Leicester Builds Back Better Stories - Episode 004

Rob Watson [00:00:01] You're listening to Leicester Builds Back Better Stories, conversations about how communities across Leicester are planning for change following the pandemic. Over six programmes we'll hear from people at the forefront of civic society in Leicester. And we'll find out how they are planning to do things differently in response to Leicester's extended lockdown. For further information about each of the topics covered in the programmes and extended versions of the conversations, go to the Leicester Stories website: https://leicesterstories.uk.

Rob Watson [00:00:37] Recovering from the coronavirus pandemic is going to take some effort and determination, which means we need to rethink what and how we approach the support that is available to people across Leicester. There'll be no returning to the old normal, though we don't yet know what the new normal needs to be. I'm Rob Watson, and over the summer I've been chatting with people who work for charities and civic society organisations in Leicester, about how they are planning to Build Back Better, and what we need to do to be ready for the next set of community challenges. Over six programmes we're hearing from people across Leicester who've been telling us what they think about the city, and in what way they think life in Leicester can be improved. In this fourth episode, we'll hear from Charlotte Robbie Turner, who's an education support champion with Leicestershire Care, who helps young people who've been in care to gain employment. We will also be hearing from Shim Gooch, who worked for Reaching People supporting community leadership training. To start things off Leicester Stories Community Reporter, Ryan Clayton, has been out in the city asking people what they think of Leicester and what they think makes the city unique.

Ryan Clayton [00:01:58] Have you got a moment to answer a couple of questions.

Voice [00:02:00] I'm in a rush mate.

Ryan Clayton [00:02:07] I'm sorry, have you got a moment to answer a couple of questions?

Voice [00:02:10] What's it about?

Ryan Clayton [00:02:10] I'm just asking people about Leicester.

Voice [00:02:18] It's alright. It could be a lot better.

Ryan Clayton [00:02:21] What do you think could be improved?

Voice [00:02:24] Bit more tidier. It's a bit of a ruddy mess in some places. But I know they are trying to, you know, like to do it up, you know, in certain areas, but it could be a little bit, a little bit cleaner.

Ryan Clayton [00:02:45] Is there anything about the city that you feel makes it unique, or stand out as a city? Or do you think it feels just like another city in England?

Voice [00:02:54] I've not really been to many cities in England.

Ryan Clayton [00:02:58] Fair enough then.

Voice [00:02:59] So, I know it's good, because we've got, you know, like the king in the, in the cathedral.

Ryan Clayton [00:03:07] Richard III.

Voice [00:03:07] Yeah, yeah. That's good. That should get people in. But, but they could do doing a lot down that area, down there.

Ryan Clayton [00:03:16] Down by Charles Street.

Voice [00:03:17] Yeah. That could do with tidying up and getting more, and more things going down that area. You see, I used to work down there, and it was really, really thriving. Everything's gone.

Ryan Clayton [00:03:29] Yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:03:30] Have you heard that slogan at all Build Back Better?

Voice [00:03:33] No, no.

Ryan Clayton [00:03:35] If you saw it on social media, what do you think it might mean?

Voice [00:03:38] Um, I assume building back communities and businesses to improve on the last eighteen months or whatever.

Ryan Clayton [00:03:49] Is there anything about Leicester you'd like to see improved now that we are coming out of coronaviruses?

Voice [00:03:54] Essentially just, just try to get people back out into the streets shopping, and just businesses get back on their feet again really. If you look around most of the streets, they are pretty dire in terms of the shops that have closed down, businesses that have moved out, or, you know, so I think it's trying to maybe look at new ways of getting people back into, into the town, you know, back into cities. Because people obviously have become quite used to being at home or doing other things.

Voice [00:04:26] I love, I love Leicester. Yeah, I've lived here all my life, so I love it. It's not unique, but it's very multicultural. I think everywhere you go you'll find like every colour type person. And I love that. I mean, I'm not going to say that people are the friendliest, but as in, like, I feel, like, there's lots to do. Like the city centre is fun. Coming to the city centre, to Highcross, going shopping, often, all the time, actually. And obviously I live not too far, and I feel like everything's pretty close. Trains, the train station is really close as well to the city centre. So it's easy to just hop on a train, go anywhere. There's always some construction going on. Always. And I don't really know why. So I wish they would keep it how it was before, and not do all the new modern building. I feel like it's fine how it is.

