

File name: UKLSE_CT1_SD01_001_001_0002_0001.wav

Audio quality: Great

Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (ia + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** = (ph + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode).

Moderator: It's Wednesday 29th January 2020, and I'm with Lee Eggleston and Sheila Coates. Sheila and Lee set up the South East Essex Rape and Incest helpline as a women's collective in 1984. The organisation has developed over the years to become South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre, or SERICC, for short. Sheila is the director at SERICC, and Lee is SERICC's operations manager. SERICC is now the lead partner for the Essex-wide sexual violence and abuse services, under the title Synergy Essex. Lee is also a trustee of Rape Crisis England and Wales. She is the regional representative for Rape Crisis England and Wales, representing the eastern region. Lee and Sheila are sharing their experience of working in the women's voluntary and community sector, and campaigning for women's rights, for the Sisters Doing It For Themselves archive. Hello, Lee and Sheila.

Lee: Hello.

Sheila: Hello.

Moderator: If we can begin by you telling me something about what influenced your decision to work in the sector?

Sheila: Well, I don't think it was an active decision, in the beginning. We were both involved in our local CND, our Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament group, both locally and nationally. And we met and started working around those issues. That was the beginning. And within CND, for me, Lee, I don't know about you, but that was the first time, really, that I'd seen women working together on women's issues within CND. That was the first time I saw a group of women doing something as part of a national organisation but they had their own autonomy within it. So, that was something that encouraged me to look at women's issues. While we were working with CND, we locally began to get more politicised, I would say. And took the decision, because of the information we were then accessing from the women's sector nationally, i.e., reading books and other magazines, to set up a women's group locally called TWAG. Thurrock Women's Action Group. We've always been really good at names, TWAG's a good name.

And then within that group, there was about twelve of us, we had an experience at the local cinema that was running films late at night. I think they started at about 11:00 and we didn't get out until about 1:00. And a group of us went to the cinema and got harassed by a group of guys in the cinema. We thought that they would be waiting for us when we came out. The management of the cinema didn't do anything about what was happening. So, we were

getting, like, various bits of banter and abuse and they were touching women, and it all got really stupid. But, as I said, the management didn't react. When we came out they weren't there, but we did talk about it at the following TWAG meeting. And the feeling of us all at that point was, if anything had happened it would have been our own fault, because what were we doing out late at night on our own? And that's what got us talking, really, about sexual violence, domestic violence. And when we spoke as a group and we asked if anyone had ever had anything happen to them around an assault, and we all thought we knew each other really well, women started disclosing about being flashed at, being sexually abused by fathers, domestic violence. And it was quite a shock, that we all knew each other, but we didn't know those things.

So, from that, that's when we decided to set up a service. It was from that moment. So, my memory, Lee, is we then took ourselves off to London Rape Crisis Centre, which opened, I think, in about 1973, and it was the first Rape Crisis Centre in the country. And they had got a lot of their information and training from America, where there were Rape Crisis Centres. And we went through some training with them. It wouldn't be called training now, but it was training. I think the difference was, we were just talking about issues and placing sexual violence and sexual abuse, not that those phrases were used then, in a political context. Not in a therapeutic context. It was about change. How to make change, how to enable women and girls to be safe. Anyway, we came back from that meeting and decided to set up a Rape Crisis Centre.

Lee: At the same time, there was a movement growing around Women's Aid, and the political messages that we were talking about locally were, sort of, being articulated nationally, and we hadn't seen a movement of that kind before. So, we explored the options of opening a women's refuge at the same time as opening a Rape Crisis Centre. So, not only did we not think about it as a career choice or, you know, it wasn't really part of our thinking, we weren't phased by the possibility of opening two organisations at the same time. We didn't even call them organisations then, our thinking was more about women supporting women. So, we looked at both the London Rape Crisis Centre and National Women's Aid, and we had a representative from National Women's Aid that was sitting on the board at that time, that was operating the Essex women's refuges, and she approached us to look at taking over the spaces that they'd identified in Thurrock. And at that point of our lives, Sheila had small children, I was still at school, and when we approached the council for the tenancy to run the refuge, they wouldn't let me sign it because I was under eighteen. So, I had to get my Mum to sign it, and she didn't know what she was signing, I just said, 'It's a good thing'. And we had no fear, no, kind of, worries about what we were-, We didn't have the, kind of, thinking about what was coming in the future, we were just thinking about the now. And we opened the refuge in January 1981, and I remember us all sitting there thinking, 'Well, we've opened this house. Everything's here, the beds are here'. You know, we'd equipped it, we'd fundraised for it, waiting for somebody to contact us and we thought that possibly no-one would, at that point.

Sheila: Oh how wrong we were.

Lee: And by the end of the day that building was full to capacity. And I think our training and our awareness raising, both, kind of, establishing a Rape Crisis Centre that had those roots in political activism, and working from what we'd probably describe now as an empowerment model, plus the reality of women's lives and children's lives that we were dealing with on a daily basis, gave us that grounding from the get-go in terms of where women's political and social position was. And what now we would describe as social justice, but then we didn't have the language for that. So, we don't come from an academic background. We're outside of London. We describe where we are, that you come on the train and you, kind of, go back in time and by the time you get to our stop it's about 1956. So, during the early 80s, the background really was, sort of, Bea Campbell riding around Cleveland, and some of them will go on to tell you about the books and stuff that influenced us. But, there was a backdrop, really, around-, Within the women's movement there was an uprising, but within the political environment there certainly wasn't, because we were under the Thatcher years at that point. Which Sheila and I describe as, 'The wilderness years'.

