it is you stand for, what it, what it is that gets you out of bed in the morning. Actually, your sense of a okayness comes from that deep place inside yourself of I know what I stand for.

[00:11:11] Jo: I know why I'm here.

[00:11:13] Natasha: I love that answer. [00:11:15] And I quite recently read Active Hope by Joanna Macy and it kind of burst my world open in the best possible way. yeah, the idea of active hope and exploring that question of what is mine to do. Yes. [00:11:30] and I was also, like had the privilege of my life recently to introduce to interview Robin Wall Kimmerer, who wrote Braiding Sweetgrass, and

[00:11:39] Natasha: she was asked that question of hope and her answer as well was, well, if someone is sick in [00:11:45] hospital, I might hope that they get better, but actually I want to be there. I want to bring them food, I want to bring them medicine. I want to hold their hand. And actually what that is, is love. Yeah. and the proactivity of, [00:12:00] of love.

[00:12:01] Natasha: which was also a really nice, it's, it's sort of the same idea of Active Hope.

[00:12:07] Jo: I love that I have goosebumps.

[00:12:10] Natasha: Um, so people working within environmental groups and within [00:12:15] activism tell us that, and we can see for ourselves as well that the, the culture is really defined by urgency, and crisis after crisis.

[00:12:25] Natasha: so how can environmental fundraisers kind of sustain themselves [00:12:30] emotionally and physically as well in this kind of poly-crisis, urgency, challenging context.

[00:12:37] Jo: Yeah, so definitely, definitely. The first thing I'd say is looking into those [00:12:45] frameworks that help you metabolise the distress that you're feeling, because that is

[00:12:49] Jo: that is driving each of our individual nervous systems into urgency and chaos and, panic. Another thing is, is obviously your own [00:13:00] self-care and your own boundaries and figuring out what is it that fills up your cup, what is it that drains your cup disproportionately? And, and you've gotta think of yourself as a balanced system.

[00:13:11] Jo: Like if there's more going out then there [00:13:15] is coming in, you're gonna burn out. Like it's simple. And, and as well, like I'd encourage everyone to have a bit of a backup plan for if they can't do this work anymore. What are you doing with yourself? Knowing what you would do if you [00:13:30] weren't doing this work, what your backup plan is to be able to give yourself a bit of rest or whatever it might be.

[00:13:35] Jo: Like burnout can come for anyone, come for anyone I think is such an important thing because it actually reduces your stress levels. Gosh,

[00:13:43] Natasha: one interesting [00:13:45] question to ask yourself as well, and straight away I am realising how attached to this identity of environmentalist I am. Yeah. and where that's okay

[00:13:56] Natasha: and where that, might be causing a [00:14:00] problem.

[00:14:00] Natasha: Being in community seems to be a very kind of core, value core theme within your wellbeing work. why, why is this kind of so important to you? This aspect of being in community?

[00:14:14] Jo: I [00:14:15] think for at least two reasons. The first is the more we understand about the human nervous system, the more we're coming to realise that

[00:14:26] Jo: it's not the absence of threat that [00:14:30] makes us feel safe. It's actually what makes our nervous systems feel most safe is the presence of being connected to the people around us, like who we're gonna go through the hard thing with. So it is essentially co-regulation, like we're taught all the time about [00:14:45] self-regulation, but actually our nervous systems are so wired for relationship that

[00:14:49] Jo: it's so much easier for us to access co-regulation. This idea of you are in distress or you're struggling, I can lend you my nervous system 'cause I'm doing okay. But the second thing is for me, [00:15:00] from an impact perspective in the work that we do, when we take that time to build our relationships and our trust with each other, when the pressure is then on, we know how to work with each other.

[00:15:10] Jo: So for me, taking that time to invest in people, it's great for wellbeing, but also [00:15:15] for work under high stress. It's actually creating the infrastructure for work to be able to happen and not just get tripped up by interpersonal issues.

[00:15:23] Natasha: Yeah, absolutely. And I've felt that in practise, in some of the work that we've done together and being part of your [00:15:30] sessions where, quite a lot of the time is spent

[00:15:33] Natasha: building relationships and creating safety, which some, which, which in our culture we can struggle to see as work. And so sometimes [00:15:45] feels a bit uncomfortable. And then, and then it's amazing how the work happens.

[00:15:50] Natasha: I wanted to ask a bit about, I guess like the, some of the tools that you use, and I know you've spoken a bit about that already, but one of the things I've been very drawn to in terms of your philosophy is thinking about it both, well, from a threefold kind of area of, you know.