Voice [00:05:11] I used to study here, so I'm not from Leicester, I'm from Birmingham. I studied, like, here ten years ago. It's good to be back, I guess. It's a nice cute little city. You have what you need. It's quieter than Birmingham, but that has its own charm, I guess. Firstly it's more ethnically diverse, which is kind of cute. Um, I don't know. I don't, I just have a lot of memories here, a lot of food places, like, every time, whenever I do come back to Leicester, I always try and trace back all the food places I used to go to while I was a uni, as a uni student. And it's always nice just going, going back, seeing that these places are still - because most of them are independents - seeing that they're still going strong. Still have their loyal clientele, still serving the same food that I did ten, eleven, twelve years ago. It's just, you know, in Birmingham, because it's a bigger city, you have a higher turnover of independents because, you know, those don't last. And they are often replaced by, you know, your Nando's, McDonald's, but here it's good to see that on the high street you have, you know, your independents, and that they do last just as long as some of the multinational chains. So I guess that's, that's why we're keeping about Leicester compared to Birmingham,

Voice [00:06:18] Probably something for the homeless people.

Voice [00:06:19] Homeless people as well, yeah.

Voice [00:06:19] Because, I do see a lot of people around.

Voice [00:06:23] Yeah, same.

Voice [00:06:24] I don't know if there is something for them. I'm not sure, because we don't know yet if there is and why they're still in the streets. Why are they still in the town, sitting in the corner?

Voice [00:06:34] Yeah.

Voice [00:06:35] I was talking to some of them, and they said they charge you some money, but then if they don't have a money, how are they supposed to go in there, and how are they supposed to afford it? For them, if they improved that, then the rest, it is obviously better for those people to go in and then sort it out, isn't it Yeah, other than that I'm not sure.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:06:54] So my name's Charlotte Robey Turner. I work for Leicestershire Cares, and I'm their Head of Children and Young people. I lead a team of workers who work both in school and youth work settings. So we have projects where we link business members, and business volunteers, sorry, with students in school to help them with their reading, maths and employability. But we also have a set of projects with young people who are out of education, employment and training, and have barriers to getting into those opportunities. For whatever reason. It might be that they have experienced the criminal justice system, experienced the care system, they might be refugees, asylum seekers, or they might just have mental health problems, or learning difficulties. Whatever it is, we have a number of different projects, and can sort of, help them overcome these barriers and make steps towards their goals.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:07:42] It's been challenging. I think as an organisation we've been really creative and sort of flexible in terms of the way that we've been delivering our support. So we've already, kind of, geared up. We all had, like, laptops and you know, like online documents and that kind of stuff. So as soon as lockdown hit, and we all started working from home, we could immediately set up online support sessions for our young people. We could loan out laptops, because we already had them, because we used them in the office with young people to help them job search. So we loaned them out to them so they could continue doing that from home. They could do online functional skills courses. We did a whole range of, like, well being sessions on Zoom. So we had group cooking sessions, where we dropped off the ingredients to our young people. Then they all came on, and each of them chose a different recipe each week that they wanted to cook. So that was called Quarantine Cooks, and that was really, really successful. Fitness things, quizzes, you know, the whole Zoom, Zoom thing, we did it with our young people.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:08:41] And a lot of the focus really was just keeping them engaged, keeping them feeling positive, and sort of connected to other people. We work with a lot of young people who are really isolated, so we have care leavers who live in bedsits, we have young mums who are living in mother-baby units, where they were trapped in, like, a one bed flat with their two- or three-year-olds, or two two-year olds, which was exciting. So a lot of, a lot of young people who really, really, really struggled with social isolation and their mental health, and really concerned about what it meant for their future, what it meant for their children's future. So I think just keeping them kind of engaged with it, and other young people, was sort of our main focus really.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:09:22] It was a lot of ups and downs, really. So some I think we're really, really anxious at first about contract and covid. So obviously they were very worried about going out. So actually, in a way when the lockdown happened, a lot of that pressure was sort of removed. And some of our young people don't like going out. They don't like the sort of social pressure of going to groups and seeing people. And the thought of having to go to work or go to school, or any kind of courses is quite difficult for them. So in a way, they were sort of in their element, you know, just kind of engaging online. But I think after the novelty of that wore off, I think the reality of the situation hit, and that was when we saw a lot of our young people take a turn for the worst in terms of their mental health. And we did a lot of, kind of, phone sessions, online sessions, doorstep sessions, where we'd go and just drop, you know, as we dropped ingredients of the cooking, checking in with them, seeing how they were doing. We created packs as well, to keep them entertained. So especially if they had kids, we put together like activity packs and gave them to them