Sheila: So, where we were both working together within the refuge, the women that were in TWAG, which was the Thurrock Women's Action Group, also became part of the management team, or whatever we called it then, I can't quite remember. So, there were other women involved, but we were taking the lead, really, in the work. So, our experience and our knowledge was gained through front-line work, front-line experiences. And that worked fine. It became evident that there was a crossover between domestic violence and sexual violence, women raped by partners, ex-partners. Hence more impetus, really, to set up a Rape Crisis Centre. So, we started looking at that and the Rape Crisis Centre opened (TC 00.10.00) in 1984 in a different building. And there were more women, obviously, involved in that who were also part of the women's group. It became quite evident early on that it was more difficult to raise the profile of sexual violence and abuse compared to domestic violence. So, as Lee said, there was an approach from the council, 'We need a refuge in Thurrock'. That type of reaction to sexual violence and abuse has only really happened to us probably in the last four years, five years. It's taken that long. When we opened the Rape Crisis Centre, it opened as a helpline first. We thought that would do. We'd do a helpline. And then we were inundated, in a very short space of time. So, we were definitely providing services to meet a gap.

And then it became evident that we weren't just providing services around rape, we were also providing services for women and girls who'd experienced child sexual abuse. Which was nowhere to be heard. I think PIE existed then, the Paedophile Information Exchange. That was around the beginning of us as an organisation. So, there was some talk about sex offending against children, but it was very low-level stuff. I think PIE were campaigning for the age of consent to be reduced, so they could carry on doing what they wanted to do. So, it was difficult for Rape Crisis at the beginning, because we were inundated with calls. Obviously, women and girls were phoning and they wanted to come in and talk to us. So, it changed from a helpline to a centre. So, we started providing lots of different services. So, this is in the days where counselling as a concept didn't exist. So, our background is from a different world, really. So, this was women talking to women, women learning by each others' experience, women supporting women. So, we would run groups, and women who

were victims or survivors of various violence against women and girls issues would get together.

Then, I think it was probably late 80s, the counselling industry decided to come to the UK. So, there was a proliferation of counselling courses, therapeutic models, and what began to happen, which is still happening now, which I think is a real shame, is that individual response to an assault has become part of the therapy procedure. And it's a one-to-one reaction with a counsellor and the person. So, the group-work stuff has, sort of, fallen away, I think. And activism within groups might well have fallen away as well. It's not seen as integral to what we are providing. But I think our background, because we've been around so long, our experiences are different, so we try to hold onto that activist element. And if you weren't there and you didn't know, you wouldn't even know it existed. So, I've got a bit of a thing about the therapeutic world. I'm not saying it's all really bad, it's not, but it's taken precedence over everything else.

Moderator: One of the most significant events in the literature has been the setting up of the first refuge. What influence did that have on your activism?

Lee: I think I've said that what influenced us was more of the movement around setting up of refuges, and there's a good analysis of it in one of the books written on coercive control by-, Where he's explained that, kind of, there was a process between Women's Aid and Rape Crisis. So, in terms of the influence on us, it was more around being part of a movement.

Sheila: Oh, the guy? You mean the guy that-, It's a guy, yes. His name will come back, I'll shout it out in a minute.

Lee: It's really well written in that. So, I think where we were in the first refuge was, it wasn't really about the first refuge, it was much more about-, that the taboo had been lifted, or had started to be lifted, around domestic violence and the prevalence of it. And as Sheila has said, when we tried to do similar with sexual violence, that lid was now down, sealed and closed for the last twenty years. It's only through high-profile cases that have hit the media, and probably the Internet and the way communication is now, that we can feel the nails coming slowly out of that, kind of, lid. Around lifting the taboo.

Sheila: I think I've got a memory of-, we did attend a Women's Aid conference right early on.

Lee: We attended a few.

Sheila: Yes. But because my focus tended to shift onto sexual violence and abuse, I couldn't relate, really, into how it would impact on the work we're doing locally, because it was about domestic violence. And it all felt quite siloed. Not from the women's movement particularly, but from the statutory sector who would only see it in this very narrow definition. And you couldn't develop anything from that, really. And I don't know if that's, sort of, carried on over the years. It probably has. So, we saw everything in terms of a continuum of violence. And I don't think people, particularly policy-makers and commissioners, have got a concept of the continuum, in that there are crossovers. And we still hold onto that continuum of violence

and understand that women can experience all sorts of assaults. But the state still insists on-, So, in our case, say, we talk about victims and survivors of rape, the state treats it as one rape. You go to court, usually, over one rape. The police investigate the rape, when it's actually not just one. So, the continuum and the reality for women is still lost, even 30-odd years on. It has got a bit better, but it's still not that great.

Moderator: So, are you saying that on a personal level? The first refuge, really, you were aware of it, but it didn't have much significance?

Sheila: Yes. Not for me.

Lee: I think the first refuge didn't. I think the first Women's Aid refuge did.

Moderator: Can you explain?

Lee: I think in those days, they needed quite strong personalities to make things happen. And it was quite clear that there was a difference between individuals that may have been motivated to support women and children, as opposed to a movement that was looking at a political and a wider issue around, you know, the structural position of women and why violence happens. And I think that had the impact on us.

Sheila: So, in terms of the first refuge, what did have an impact was when we looked at Women's Aid or engaged in what Women's Aid were doing. It added to that sense of women's solidarity was really important. That was a big thing. So, it wasn't really the refuge, it was the solidarity of women, and collective working, and thinking about theory and practice. All that became really important. And has carried on, really. That's carried on to this day.

Lee: Yes. We still work with Women's Aid really closely. And the woman that originally approached us when we were in-, you know, 40 years ago, we still work with today. And she's a complete inspiration to us.

Sheila: And she's 210.

Lee: Yes, she's amazing. She was one of the original members of Women's Aid, so has maintained into her 70s that political perspective. So, yes, she is an inspiration.

Moderator: Which leads onto leadership quite nicely, in terms of who inspired you and who inspires you now? And how?

Sheila: Oh, that was a difficult question. So, one of the experiences that I had, right at the beginning-, I think Lee said I had small children when all this began, so they would have both been under five, and a partner-, So, I married when I was, God, how old was I? Sixteen? Seventeen?