[00:16:10] Natasha: Individual things that you can do as an individual. things that, [00:16:15] you can do at an organisational level, but also, thinking about the systemic level. Because we can do as much work on ourselves, but if the systems at play are still harmful, then we're not getting to the root of [00:16:30] the problem.

[00:16:31] Natasha: so yeah. I was wondering if you could talk a bit more about that approach to wellbeing.

[00:16:36] Jo: So on that sort of organisational and structural level, I feel like even now there's still so [00:16:45] much shame around saying that we're struggling and saying that we can't, and saying that we're human beings as well, like

[00:16:52] Jo: the more that we're able to open up and have these discussions and accept our humanness and our weaknesses and our flaws and the things that we [00:17:00] can't, is also valuable to the work, actually, the more we are able to bring more of ourselves to what we do. So on an individual level, there's six gr words that I often work with, when I'm supporting someone with burnout.

[00:17:14] Jo: And [00:17:15] I, for me, they're like the pillars of burnout recovery. So the first is grace, which is around rest. The second is grounding. So like our brains get so tired thinking about this stuff all the time. How can we come into the body move movement, mindfulness, that kind of thing. [00:17:30] the next is gratitude.

[00:17:31] Jo: Like where's, where's joy? Where's, where's those sparks of things that make you think I'm actually grateful to be alive rather than this is just a constant slog. growth is the next one. So thinking like where are you finding your [00:17:45] meaning? What's the thing that's getting out of bed in morning? The active hope thing as well.

[00:17:48] Jo: If we feel like what we're doing is making a difference, that is gonna enable us to keep going way more than just going through the motions with something. Grief we've already touched on. So I, I [00:18:00] love that Adrienne Rich quote of like, we all need people with whom we can sit down and cry and be counted as warriors.

[00:18:05] Jo: Like, where can we just let it all go? And the final one is group, like who are our people? So those, those six things, if someone was putting together a burnout, prevention or recovery [00:18:15] plan, it'd be like, look at each of those and see what you can do.

[00:18:18] Natasha: Yeah. Amazing.

[00:18:19] Natasha: Um, and I wanted to, ask you to talk a little bit about your, the things that you offer, so maybe The Rest of Activism, the Working Well Network, because the, the tools that you have are so incredible.

[00:18:35] Natasha: So yeah, just a, a chance thank you to shout out some of the amazing, work that you do and programmes that you run?

[00:18:42] Jo: Yeah. Yeah. So the first thing would be the first [00:18:45] place to go is the Working Well Network because it's a, a free open network to anybody who wants to explore what we've been talking about.

[00:18:52] Jo: And it's a chance to come together with other like-minded people and figure out what, what is gonna help us work well, both in terms of [00:19:00]

wellbeing, but also in, in, in terms of impact. And then taking that back to, to, to their places of work or their places of influence, trying things out. Coming back again to people where it feels safe in that environment to to have another go [00:19:15] at figuring out how we can work well.

[00:19:17] **Jo:** So that would be the first resource. And then, yeah, through The Rest of Activism, I also work with people one-to-one to support them if they're experiencing burnout or they just wanna find a different way of working, or they're feeling at a bit of a crossroads and they don't [00:19:30] really know where to go.

[00:19:32] **Jo:** And so yeah, that's called The Rest of Activism. And then the final layer, I guess, is that big structural layer of working with grant-makers. If they're wanting to find different ways of, funding to create the [00:19:45] conditions for this kind of work to happen and to create culture within which kind of creative and collaborative work can happen, then that's, that's something else that I do.

[00:19:54] **Natasha:** Wonderful. thank you so much, Jo. I always feel like after a chat with you, I just feel like I've had a, [00:20:00] a big exhale. just, yeah, really calm, really soothed, but also really, really inspired. and yeah, talking about somebody who has kind of figured out what is theirs to do, you feel like someone who's really found your [00:20:15] purpose and, yeah, it's really.

[00:20:17] **Natasha:** Very inspiring to watch, so thank you so much for joining us. Thank you.

Meet Mohamed Towhasir

[00:20:25] **Natasha:** I'm so pleased to introduce our second guest, Mohamed Towhasir. [00:20:30] Mohamed is the Chief Executive of Become United, a charity running projects for marginalised communities in Greater Manchester, and reconnecting local communities with nature. Welcome, Mohammed. Thank

[00:20:42] **Laura:** you.

[00:20:43] **Natasha:** So I was wondering if you could start by [00:20:45] telling us a little bit about yourself.

[00:20:46] **Natasha:** So from growing up in Rochdale and working in the NHS to then co-founding Become United, yeah. Can you tell us a bit about that journey?