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each week, so that they had something to keep the children entertained. And gave them tips for, like, how they could do bits of exercise at home and, you know, mindfulness, and those kinds of things, and keep them sort of occupied. But also worked a lot with our partners, like Let's Talk Wellbeing, and other, kind of, mental health services, to sort of get them counselling if we felt like they were really in need of that kind of more intensive support. But obviously, that's hard to sort of get young people into because at there, there is such a long queue waiting list for a lot of that.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:10:59] So, yeah, it was I think some of them, they were very good at talking to us if they had issues and they, they wanted to, kind of, get things off their chest, or talk through a problem they'd got at home. And others were, kind of, a bit more reserved, and it takes more, kind of, relationship building with them before they'll open up to you. But we're lucky that we have, we have a really, really good team members in my team, that have that kind of connection with young people. So I think we were a source of support for a lot of those young people when they didn't want to, to anyone else, actually. So, it was, it was positive in that, sort of respect, but challenging in many other ways.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:11:41] We get young people referred to us often. And as part of that process, we sit down with them and have an open discussion about key areas of their lives that we might be able to support them with. And one of those key areas is mental health. So right from the get-go, we speak to our young people about how they feel in terms of mental health and wellbeing, if they have any kind of diagnosed mental health conditions. But also, I think, the main thing that we do, is just really get to know our young people on a personal sort of level. And we can see changes in their behaviour, changes in their demeanour. There might be a bit more withdrawn, or they might just be a bit more chaotic in, kind of, their behaviour, or erratic in terms of what they're doing. And we can pick up on those things and know that something's not quite right, and sort of take them to one side, talk to them about what's going on outside of our work, and what things are like at home, and, you know, talk to them in that way. So, a lot of it is, I think for them, just feeling like they've got someone that they can talk to about those issues. In terms of knowing when someone's struggling? Some of them are very open, like I say, about having mental health problems. And some of them are like advocates and peer supporters for, for that kind of issue. Which is great. But others, you just, kind of, have to pick up on changes in their behaviour and the way that they're presenting themselves. The way that they're talking or not talking, engaging or not engaging. Which is where it was more difficult on Zoom, because a lot of them didn't like putting their videos on. So, if you can't see them, it's a lot more difficult to, kind of, pick up on those, sort of, behavioural cues, or those visual cues as to how a young person's feeling. Which is why my team still went out and, sort of, met them on the doorstep, and did those kinds of socially distanced sessions with them as well, on a one to one basis. Just because you can't, you just can't tell sometimes from how someone sounds on Zoom, as to how they're actually feeling, and whether they are okay.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:13:39] There is a kind of sort of assumption now, that young people feel like it's more accepted to, kind of, talk about mental health. And particularly young men. You know, I know there's been lots of campaigns around encouraging young men to talk about, you know, how they're feeling and know that it's okay if they're not feeling, you know, positive and they need some support with their mental health. But it really does vary from person to person. I think for some young people, they found that quite empowering, and they think that they can, kind of, talk about how they're feeling. And they talk to their peers about it and they will, you know, confidently come to you and say, I have anxiety, I have depression. These are the things I have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Whereas others are just very, very insular. Partly sometimes because of their mental health, kind of, condition. They don't necessarily want to, sort of, talk about themselves, even let alone, sort of, how they're feeling. And it is really difficult, I think.