Lee: Sixteen.

Sheila: And my partner was struggling with this emerging feminist understanding, bless him. So, he was really young, but of course it was then, therefore I refer to him now as '50s man.'

So, the more I understood radical feminism, different forms of feminism, patriarchy, the more difficult his life got. I found it really difficult communicating this new knowledge to him. I met a teacher (TC 00.20.00) who was part of TWAG at one point, and she said to me, now I think it was, was it Mary Daly? To read a Mary Daly book which I think was about politics of housework. It was either that or whoever wrote another book called Language. It might of been both hers I'm not sure.

Moderator: I think it was.

Sheila: So I would say Mary Daly. So I read this book and it all made sense. So much so we tore the book up and threw it out the window. But, as time went on, he adjusted to this new me and begun to get quite motivated by it all himself.

Lee: The other thing that Sheila's not saying is, because we was part of a women's group and we probably now it would be seen as probably encounter therapy or something like that. But when Sheila described the fact that he had ripped the book up we all, the whole group went round there to talk to him about that experience. So, like the personal he's not and the political those old phrases from the 70s. We lived that so things like keeping secrets or how you share things have influenced our ways of working from that point. So the individual women that we've kind of read or went and met or spoken to or had a connection with is-, we was trying to think of a list so we could just say 'this is the list for the tape' and we was-,

Sheila: I've got a bit of a list.

Lee: We've picked our top ones haven't we?

Sheila: So, obviously if I'm talking 60's, 70's formative years really, Germaine Greer has got to be top of the tree because she was everywhere. Because she was part of the hippy underground as well but she had politics. She really stood out for me. Anything she wrote I was just, I was there all the time. Anything she was on TV or whatever so Germaine Greer was really important. Kate Millett wrote Sexual Politics which I thought was fantastic. Angela Davis, I knew about Angela Davis obviously because of civil rights in the states. Again she was a really strong, powerful woman. Bea Campbell. Not sure what Bea was writing at that time.

Lee: Anything.

Sheila: Anything she said or wrote we were just 'yes'. So she could sum it up in a really simplistic way and in a really powerful way. Gloria Steinem. Bell Hooks. This is the list.

Lee: And then we, in 1996, cause one of the things that was difficult for us was not having any money. So getting to anything, doing anything. So when we talk about running our organisation and services we're talking like minuscule like SERICC set up with £64 from a jumble sale. I think the refuge set up with 100 quid from a jumble sale. Very small amounts of money.

Sheila: Very interesting though Lee how the State, as in the council, wanted the refuge open but wouldn't give it any money.

Lee: Yes. So our-, the things that we wanted to do or go and see or be part of, London was a really big deal for us to get up there, to get the money to get up there. So we've-, and at that point the trains were not like they are today. So if we went up there for an evening event we stayed up there in the doorways or wherever because we couldn't get back. We had to wait for the milk trains. That really impacted on what we could get involved in and what we couldn't. In 1996 we was-, we heard about this women's conference and we decided as a group that we wanted to attend. One of the main motivators for us attending, apart from being with women from all over the world, was all of the rioters that we'd read over and over again and hung on their word or-, I just thought 'one day we could meet them'. We're there on the list.

Sheila: Like Andrea Dworkin and that.

Lee: It was just amazing. It was like everyone that we'd ever talked about was on the list. I think that was, that was a game changer for us. Being able to get somewhere and hear these women speak. So like Bea Campbell was there. In fact one of-, she done a series of talks. Our favourite one was 'why the police need boy racers'. After that discussion-,

Sheila: We've got that on tape.

Lee: After that discussion one of the women that was in the room was so inspired she went and had a tattoo done didn't she.

Sheila: She did, yes.

Lee: With her name on. So I was just leading you in there to 'Who Stole Incest' because I think that's the key one.

Sheila: Yes. So I think in terms of sexual violence and abuse, Louise Armstrong was up there. So she wrote a book called 'who stole incest' and it's still relevant today. I was reading a chapter of it last week. In fact I've just sent it round to all the counsellors here. So we need a discussion about this. So she was the first one to pick up on the fact that it was the women's sector and the sexual violence women's sector that actually discovered child sexual abuse in modern times. Other than Freud before he decided to ignore it and whoever else. It was the women's sector that started talking about and challenging Pie, Paedophile Information Exchanger, whoever. Then by the time we got into probably the mid 80's it was something that the state had then got hold of in a very weak way. Not in an informed way. It became understood as some dysfunction within a family. The whole thing about child sexual abuse was taken away from-, actually part of this is about patriarchy and society and how society treats children and how families treat children. The whole women's sector feminist understanding got lost. So Louise Armstrong's books are really clear on when that happened and when it became therapeutic.

Moderator: Apart from authors and writers who else has inspired you? Or has anybody else inspired you?

Sheila: What you mean real people? Well Lee inspires me.

Lee: Yes we inspire each other. I think one of the things that inspires us is the fact that we work in a centre where everyday hundreds of victims and survivors come into our centre. So there's 125 women a week that come in just to this building. That's let alone across where we worked that's 8000 individuals last year. Every single woman that comes in inspires us.

Moderator: How?

Lee: Because of the fact that they've reached a point where they have reached out to an organisation where we can work alongside with them in terms of their life experiences and their journey onwards. That is an inspiration. Loads of people say to us when you're out and about 'it's depressing what you do', 'how do you cope?' 'how do you keep your resilience?' it's quite a common thing we're asked. That is the least way that we feel that in the last 35 years we've never been depressed from the work with women.

Sheila: Angry sometimes.

Lee: What makes us depressed is the fact we have to spend 90% of our time keeping our service open. If we was able to use that 90% of our time into increasing our services, being creative with our services and doing different things, we'd be sitting here telling you a different story. That is not inspiring.

Moderator: You said that Lee's inspired you, you're inspired by Lee. How?