[00:20:57] **Mohammed:** Yeah. So, my father came [00:21:00] first generation in the, about the 1960s. so you came from Bangladesh, so it's quite a green area. I grew up in the nineties. I was quite fortunate.

[00:21:09] **Mohammed:** I was always out as a child. There was no obviously social media, no internet, so I was always playing out. [00:21:15] and then I fell into the wrong crowd. I started messing about, and then when I turned about 18, I, fortunately I came across a youth worker and he supported me in terms of changing my life around, and that's one of the reasons why I always want to give back to the [00:21:30] community.

[00:21:31] **Mohammed:** I then, graduated and then started a role in, NHS. I moved around and then just before covid I was in a trust that it was a mental health trust and that was a big eye opener for me personally. 'cause it gave me a lot of, [00:21:45] emphasis and on wellbeing for myself and for my family. I was actually in a team that investigated suicide, so it's quite

[00:21:53] **Mohammed:** it's quite intense. but it was a big eye opener for me. And then suddenly when covid kicked in, suicides increased, [00:22:00] so I had to leave for my own sanity. and then in 2022, I co-founded Become United with another colleague, and we set up to work across Greater Manchester, to work with the BME communities to bring about, engagement outdoors, especially with young people.[00:22:15]

[00:22:15] **Natasha:** Become United isn't framed as a kind of traditional environmental organisation, but nature and kind of access to the outdoors are clearly very central to your work. so why do you feel it's important [00:22:30] for kind of young. People and the families that you work with to have that kind of nature connection?

[00:22:36] **Mohammed:** Yeah, there's a few things. So in Greater Manchester, we are actually quite fortunate in terms of, we've got amazing green spaces and blue spaces, so we've got a lot of [00:22:45] reservoirs, canals, a lot of parks, beautiful areas, but you, you wouldn't see many people of colour in those spaces. So what

we've tried to do is have, people of colour lead our sessions, and understand the sessions.

[00:22:57] Mohammed: And for me personally, what kind of wakes me up every [00:23:00] day is. A lot of our service users, it's like the first time they've attended, green spaces and a lot of them have gone on to attend themselves. And we work in the most deprived areas in the UK as well. And personally for us as an organisation, our [00:23:15] ambition is to get people to engage with outdoors, to help improve the help, but also wellbeing.

[00:23:20] Mohammed: And I personally believe if they're outdoors more and they have that space, 'cause even for myself when I'm outdoors, that's when I get a lot more ideas and it gives me time to reflect. [00:23:30] And I think that's, that's powerful.

[00:23:32] Natasha: Yeah, I agree. And I was reading, some research from the Nature Connection Network about how that nature connection is so important, not only just for

[00:23:44] Natasha: [00:23:45] wellbeing, but also for like a sense of, purpose, and personal development. And then also it just sort of automatically leads to pro-environmental behaviour. So it's just such a brilliant thing.

[00:23:57] Natasha: Um, and you've, you've spoken before about the environmental sector, feeling quite disconnected from the communities that you work with, particularly in the North of England.

[00:24:11] Natasha: so what has your experience been kind of [00:24:15] entering environmental fundraising spaces? And maybe what changes do you think would sort of help, make those particular communities feel more welcome and more represented?

[00:24:29] Mohammed: Yeah. So with [00:24:30] ourselves, I wouldn't say we're like an outright environmental climate organisation, but almost majority of our work is to get people outdoors and engage with the outdoors.

[00:24:39] Mohammed: so I think what's worked for us well is we've had that cultural understanding and understand the barriers, and I [00:24:45] think that's key. We actually just started off just running activities for children between the age of five and twelve. And that was intentional 'cause we knew that if the children enjoy it, which way they will, the parents will be forced along.

[00:24:55] Mohammed: So we've kind of got that knock on effect. But in terms of the environmental [00:25:00] sector and the fundraising, the North of England, I always say this is a big disconnect between the North and the South. There isn't many organisations, especially BME-led organisations that do outright environmental work.

[00:25:11] Mohammed: So there isn't that support available, locally and that, that, that, [00:25:15] that needs to change, I believe if we wanna start seeing more, people of colour engaging with the outdoors and those types of things. But, we've been quite fortunate where we've, joined the EFN. I think that's helped us a lot.

[00:25:26] Mohammed: Yeah. Otherwise, I think yeah, we would've struggled a lot more.

[00:25:29] Natasha: One thing that [00:25:30] just really stands out, about your story and also just, having met you and, and, just kind of seen your journey over the last few months yeah. is that you really intentionally build relationships, [00:25:45] you know, you seek mentors and allies and join collaborative networks.