Charlotte Robey Turner [00:14:36] Yeah, I think working with businesses is great, because it's like a totally different kind of perspective. I think a lot of organisations and, either in the voluntary sector, are a bit afraid of approaching businesses, or they are daunted by the prospect, or they're just not really considered in a lot of like plans, I guess locally. And the local authorities are thinking of things... Like businesses have a particular role around, you know, bringing in income to the city or, you know, generating jobs, and that kind of thing. But we think about it in a holistic way, I guess, and a very proactive way that businesses can

actually, you know, really work with young people to help them get the skills and things that they need in order to progress. And so, I really enjoy that part of working at Leicestershire Cares, and, kind of, how we make those connexions. And it can really add so much value to what we do on our projects, having the business element to it. Not just because, obviously then you've got someone who works in a company who can tell you and people, like, this is actually what an employer expects, and this is how you should apply for jobs, and those kinds of really basic things. It's just building those connexions for young people that they just don't have. They don't have, you know, an aunty that works in the hospital that can get them a work placement for six weeks. They don't have a dad who's a high-level senior manager at whatever retail company might... You know, they don't have those kind of family or social connexions where they can just, kind of, get those bits of experience, those skills, or that advice, or even just bounce ideas around about what job they might enjoy or, you know, or how their values as a person fits with the companies or, you know, those kinds of things that a lot of us, I think, take for granted. So bringing that into our work, I think just adds so much value. It's really good.

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Ryan Clayton [00:16:46] I don't suppose you've got a moment to answer some questions?

Voice [00:16:48] It depends what it's about.

Ryan Clayton [00:16:49] We're just walking around, asking people how I felt about the city.

Voice [00:16:51] Yeah. Oh, I'm very pleased. It looks so vibrant at the minute, yeah. It's lovely to see people around. We walk down past the cathedral earlier, and it was, it just looked fantastic. In through, oh, where did we have coffee? St Martins. St Martins looked fantastic with the food stores and things. So, yeah, very, very impressed at the minute. It's all green, it's all clean.

Ryan Clayton [00:17:12] Is there anything about the city that you feel makes it unique, stand out against the cities in England?

Voice [00:17:16] Well, it's well known for its ethnic diversity. So, I mean they do celebrate that don't they. So the food, the food and the cultures. Yeah, that's what definitely makes it stand out.

Ryan Clayton [00:17:24] Anything perhaps that you would like to see improved about the city?

Voice [00:17:26] Just general, you know, just general cleanliness. It's quite good at the minute. But yeah, it does get a little bit scruffy in places, so.

Voice [00:17:32] It's nice. Yeah, it's good. A lot to do when you need it.

Ryan Clayton [00:17:38] So anything about the city that makes it feel unique for you?

Voice [00:17:43] No, not really. It's like a lot of other places. It's a lot smaller than, say, Nottingham and stuff like that. So it feels a lot better sometimes. I mean, it's easier to walk to. Yeah, depends where you live, obviously.

Ryan Clayton [00:17:56] Is there anything you'd like to see improve then about the city?

Voice [00:17:58] Probably a little bit more entertainment, you know, like streetwise, and stuff like that. Similar like today. Yeah, with a lot more things going on to get people out and about.

Ryan Clayton [00:18:08] Is there anywhere in the city that you can go, anything that you do in the city that makes it feel like home for you?

Voice [00:18:15] Well, there's lots of places that you can go and eat, and things like that, you know. Yeah, it's quite nice.

Voice [00:18:24] Well, it's very diverse, isn't it? Yeah, loads of different shops and especially where I'm staying in a town you don't have that much variety, and like food wise. And I'm from Nepal, so in terms of, like, that part of the world, you know, you got like loads of food. It's like sometimes you feel like you're not in the UK, you know, some parts of it. But yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:18:47] Fantastic, thank you so much mate. Have a nice day.