Sheila: It's her vision. She has an amazing capacity for vision. I get stuck and I think 'oh god I don't know what to do about this particular situation' as in how do we develop. Lee always has a vision. 'Well we could do this and we could do this'. We bounce it off each other, but her vision is the thing. To list people, I find that really difficult to do because I'd be terrified I'd forgotten someone. So there are obviously women over the years that we've met. I mean Lee mentioned the woman from Southend whose now 220, who set up the Southend refuge. She's an inspiration because she's still got that excitement around politics. She's really interested. So it's people really that have an interest in politics in the little p sense. Not tribalism or partisan politics but a general understanding of what's going on. Also what's going on outside the UK (TC 00.30.00). It's like we get very, like you say it all the time we get stuck on the island when there's a bigger world out there and that can influence some of the things we want to do. I know I don't want to go through a list but I do want to say, I think when I mentioned earlier on about Kate Millett there was also Mary Daly I think who wrote the politics of a housewife or language. I wouldn't want to not say Audre Lorde and that's probably it on the list. There are others. Audre Lorde is quite important. We still quote her now. We quoted her on our recent Rape Crisis bag.

Moderator: Yes. Is it the same for you Lee?

Lee: Yes. Sheila's instinctive and intuitive self. Particularly when we've been in quite difficult strategic situations that I completely trust. So vision is can't work without form. I think that's why we compliment each other because I can go right out there into some other orbit about, you know, with an idea, but to make that grounded and real it's got to have form. It's got to-, I trust Sheila's instinct 100%. 100%. So if I've come up with an idea and she feels

that it's not going to work or there's a hesitation. So we go a lot on our gut instinct here so we call it, if you have a hesitation and you don't do it. So it's something that we value about women even though over, you know, the patriarchy sort of downplays intuition and instinct, we think it's vital and should be encouraged and celebrated. Not ignored.

Moderator: How do you both approach leadership? Maybe Sheila first.

Sheila: You go first.

Lee: I'd be interested to hear Sheila's approach to leadership because I describe her style of leadership as very organic. So because I think Sheila's philosophy is about honour ethos is so grounded in the politics of sexual violence and our collective backgrounds, we have struggled over the years to create any form of hierarchy in terms of management structures. We also feel deeply that-

Moderator: Is that, sorry I'm interrupting you.

Lee: Yes, that's alright.

Moderator: Can you talk about your leadership?

Lee: Yes I will do. That the charity structure that we work under had created a form of leadership that has come from our, from the ground really.

Sheila: So I find my leadership style, I'd say it's a bit anarchic myself. So it-, my leadership feelings are linked to the past. So it's things like if we're talking about an issue within the service provision or wider development with commissioners and whoever, then it's the need that women and girls express is more important than anything. Whatever theory, strategy, process, that for me always comes first. People can get locked in theory and I get really agitated. I don't do hierarchy. I really am really bad at it. So obviously over the years we've got policies coming out of our ears and I just can't function in that world. Lee has to push me in it. 'We have a policy for that Sheila'. I go 'yes, I forgot'. Dealing with people in an honest, respectful way is really important. Getting things out on the table is really important, but I don't know how to express that in terms of a leadership model. We obviously have got a model because something has worked all these years. But you wanted to talk a bit about-,

Lee: Well yes, and you also ask everyone's opinion about every little thing.

Sheila: Yes, it drives her mad.

Lee: It's that, we get amazed when things get labelled like co-production. We just think 'what? We've been doing that forever'. It's now called this. So we've seen our own style become labelled and then sold back to us.

Sheila: A good example lately would be trauma informed. The services were doing that forever but the state's caught up. You wanted to say stuff about leadership because you've got some good words. I don't mean they're just words.

Moderator: The way that you do things, how do you lead?

Lee: By example is a simple way of saying it.

Moderator: Could you give us an example of where you have led by example and the outcome?

Lee: Yes. I can I think. I think the whole idea of women's leadership has been a huge topic for us in the women's movement. Probably the last five to six years. One of the things that is always said to me is about leading by example. In here we do long hours. We do-, we ignore our sickness. We do this we do that. All bad practice you could say. That was fine when we were a small group of four or five of us. Now of course our partnership there's 48 women. Those kind of leading by example of bad practice doesn't work because what it does is sets a bar within the kind of the team that that is okay. So we have had to re-look at and re-examine our behaviour or our practice so that those habits don't-, are not seen as normal. So where in the past we would've thought a 90 hour week is normal, and somebody wants to work their 37 hours. We would have thought 'well they can do a few more weekends or they can do a few more evenings like we do'. We've realised that that is not sustainable in terms of women's health and wellbeing. Let alone their caring responsibilities or anything else that's going on in their life. So, that would be a brief way of saying.

Sheila: I think it's more about-, I mean, I was looking at this list and I thought this sums it up quite well really. So, both us lead in a way where we still function in that anti-patriarchy place. So, things we have to deal with are filtered through that often. We also want change, so the activism thing is still there. So, agents for change I think is the phrase is really important to both of us. So, we lead through that. So, where a counsellor, say, is working with an individual on this, she's had these experiences of the police or the courts and it's really bad practice, then we go through the process of, 'This is really bad practice.' The counsellor works with the individual to get the individual through that. Then we go back to the police and the courts with their bad practice and say, 'Right, you did this, what are you going to do about this?' So, I think that can be quite different from other organisations where they don't challenge and want change. So, the leadership thing about change is quite important. Fairness, I mean, leading by example, you're really fair. We both have our moments where we're not fair but no one really hears that. But the time we get to communicate with everyone else we're probably really fair. And we're really focused on the outcomes for individuals and the outcomes for staff. So, the staff in all rape crisis centres hear horror day in, day out, so when you asked the question earlier about influence, I think they're amazing, what they hear. And we know personally what that's like because we've both been counsellors and we've heard that too, so there's an acceptance that we understand the work because we've also done it. We're very inclusive, so it's an inclusive model, leadership model. And we don't exercise forms of hierarchical power. When we have to, I think we both really struggle with that because it's not part of our history and when we've had to do it, and we do do it, but it's not something that we would exercise every day. (TC 00.40.00) Like, everyone doesn't stand up to attention when we come into the office. And we have a key to our motivations and things like, to ensure services still exist. So, as time goes on, our experience influences our leadership model but our experience is becoming more rare in the women's sector, and I'm really concerned about what will happen.