[00:25:52] Natasha: so what advice would you kind of give to fundraisers, or grassroots leaders yeah who are trying to [00:26:00] find their community and maybe build confidence in those spaces?

[00:26:04] Mohammed: Yeah, I think what's worked for Become United is, I think, as a team we've been quite open and I feel like that's, that first step of just being open and understanding what is it that you need [00:26:15] and that clear ask.

[00:26:16] Mohammed: So whenever we've been attending events or even like networking and those opportunities, having that clear ask, so.

[00:26:23] Mohammed: I think that's worked really well. But personally I felt like because we spoke to people, nationally, that helped. 'cause there was that kind of, there wasn't that competition barrier I felt like.

[00:26:34] Mohammed: so that clear ask helped a lot. And also just, I also have that motto that if you don't ask, you don't get. And also. I would, I would always ask like, this is the work that we do, would you recommend [00:26:45] introducing us to any organisations or people that you think that will support our work? And I, I personally believe that question has literally like boosted our work and has not had a knock on effect.

[00:26:57] Mohammed: We've been introduced to so many people because [00:27:00] of that. I've probably met about a thousand people in the last, I've just been in it about three or four years now, and yeah, probably like 70, 80% of that hasn't been worthwhile, but I, I believe that that 30% has made the, the, the, the rest of it [00:27:15] really successful and worthwhile.

[00:27:17] Natasha: Yeah. Amazing. A very natural networker. Yeah. it's amazing.

[00:27:22] Natasha: Um, you recently attended our Green Fundraisers Forum Nature Retreat in Stroud at Hawkwood College. and I wondered if you had any kind of reflections on the importance of, I guess nature connection, community and wellbeing for environmental fundraisers and for community leaders right now?

[00:27:45] Mohammed: Yeah, definitely. I think. I think what's happening now is, especially in the environmental and outdoor sector, leaders find the ti, find the, find the struggle to find that time to reconnect with outdoors, even though we work in the [00:28:00] sector. And I think it's very vital that we spend that time. I think 'cause life is just so busy and yeah, there's always things to do.

[00:28:08] Mohammed: I think it's very important that we take that time out, to spend that time in nature. Yeah. To be honest, it was amazing that space [00:28:15] specifically, it was a perfect two days and a lot of learning.

[00:28:18] **Natasha:** And if you could kind of go back in time to the very, sort of start of your journey with Become United, is there one piece of advice [00:28:30] that you would maybe give yourself when it comes to fundraising?

[00:28:33] **Mohammed:** I think there's two things probably. One is just be brave in terms of have like, have a mission and just go with it. We were quite ambitious actually, because we wanted to work across [00:28:45] Greater Manchester, and that's quite a large area. It's ten boroughs and three million people. So yeah, for a small charity, that was quite ambitious, but we had a clear, ambition because of the reason for the needs and the learning to be shared in those areas.

[00:28:57] **Mohammed:** So to be brave one and number two [00:29:00] is look nationally. I think if I, I think we focused a lot on local, funding, but also local support and I think because there isn't a lot of, outright BME-led organisations, there wasn't those role [00:29:15] models or those potential support. And I feel like later, like now, we've managed to bring a lot of allies nationally, that support our work.

[00:29:24] **Mohammed:** And that's been powerful. And I feel like if we did that in the beginning, we would've probably, we would've grown a [00:29:30] lot more faster. We did, we did actually grow faster than we expected, but we would've probably grown even faster. Yeah.

[00:29:36] **Natasha:** So a question, for you, as somebody who kind of has, I guess, fresh eyes coming into this sector, into the world of [00:29:45] fundraising, into the charity space, environmental space, yeah.

[00:29:50] **Natasha:** what would you change about it, I guess? what, what feels like it's working well? What feels like [00:30:00] it, you know, we need to find different ways of, yeah doing this work?

[00:30:05] **Mohammed:** Yeah. I always say this, I think it's that still that North and South disconnect and I feel like we, there needs to be a lot more, 'cause a lot of the events not just in environmental sector and the whole, [00:30:15] nonprofit sector is, is very, London centric.

[00:30:19] Mohammed: So it's about how do we get more of that in the North of England and then also. The second point is there isn't much diversity and a majority of events [00:30:30] or, conferences I attend, I'm usually the only person of colour and male as well. But also we know the environment, climate sector is the least diverse sectors, in the, in the, in the UK, but more so in the North of England.

[00:30:43] Mohammed: How do we get diverse communities [00:30:45] into those sectors? Become United is something we we're trying to do to change that. But yeah, hopefully I think it's changing, but it's not fast enough.

[00:30:54] Natasha: Thank you Mohammed, so much and yeah, your work feels really, really important, particularly [00:31:00] today. and yeah, wishing you all the best with your continued, work with Become United and thank you so much for joining us on The Fundraisers Handbook.

[00:31:09] Mohammed: Yeah, likewise. Thank you.

Meet Laura Perratt

[00:31:14] Natasha: [00:31:15] So what can I say about our next guest? Laura Perratt is one of our Green Fundraisers Forum champions, an incredibly generous fundraiser who thrives off of building community and creating safe spaces for people to [00:31:30] learn, get inspired, and support each other. Laura, who is a Fundraising Consultant with Prospect & Pitch is also a Green Fundraisers Forum subgroup leader running a monthly informal online group called 'Seed and Share', which provides a welcoming [00:31:45] space for environmental fundraisers to chat through the challenges and opportunities they're meeting in their day-to-day work.

[00:31:51] Natasha: So welcome, Laura. It's lovely to have you here.

[00:31:54] Laura: Yeah, thank you. And thank you so much for inviting me. It feels like a real. Privilege.

[00:31:58] Natasha: Oh, it's our privilege for [00:32:00] sure.

[00:32:00] **Natasha:** Um, so Laura, you have described yourself as having fallen into fundraising by accident and then spending more than a decade building a career across international development, education and environmental charities.

[00:32:16] **Natasha:** So what was it about the environment sector that kind of drew you in?

[00:32:22] **Laura:** Thank you. yeah, I think when I speak to fundraisers, it's surprising, well, maybe not surprising how many people [00:32:30] say that they fell into fundraising by accident. and I'm definitely one of them. I think the environmental sector and, nature in general is, is something that I'm really, really passionate about.

[00:32:44] **Laura:** [00:32:45] And I knew, probably as I was leaving uni, that I really wanted to pursue a career in the, climate and nature space. I think, my, my faith has quite a lot to do with it. I believe that we're [00:33:00] all stewards of this planet. We share this planet with so many amazing creatures, and it's our duty to look after it.

[00:33:09] **Laura:** And I just noticed in environmental charities particularly, [00:33:15] it's. People coming together to work together for a cause that they really care about. and I really wanted to make a difference.

[00:33:26] **Natasha:** Yeah, I love that. And yeah, as soon as I met you, I could [00:33:30] definitely feel a lot of the passion and the love for nature that came really naturally to you.

[00:33:35] **Natasha:** How important was community at that stage in your career? And what difference did it make to kind of feel connected to other people and maybe [00:33:45] to people who like just get it?

[00:33:47] **Laura:** Hmm. Thank you. I mean, community's always been really important to me. I think it, it's like it's an ecosystem, isn't it? I think is the best way to explain it.

[00:33:57] **Laura:** We can't work in isolation. We [00:34:00] can't grow on our own. We need different different things connecting us together so we can all

grow together. And, as a sole fundraiser, particularly working in a brand new charity with no track record of [00:34:15] fundraising, there was no one at all to answer those questions, so the only place I could go to get the answers to my questions

[00:34:24] **Laura:** was a community of people who had the answers. and what you [00:34:30] said about getting it, I think we can often feel very lonely in our role as a fundraiser because from my experience anyway, and. people don't always know what a fundraiser is or what a fundraiser [00:34:45] does, so what works for one fundraiser and one charity won't work for another fundraiser in another charity.

[00:34:53] **Laura:** And, I just thought I am. In this role, creating the culture of fundraising from [00:35:00] scratch. And I wanted as many different experiences as possible to learn what would work best in the organisation that I work for. So it's very, give and take.

[00:35:13] **Natasha:** Yeah, [00:35:15] absolutely.

[00:35:17] **Natasha:** And at the moment the, the kind of fundraising landscape feels particularly challenging.

[00:35:23] **Natasha:** so from kind of cost of living pressures, on the one hand reduced public funding, and [00:35:30] then this whole new challenge of ai, do you use it, how do you use it? and also maybe sort of changing trust in charities. So what, what shifts are you kind of sensing in this sector and how can [00:35:45] communities of

[00:35:45] **Natasha:** fundraisers really help each other kind of adapt rather than go into panic mode?