Lee: So, we work from the premise of we're not at work, we're at war. So we-,

Sheila: Hence, 90 hours a week.

Lee: So, our war is with the patriarchy and until that's over, then the journey continues.

Moderator: What do you think makes your leadership successful? You've mentioned leading by example.

Sheila: I think that's probably really key. It's also respect for women's lives. I think that comes over, so when we see individuals who are referred here by, I don't know, mental health services or social services, we get the referral and sometimes those people making the referrals will say, 'Be careful of this person, they're really dangerous, make sure they haven't got a knife on them, they're going to set alight to the building,' all this horror. The person arrives, it's fine. And the reason it's fine is because the way we've created the organisation's responses treat that person with respect and they don't react in that way. We've never had a problem in all these years, with all these difficult, terrible women out there. So, I think respect is quite key. Also, we're in a working-class area. We've lived here all our lives. We mix with working-class people. We are working class and I think that really makes a difference. We understand it. So, these other models of leadership and working, you know, when we're sitting in meetings hearing some of this stuff, we're thinking, it won't work. It doesn't work. It depends what communities you're working with.

Lee: We also went on courses as well, you know, external courses because we have to have qualifications to do applications for money. And they disappointed us remarkably because, surprise surprise, they were written by men for men. And we created our own course, and we looked at our own feminist governance model that we've, kind of, shared with other women's organisations. We're delighted that the Women's Resource Centre is running a feminist leadership training, we run our own at Rape Crisis. And we felt that it was important to articulate some of our styles, particularly because we're values-driven or politically driven and we, so we've got a model that we can share with yourself and the project that we're happy for you to, kind of, give away.

Moderator: Thank you. So, how do you, do you think women's leadership is different from men's and how?

Sheila: That's an interesting question. One of the things that, as leaders in what we do here, when we're working with staff, women don't, I think, compete with each other as much as if it was a team of men. I think it would be different. And they also don't push themselves, as in I want more money, I want this, I want, I mean that obviously goes on. But I think it, I mean I've never worked in an organisation that has staff that are predominantly men or have only got one member of staff that's male now. But I have worked a lot, and so has Lee, with government departments where we're working with men all the time, and men in leadership. And my experience would be that the cultures that they're in, they haven't got a concept of patriarchy, obviously. And we're talking about sexual violence and domestic violence in these forums. They're not transparent. It's usually about some sort of career goal that the individual person has. They can be quite manipulative, and I've seen various people put women down. And analysing it afterwards, because they're women, they're just not listening to them.

Lee: I mean, our funding got stopped because Sheila had long hair. And we was interviewed for about an hour of why did she have long hair, and what was that about. So, it's.

Sheila: This was a while ago.

Lee: Yes, but it's that whole thing about, if we'd put the word 'feminist organisation' in any funding bid we wouldn't get it. So, we've had to relabel it as women-centred, women-focused. Gender inequality. Strengths and right-based approach. We've had to rename it a thousand times. And at each point in the story, really, or I think we've been through, Sheila and I have counted it out. We think we've been through 38 Home Secretaries, and quite a few Prime Ministers. So, those gender inequalities don't disappear when you're with people in positions of power, particularly in our life, where it's about controlling money. So we just, we think that that's, it's very difficult for that bridge to be crossed.

Sheila: So, I think in speaking earlier on we've got sort of a horizontal leadership model, that we've always had. And I think men don't necessarily function well in the horizontal.

Lee: It's the flat structure, yes.

Sheila: Yes, and that would probably be a big difference. That's not to say, I mean I would be really interested if there's, and there are, men's sexual violence groups that are men-only, and how that works. And what dynamics go on, are they different dynamics? I don't know. But I know that working with men who are not in the organisation has been difficult from time to time. Obviously we've had things like people asking us out to dinner if we want funding. We've had funding commissioners talking about women's bums, look nice in those jeans. We've had all sorts of things.

Lee: Sex for funding.

Sheila: Which I don't think would happen in another sector.

Lee: Yes.

Sheila: And some of that would also be about being seen as vulnerable, which we're not. Silly man. Because we're in the sexual violence world then he thought he could sexually assault someone, as a member of staff and he'd get away with it because he'd say, 'Well, she works for a Rape Crisis centre, she hates men, she's obviously lying.' You know, I was aware that he had that going on. So, it's a complicated dynamic, and I think it's very different working with men than working with women.

Moderator: How different do you think your leadership journeys would have been if you weren't working together?

Sheila: God, that is so hard.

Lee: I think it's a question that's never been asked of us, so yes, we've have to, kind of, talk about what that might be like. But, what I think has happened that is, that in the environment that we're in, and working nationally with Rape Crisis, then we've been able to explore

women's leadership as an entity in itself. So, in terms of each other, I think, I don't even know where to answer that. But I know that working with other women separately we've, kind of, created a whole thought and critical analysis of women's leadership in rape crisis centres. Because it's quite different to other women's sectors.

Sheila: Part of me thinks that that would never have happened. It would never have happened separately because your political understanding and the path you were on at that point, would have led you down a path and we might have not gone down that path together. But I was on the same path over here, so we would have met anyway. It just might have happened later on.

Lee: Yes.

Sheila: Such a small town, we would have, you know, it would be inevitable. And we got a bit into, well I did more than you did, I got a bit into Myers-Briggs. You know about Myers-Briggs.