[00:35:51] **Laura:** I think you've kind of described all the main things that are happening and it feels, particularly for me anyway, since covid, because technology [00:36:00] has just rapidly exploded, as you said, with with AI, but also being able to connect so much more easily with video conferencing and being so totally aware of what's going on around the world [00:36:15] all the time can leave this sense of, almost hopelessness and feeling like we can't keep up

[00:36:24] **Laura**: we're constantly firefighting, we're constantly trying to adapt, and the narrative can get very, very negative and [00:36:30] fall into this kind of doom and gloom. And I think as a community of fundraisers, we need to try and change the lens on that narrative and try and shift it so we say, yes, [00:36:45] things are changing, but maybe that means that we need to change too, because the way that we are doing things now isn't working anymore for the way that things are changing.

[00:36:57] **Laura**: So what can we do? How can we help each [00:37:00] other to learn to adapt? What's working, what's not working? Can only do it by learning from other people.

[00:37:07] **Natasha**: Amazing. Thank you. It's more about those kind of bigger picture qualities, like the [00:37:15] episode titles, you know, telling stories, building relationships, seeing the bigger picture.

[00:37:19] **Natasha**: Yeah. That seems to be, you know, if you can adopt those, you can be agile enough to change with the very quickly changing times.

[00:37:28] **Natasha**: Um, Seed and Share. the monthly online group that you run has really struck a chord with people, because it creates a kind of very friendly, informal, supportive atmosphere.

[00:37:41] **Natasha**: so you are very good at holding spaces. So [00:37:45] can you tell us what you think kind of, allows people to feel safe enough to kind of ask questions, share challenges, and kind of have really honest conversations with each other?

[00:37:56] **Laura**: Thank you. That's really kind of you, by the way. [00:38:00] yeah, I think I'm, I'm a huge fan of authenticity.

[00:38:03] **Laura**: I wonder if maybe people are scared of saying, I don't know the answer to this because we feel like we have to have the answers. and I think in Seed and Share [00:38:15] I am I really, really try to create an environment where people don't feel they have to have the answers and actually not having the answers is a good thing because it means that you can be really open-minded and willing to listen and hear other people.

[00:38:29] **Laura:** [00:38:30] There are no right or wrong answers. It's just about sharing what our experiences are and just gradually making people feel comfortable. What I love about Seed and Share is there are so many different experiences. People come from all sorts of different backgrounds and [00:38:45] sectors and different charities.

[00:38:46] **Laura:** Totally informal, and I just kind of hope that that creates a space where people feel like they're not being judged, they're just being accepted for who they are.

[00:38:54] **Natasha:** Oh, it definitely does. And we get such amazing feedback from your sessions. Yeah, that's [00:39:00] exactly the space you create where people go, oh, okay

[00:39:03] **Natasha:** maybe I know more than I think I know. And also maybe there's still lots to learn as well.

[00:39:08] **Laura:** Yeah, and I, there's something in that again, about authenticity and like we can help people by saying, [00:39:15] I dunno the answer to this. And like because other people think that we have the answers, but we don't have the answers.

[00:39:23] **Laura:** So by saying, actually I don't have the answer, they're like, oh, oh, but oh, okay. Oh, I thought [00:39:30] you knew everything ever. But oh, you don't. Okay. You are, you are just a, a normal, humble human being, just like me. And I think if more people, are brave enough to accept that, then we can. We can create this kind of [00:39:45] environment where we kind of all know, actually no one really knows all the answers, but I, I'm, I'm an expert at this little sphere and I'm gonna own that and I'm gonna be confident in my knowledge here, while also accepting that that [00:40:00] person over there is an expert at this.

[00:40:02] **Laura:** And it, again, it's just like helping each other, isn't it?

[00:40:05] **Natasha:** Yeah. Absolutely. I couldn't agree more.

[00:40:09] **Natasha:** So what, what's an example of one of your favourite, seed and share sessions?

[00:40:15] **Laura:** Ooh. I mean, they're all brilliant, obviously. I think that, I think there's probably two that spring to mind. we did one about, ethical fundraising and [00:40:30] due diligence.

[00:40:30] **Laura:** How do we get that balance? How do we make sure that the gifts we're accepting aren't actively going against the work that we're doing? so that was an interesting one. And then the other one was about, AI and how people who use AI. [00:40:45] and I think the reason they were both really fascinating was because, people came from so many different perspectives and I think they're quite, they're not questions, but the

[00:40:59] **Laura:** black and white, [00:41:00] yes or no answer. So yeah, I think those were two of the best ones.

[00:41:04] **Natasha:** Yeah, definitely. I remember very lively conversation and some really, really interesting perspectives.

[00:41:10] **Natasha:** So you have recently, joined a fundraising consultancy. I think that's such an interesting job where you get to peek into lots of different charities and organisations and

[00:41:23] **Natasha:** fundraising teams. What are some of the the key things that you've learned in the last year, [00:41:30] over that transition into consultancy?

[00:41:33] **Laura:** I think how every charity is so different and they're all coming from completely different places. Nothing we do is off the shelf. [00:41:45] It's all bespoke. And I think probably a lot of freelancers and consultants will find this in the charity sector.

[00:41:50] **Laura:** You can't really have an off the shelf model to creating a strategy or you can have a kind of methodology, but every organisation is so different that, so I think it just helps [00:42:00] develop your knowledge of like where the gaps are and how you can connect people within that ecosystem.

[00:42:05] **Natasha:** And so many fundraisers are struggling with burnout.

[00:42:10] **Natasha:** so how, how do you look after your wellbeing whilst doing this work? [00:42:15]

[00:42:15] **Laura:** Mm. I think it kind of goes back to what I was saying before about knowing where your gifts lie, knowing what you can do, but knowing what you can't do. We want to give, we want to play our part, so we feel like it's all on us to fix the problem.[00:42:30]

[00:42:30] **Laura:** And I've learned that it's really important to recognise where actually it's not in our gift and we have to lay our lines in the sand and say, these are the [00:42:45] things that I can do. These are the things that I can't do or that I need help with, or maybe I can do, but I have to do it later. And we have to be okay with that actually.

[00:42:56] **Laura:** We need to learn that we're not letting people down, we're just doing [00:43:00] our very best. There's a little sign out there. What does it say? It says something like, 'It's okay to stop. The world can wait.' And I think that's really important. Like we need to take time to, [00:43:15] if we're giving so much energy to something, we need to do things that give us energy.

[00:43:20] **Laura:** Whether it's going for a walk or doing some yoga or cooking a nice meal, or just taking five minutes to just stop and breathe and think [00:43:30] and write things down. Take a breath before we continue and like that's gonna be so much more helpful than continuing to power on, than just completely burning out.

[00:43:42] **Natasha:** So, last question.[00:43:45]

[00:43:45] **Natasha:** If, if an environmental fundraiser was kind of listening to this podcast and wondering, whether or not to join the Green Fundraisers Forum, what would you say about the community, your experience of it, why it [00:44:00] matters? Yeah, over to you.

[00:44:02] **Laura:** Oh, I would say please come because you're so welcome and we want to see you.

[00:44:06] **Laura**: And I think the more people that we have supporting one another, the better. So like, don't be shy.

[00:44:12] **Natasha**: Lovely. Thank you so much, [00:44:15] Laura, for your time. and for, yeah, coming to speak to us on the podcast. it's really inspiring just to hear your kind of passion for nature and your clear love for environmental work.

[00:44:27] **Natasha**: So yeah, we really appreciate everything you do. [00:44:30]

[00:44:30] **Laura**: No, thank you. And, again, I give my energy, but I get a lot of energy back from it, so it's, it's definitely a mutual feelings. Thank you.

[00:44:43] **Natasha**: Thank you so much for [00:44:45] listening. Now, we'd love to bring in Andy and Chloe from Change in Nature to guide us through a short nature connection exercise. They will help ground us in today's themes, reflect on what we've heard, and explore how we might want to integrate some of the [00:45:00] learnings into our work.

[00:45:01] **Natasha**: This is the last episode of this miniseries. We've covered some big topics, finding your voice, understanding the bigger picture, creating meaningful relationships, and building community and wellbeing. I [00:45:15] hope you've enjoyed the series and taken away knowledge and inspiration and that you feel connected to the community that is here working alongside you.

[00:45:24] **Natasha**: Thanks again for tuning in and hope to see you over at the Green Fundraisers Forum. [00:45:30] Over to you, Andy and Chloe.

Nature Connection Exercise

[00:45:33] **Andy**: Hi, I am Andy,

[00:45:34] **Chloe**: and I'm Chloe.

[00:45:35] **Andy**: And we are Change In Nature

[00:45:37] **Chloe**: and we take environmentalists out into nature so that they can bring nature's voice back into environmentalism. [00:45:45]

[00:45:45] **Andy:** and we're back by the fire.

[00:45:47] **Andy:** This is the fourth episode, and there's a real sense of peace here. There's like a stillness in the air. Maybe you can even just sense it through the sounds, through the images, just by the centre of [00:46:00] this fire and so often we need to come to places like this 'cause we're frazzled. Like Chloe, what do you do when you're frazzled?