Lee: Whereas I'm more sun signs.

Sheila: So we're not, you know, there's a lot of things about us that are very different. But I got really fixated on the Myers-Briggs thing and looking at personality profiles and things. And we're very close on the scale, and I think that's quite important. So, in terms of Myers-Briggs, under intuition (N) we've both got N's, and I think that's helped. And N's are quite rare, so people with an 'N' in their personality profile, as in intuition, are quite rare compared to the statistics for people with other parts of their personality profile. And I think that's probably what caused it as well, we recognised that we were, had this similarity. But you'd say it was a star sign.

Lee: I would, I would say (TC 00.50.00) it's in the planets.

Moderator: You, Lee, you've touched on this but how do you think your involvement in the sector has impacted on you personally?

Lee: I don't remember touching on it, but, was it about health? Yes, okay. Yes. I think, I don't know how many women's menopauses I've been through.

Sheila: Because she's the youngest.

Lee: Quite a lot. Let alone how many PhDs I've supported, or Masters and the rest of it. I think it's had a big impact on my life, and it would be at different points in time that, you know, where that impact has been. But I, what I know is, is that whatever the consequences are, it could, like, so if I think back a few years ago there was a particular individual that we supported, that really impacted on my sense of self and all kinds of things. So, there's, it might come from an individual, it might be through a piece of work we're doing that we feel really connected to and passionately about, but the biggest impact of all is around staying open. So, it gives me sleepless nights, over-active brain. I don't know how to secure the service, I don't know where else to go for money, I. That is, that affects everything outside of here and in, and while we're in here and while we're outside of here because it's becoming

increasingly difficult in the environment to get any kind of funding that is long-term or anywhere near the amount of money that's needed. So, we spend extraordinary amount of hours recreating the hamster's wheel and trying to present it in a different way.

Sheila: Impacting on us both, personally. We do go into moments of rage, and it's usually rage at the system. So, as examples of that, I mean, the rage that you experience you take home, and you think about, and you get even more angry about. So, it's things like in the past, that wouldn't happen now, but we have been told in the past, 'Okay, you see 300 women in a month, you're a women's service,' this is commissioner, 'You're a women's service, if you see ten men we'll give you funding, if you don't we won't pay you anything.' So the 300 women are irrelevant, so it's that rage. Things happen like that all the time. Like, I'm very interested in how men, how much funding goes to the men's sector compared to the women's sector. Someone needs to do that piece of work really, and look at the numbers, service users in that. That makes me really furious. Stuff with, recently in the press, it's gone on forever, say like Worboys, the taxi driver, serial rapist trying to get out of prison. And people weren't really engaged in that until the women's sector, particularly through -

Lee: Centre for Women's Justice.

Sheila: Women's Justice acted on that, thank God.

Lee: Yes.

Sheila: So, all those things that happen have an impact on our, on our health and wellbeing, really. It's those things that drive us crazy. And one of the positive things impact on, I think, I'm not sure, is because of the way the world changed, then we all did counselling courses. We got caught in that counselling world that came over from the States, so to survive we had to do it. So we all got qualified, so we've done counselling courses. We've done women's studies. We've done BA's. We've done group work. We've done relationship, we've got this stuff. And it's because that's, the influences have made us do that. And it wasn't bad doing it, it was quite interesting, but it hasn't made a blind bit of bloody difference.

Lee: We see it, though on, you know, that's, I think that's in our leadership style. We do see the impact of what we do on women, over the years, and Viv from the Women's Resource Centre, we was talking about it recently around, how do you build resilience? How do you do that? Like, you can go on these courses and you can do this and you can do that, but how do you build it? So, working with survivors, you know, we know a lot about resilience, you know. But in terms of women that work with women and girls, particularly we've seen, you know, with movements like Me Too, or where there's been a, kind of an upsurge in women's activism, building resilience has become equally, kind of, side by side with women's leadership. And Viv described it to me quite recently that everybody's got a tree inside of them of strength, but they don't know it yet. And how do we support that tree to grow? What do we need to do? So, things like, this is what we were saying about leading by example, so SERICC is massively keen on having good shared lunches, or where we all get together and bring 50 bowls of hummus or something. But the shared experiences, so once a month we do a training on a particular subject, it's more of a discussion on a particular subject. It could be something that is in the media or it could be that we feel like we need to, kind of, re-look at.

It could be a topic base, but the feedback that we have is that everybody really likes getting together and having a couple of hours to talk about one thing.

Sheila: And we try and, I think what plays there, because women really enjoy it, is we're trying to recreate a consciousness-raising group. That's what we're doing. Even though we may have forgotten about that, but that's, that's the process that goes on which is different than just a meeting and someone talking at you. But one of the other impacts, really, in involvement in the sector is what it's opened up for us. So, I think we've touched on that we're involved in a lot of national work with government and governments, even though how frustrating it is, but some of that's been quite successful. And I can't remember when it was, but Lee will remember, we went to the United Nations to CEDAW.

Lee: 2008.

Sheila: And that was an experience. So, we were in New York for about, what, three weeks but working with the CEDAW committee, was a fantastic experience and watching them questioning government, and watching the representatives not really telling the truth to the answers was quite interesting. So, we were in the position of sitting behind the CEDAW committee members and writing the truth on a piece of paper and going, 'No, this is the truth.' So, that, I think that was really an exciting experience. Got a good picture of ourselves in the United Nations.

Moderator: How has your organisation, and the women's sector as a whole, SERICC, but maybe Lee you can also touch on your experience with Rape Crisis England and Wales, influenced and changed women's structural position in the UK?

Lee: I don't know if we've changed women's structural position, but we've certainly challenged and changed legislation, or women and girls' experience has influence policy and strategy. So that, that, I think that is our main driver is that women's voices.

Sheila: So, because of, it's not just us on our own.

Lee: Yes.