[00:46:09] **Chloe:** I do probably not surprisingly go out into nature and [00:46:15] either, like for a walk really helps me to just like move through a natural landscape. Or Yeah, lighting lighting a fire. When that is an option, and just sitting and gazing into the flames. I can just feel my [00:46:30] whole system just like, hmm powering down.

[00:46:36] **Andy:** Yeah. What, what would you say are the benefits?

[00:46:38] **Chloe:** I think just a real, like widening of perception and perspective. It's like I feel like I can [00:46:45] sometimes get so myopic in my life and what I'm doing and this thing's happening and this responsibility and I'm busy and someone needs something and it's like, it's like an a big, deep outbreath and in-breath as soon as I'm out in a natural landscape, [00:47:00] like, oh, like

[00:47:03] **Chloe:** my life is just one strand in this massive tapestry of things, and it's not even that relevant. It's a huge relief. Yeah.

[00:47:14] **Andy:** Yeah. It reminds me, [00:47:15] there's a quote from Mary Oliver, 'Instructions For Living A Life' and she says, 'pay attention and be astonished.' And for me, that's exactly what you just said.

[00:47:25] **Chloe:** Mm.

[00:47:25] **Andy:** It's like there's something about paying attention and also just being in awe and being [00:47:30] in wonder of the natural world.

[00:47:32] **Chloe:** Yeah.

[00:47:32] **Andy:** And it can really resource us. So there's a lot of science around entrainment, and this is the, our body naturally syncs with natural rhythms.

[00:47:43] **Chloe:** Mm.

[00:47:43] **Andy:** It's, you know, our [00:47:45] heart rate slows, we feel more at peace.

[00:47:49] **Andy:** Our immune system increases. It's a real boost for us. It's also like a boost for our creativity.

[00:47:56] **Chloe:** Yeah, and you, you really notice it as well when we run.

[00:48:00] Some of the longer camps and in settings where there's no electricity, for example. Just how your body comes back into the alignment of night and day and your circadian rhythms and actually [00:48:15] remembering that we're biological beings and there's a rhythm at which

[00:48:19] **Chloe:** we live when we're not always on under electric light bulbs, looking at shiny screens. It's like, oh yeah, now it's rest time.

[00:48:27] **Chloe:** Now it's waking time [00:48:30] and like realigning with that.

[00:48:33] **Andy:** Um, so when people are in overdrive. For example, also something we call the no zone. When you feel really depleted and you're not motivated and it's a real struggle to like keep up the [00:48:45] enthusiasm.

[00:48:46] **Andy:** Yeah. Nature can be such a resource and it helps us be in the flow zone. So this is about wellbeing, but it's, it's also really important for our work. We do our best work when we are most resourced and you know, it's not always [00:49:00] possible, is it? No, but it's something we can really work at and try to do. And there's this great framing for grounding, from Dan McTiernan, and he talks about, [00:49:15] physiological grounding.

[00:49:15] **Andy:** So this is kind of coming to a place like this, maybe even taking your shoes off, like being barefoot on the earth and really feeling the grounding, the physicality of being in nature. But there's [00:49:30] also emotional grounding.

So this is things like mindfulness or journaling, these other things we can do that really helps regulate our emotions.

[00:49:38] **Natasha:** Mm.

[00:49:39] **Andy:** And there's also existential grounding.

[00:49:41] **Natasha:** This is, oh, watch that one.

[00:49:42] **Andy:** Yeah. This is the bigger picture. This is when we're [00:49:45] really aligned with meaning and purpose. And it's also really, really important. And again, what you said about being in nature, being in the bigger picture, you know, maybe we are connected to like ancestors future generations or like the wider [00:50:00] world,

[00:50:00] **Chloe:** remembering what it's really all about.

[00:50:02] **Chloe:** In the context it's happening in.

[00:50:04] **Andy:** Exactly.

[00:50:05] **Chloe:** Yeah.

[00:50:05] **Andy:** So those three types of grounding, maybe having a go. And what we, what we recommend this week is, maybe lying on the earth or [00:50:15] sitting somewhere in nature and really trying to connect to those natural rhythms and just notice what happens internally.

[00:50:22] **Andy:** So thanks for joining us around the fire.

[00:50:25] **Andy:** We've really enjoyed it. And if you want to find out more, we're gonna have a [00:50:30] secret webpage for fundraisers. So our website is www.changeinnature.org . That's all one word / fundraisers. That's gonna be the secret link, and we're gonna put some [00:50:45] extra resources just for fundraisers and some more practises you can do at home or in nature.

[00:50:51] **Chloe:** There's your secret link, and come and join us in nature. We would love to see you there and sit around the fire with you in real [00:51:00] life.