Sheila: I mean that we must acknowledge that going, say, to CEDAW was a group of, all women's organisations went together. Working together in solidarity is really important. And in some of these structural, in some of these legal changes, it's been working together that's caused that to happen.

Lee: Yes.

Sheila: So, more recently, say it would be changes to the criminal, the Criminal Injuries Compensation scheme, which was really unfair for women and girls. And that's been changed, and that's because of consistent, consistent lobbying over a number of years, but it's happened. When did we work on the Sex Offences Act?

Lee: 2003.

Sheila: So it made changes with another group of women, not just us.

Lee: A lot of women.

Sheila: Yes. So that was quite key, actually getting the Act up to scratch. There's loads of examples like that. Bringing child sexual abuse to the forefront. So now we're at the point of arguing with various government departments about the child sexual abuse strategy that they're just about to write. So those things are really important. Commission guidance, a national statement of expectations, there's loads of (TC 01.00.00) strategic-type work that goes on. And I'm not sure that answers your question about changing women's structural position, but in making those changes, it changes women's lives, because they've got more access to equal justice and fairness and support.

Moderator: What do you think needs to happen to really change women's structural position?

Sheila: It would be worthwhile if we could have a system that actually looks at women. Because it's so neutral. And all the successes that women's organisations have had over the years is the hard slog of forcing parts of the structural framework to actually focus on women. There was a period of time where that was a little bit easier, I think. It is not easy now, at all. So to raise women in certain forums, to get a focus on women, to look at what needs to change to benefit their lives is getting really hard, because everyone's functioning from some gender-neutral place. Because we all have equality now, you know? It's happened. So a focus on women would be useful. More resources to undertake effective, informed research to prove the point. But a part of me gets agitated with that and I think, 'Why have we got to do more bloody research, we've been doing it for years?' And then the research is presented and it has recommendations and everyone ignores it and three years down the line we do the research again and just call it something else. I mean, that seriously has to stop. And there has to be some leadership. Not within the sector, because there are women that are really effective, but within government, international, national. There needs to be people who have an understanding and have some sort of commitment long-term and show some leadership, in the same way we were talking about earlier.

Moderator: What do you think are the greatest achievements of women's collective action?

Sheila: We're still here. We still exist. That is such an achievement. That you think with Women's Aid, Rape Crisis, FGM groups, we're all still here, hanging on by our fingernails.

Lee: And I think that it's because we reflect and learn, reflect and learn, reflect and learn. So within the Rape Crisis movement there is a lot of sharing of what works, what doesn't and we are able to adapt. So within the women's sector I think, you know, I have often described us as shape shifters because even though your core stays the same, how you package that to stay open constantly changes. I think also what's different, what Sheila and I have seen, kind of, the growth of, we were one of the first organisations to have an email address. So, we're really keen and supportive of the digital revolution for women. So we know that by expanding what we do, there are opportunities for that collective, that movement of women and girls' voices to have a massive impact in a different way. So we've seen it with, say, you

know, click activism. Like, previously if we wanted to have done a petition, we'd have had to get an envelope and stamp, send it on like a chain letter. If we put something on the Internet now, we can get signatures, thousands of them, within the end of the day, and that kind of influence is something we haven't seen. So when we're thinking about the future of the women's movement, that has to be central to our thinking. So where we've described our whole lives being devoted to social and gender justice, there is a different possibility now, through the fact that the world has become a really small place. And that those things that we might have been talking about in a church hallway, you know, a little room somewhere, is now international within a really short space of time. And that is key in our thinking about, 'What does our future look like?' So we've often talked about that feminist ecosystem around funding, around leadership, around development, but now there's a possibility of that really happening. And that is so exciting. So in terms of where we are in our journey, in our lives, it's like we've, kind of, exhausted loads of the things that we've done. Like, SERICC over the years has run things like smoking cessation classes.

Sheila: Canoeing, I've got my canoeing badge.

Lee: Yes, like, all kinds of things.

Sheila: Shooting, we even did a shooting course.

Lee: Yes, we've done all kinds of things to enable funding to come in. But with the digital revolution there's different opportunities and the women's movement really need to embrace that. So we know from working at Rape Crisis England and Wales, opening the first online service for women, we've seen an increase in women contacting us that previously were unable to get into a centre for a whole host of reasons. You know, whether it's their location, whether it's their disability, whatever the reason, are able to use us. And their voices can be part of that change.

Sheila: I think in terms of Rape Crisis England and Wales, and change and what needs to happen, when we first started there was no national umbrella body. And then there was a type of umbrella body for a while, and then we have the Rape Crisis England and Wales structure and organisation. So we work really closely, Lee particularly, but we also work on an external relations policy and strategy group, so we can use our experience in going into other organisations or national structures to talk about the needs. But what is striking still, is no one understands that the issues for women and girls are linked to their rights. These are rights we're talking about here. And there's very little understanding of that. That needs to change. And women and girls themselves don't understand it's their right. So when we're contacted, a lot of women say, 'I'm sorry to bother you. I know I've been really stupid'. And men that have contacted us actually contact us in a different way, they access our service as a right. Women don't, women apologise. So we need to change that dynamic somewhere and get this rights thing solidly on an agenda, and get some sort of political will. That's what's not there. There's still no real political will. It's very personality-based depending on who you've got, at what point in history. And that has to change.

Moderator: What are your thoughts on the future for women's rights?

Sheila: That is hard. We've spent, what, since the last three years in what feels like complete chaos. Now it feels like it's settled a bit because of what's gone on. As in we're clear that that bit's ended, now we're in this bit. I don't know. I have no idea. I don't know if it'll get harder, if it'll get easier. It's still personality-based about women's rights, depends who we've got. It's really hard, I think it's harder to answer now than it was ever. So in the past we would have some understanding about government and where people were in what party and what their thoughts were, but I don't think we've got that anymore. I think it hasn't settled into that yet. And social media, the fact that most people, including (TC: 00:10:00) myself, spend hours just sitting watching Netflix. We are in a completely different world that's giving out completely different messages, or rather the same messages, but it's more intense because it's there at the flick of a switch. And how do we challenge the bad messages about women that are going on in social media? That's a really hard question to answer.

Lee: Yes, I think we could do a project just on that alone, couldn't we? On 'What is the future of rights?' We know some of them have been enshrined, we look to other organisations, you know, like CEDAW that we referenced before, or we look to the international law around what our rights.

Sheila: So the Istanbul Convention is still not ratified, so that might help a little bit if it was.

Lee: Look at (TC 01.10.00) the sustainability goals, where we fit under five, for example.

Sheila: And it's not a blind bit of bloody difference.

Lee: How do we, kind of, bridge the gap between that international thinking and the island thinking?

Sheila: So most of us, within Rape Crisis, haven't got the time. We're providing front-line services, we're working with women and girls, we're working at a really heavy-end social issue. That is our priority. On top of that, we're trying to understand how we make big change that lasts. And we haven't got the capacity. So unless capacity comes into the sector, all of us, so we can work together with some sort of solidarity, I just don't see how it's going to happen. And the world of academics doesn't really work for us because again, that's great, looks fantastic that report but, and?

Lee: Over the last couple of years, with the establishing of the Centre for Women's Justice, we've seen a possibility of change around rights that we never have before. So even though we've known those lawyers individually or through other, kind of, campaigning groups, actually having a Centre for Women's Justice where we can look at the options of challenging the state in a different way, has just been amazing. So individual women's cases or women's organisations have had a space to look at how you use what we've got in terms of legislation and embedding and enshrining rights, that we haven't had before. We've never had that. We've had sympathetic individual lawyers that might have worked pro bono. So that is a significant change, and I think that that's going to, kind of, lead to a whole range of possibilities that we can expand on. I think one of the things that we've seen is, and Viv from the Women's Resource Centre's really tried to hold onto this, is the decline of spaces where women can have those kind of discussions. So we've been through, like, the Women's

National Commission or various national organisations or national spaces, but the actual spaces, like Sheila said, we get so, kind of, day-to-day work, the actual spaces created to have the thinking time to maybe say, 'What do our rights look like?' you know, 'What are they?' isn't there. And we need to create that space, I think.

Sheila: But the other thing that's new for us, I think, more than ever, it's always been there, but it's more than ever, is to have space and resource people's time and give people a gap to think. We're all forced into competing now. So that level of solidarity that might have happened in the past, because it was a political movement and there was a push, I think has been watered down now, because we're all scrabbling about for the same crumbs off the table. And it's difficult to work like that now. Like Lee was talking about earlier on, we have a level of trust between us. you have to have that level of trust with organisations you work with. And I'm not sure that's as strong as it was, say, in the 70s or 80s. But in terms of rights maybe the answer is, it sounds a bit depressing but there we are, that we're at the point of trying to keep the rights that we've got. That's where we're at. Which is a really depressing thing, because they feel like they're beginning to slip away. And on that happy note.

Moderator: What are your thoughts on the future of the women's sector?

Sheila: That's all caught up in the stuff that we've already said, really. I mean, we're really clear what the women's sector is. I think the women's sector are really clear what the women's sector is. I don't know that women in communities know what the women's sector is and the powers that be, whoever they are, don't really have an understanding of what the women's sector is.

Lee: We're called stakeholders now. Which is some weird phrase which has become very tokenistic. And there was a point, I would say, around in 2000, there was a women and girls fund that the government produced. It was the first fund of its kind. It came in on the back of a fund that Clinton had introduced, and for six years that fund was available and that meant there was an opportunity for the women's sector to get together. That's the only dedicated fund that I can think of that was a women and girls fund, that wasn't a trust fund like the lottery, that came out of government. And that fund enabled some of that collective working and the Women's National Commission enabled some of that collective working. And so, for me, the future isn't possible unless we put time and resources, as Sheila said, into making that happen. When everyone's worked as a collective until there's a funding opportunity and then everybody doesn't.

Sheila: Well that's because of survival.

Lee: Survival, totally. And we have to find different ways of creating that space for the future.

Sheila: So here, what we did is women sector groups in Essex, and we were pushed into it, really, by the growing nature of public procurement and tendering commissioning processes, is instead of competing with our sister organisations in Essex, we just formed a partnership. And in that partnership we functioned together as three centres. There's glitches every now and again but it basically works really well. But in other areas, it hasn't. So even getting a template to be able to work together as a partnership wouldn't necessarily work in every area.

Lee: It hasn't worked together well in other areas because the ethos of some of the other organisations that aren't the women's sector.

Sheila: That aren't the women's sector but are put into the women's sector world. It's chaos.

Lee: Because of the ethos and values. So, you know, for me around rights, I think that sits with us around our ethos and values and, they're fundamental, they're our core, how that manifest has changed.

Sheila: We have gotten into a little bit of a discussion of late about, okay, because I'm getting on a bit now, I leave, Lee leaves, then what? What is it then? And because of the nature of the charity commission, commissioners' needs, we sit sometimes thinking, 'Will they force us to become just a cheaper version of social services? Is that what's going on here?' Because it feels like that sometimes. And lots of groups in the women's sector must be in that position, where, you know, it's like joining forces with the devil. If we could all be independent we could get on much better. What we need is a philanthropist to give the women's sector all their money.

Lee: Or we need to look at, say, some of Sylvia Walby's work around other countries where women's sector is seen as the fourth emergency service or the fourth service, where there is a specific, dedicated, ring fence tax that supports the services where we're not in competitive funding. And then real change would happen.

Moderator: Well, thank you, on that note, that's the end.

Sheila: That's a bit more positive than my ending thing.

Moderator: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Lee: No.

Sheila: I don't think so.

Moderator: Well, thank you very much.

Sheila: Thank you. (TC 01.18.51)