Voice [00:18:53] Yeah, let's say it's a good city to live in. It's multicultural, yeah. And yeah, things are just nearby compared to other places I've lived in. So, yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:19:04] Is there anything about the city that makes it feel unique and stand out in your mind?

Voice [00:19:11] Basically, I think, like when you look at things like universities, they are just nearby, they are not far from the town. So for me, it's that.

Ryan Clayton [00:19:22] Anything you'd like to see different about the city, improved?

Voice [00:19:26] Probably the buildings within the city. They look not really up to date, so if that could be changed. Yeah. Yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:19:36] And finally, is there anything about the, anywhere you can go, anything you do, that makes it feel like home for you, give you a sense of community?

Voice [00:19:47] Basically, the parks. Like Victoria Park, yeah, I think that is, is that for me?

Ryan Clayton [00:19:55] Thank you so much mate.

Voice [00:19:56] All right.

Ryan Clayton [00:19:57] Have a nice day.

Voice [00:20:01] Yeah, it's alright.

Ryan Clayton [00:20:02] Is there anything about it that makes it feel unique to you when you walk around?

Voice [00:20:06] Its very dirty.

Voice [00:20:08] It's not that bad, is it.

Ryan Clayton [00:20:09] Is there anywhere you go, anything that you do that makes it feel like home for you? You get a sense of community from?

Voice [00:20:15] Football. The football games. Isn't it Harry?

Voice [00:20:17] Yeah. No. I'm not a Leicester fan.

Voice [00:20:17] I am.

Voice [00:20:23] Yeah.

Ryan Clayton [00:20:25] What about improvements? Is there anything about the city you'd like to see changed?

Voice [00:20:29] A bit more cleaning. Yeah, and tidy it up a bit more.

Shim Gooch [00:20:37] So I'm Shim Gooch. I work for Reaching People in Leicester, which is a consortium of charities, member charities. My role is the project manager, and I've been brought in to work on a three-year leadership training project. So that involves the design and delivery, and evaluation, of training pro-grammes, or interventions for the voluntary sector. Because there was some research done before I started back in the beginning of 2020, or the end of 2019, that was around how can we sustain the voluntary sec-tor, and how can we make it more resilient? And one of the biggest things that came out of it was the lack of training of the grassroot people, the grassroots organisations. How do we create the next leaders? And also, very much about where's the succession planning? Why don't people stay in the sector? Why do they do a bit of voluntary work, or start often, and then they go and work somewhere else in a different sector? How can we, sort of, sustain that? So this project was very much around starting to empower and, sort of, look at behaviours and how we can, sort of, coach or mentor people into staying in the sector. And I think it's about raising awareness. The biggest thing I noticed was people don't really know what the sector can give them. You know, the everyday person that's out there thinks of the voluntary sector, as you know, working for a charity or working unpaid. You know, it's that perception, and how do we change that per-ception?

Shim Gooch [00:22:11] I don't come from a voluntary background. I used to work in retail management. You know, I've spent a lot of time around people, and planning, succession planning and developing teams. And I've worked my way from bottom up, kind of thing. So, and I've worked for different organisations with different cultures. So all of that's come in quite useful coming into this sector with sort of fresh eyes. There's a lot of challenges. So, what we've done with this project, is we've sort of started at the founda-tions. We've started some partnerships, and therefore training programmes for different levels. So people that are grassroot levels, that are just getting into it, or just want to volunteer, don't, don't want to do a lot. But we can still give them something in terms of free training. And it's that empowering... Is about giving them confidence, and it's about getting them to think a little bit outside of where they are. What impact are they actually making? And a lot of them make a lot more impact than they realise. And that's quite in-teresting and quite eye-opening for them, because you see the excitement and that buzz. And that, and that's what you want to build on. It's that core, like, you know... Actually, I am making a difference. How can I take that further? How can I help my community? Because that's what it's all about. Without the com-munities, there's no voluntary sector. Without the voluntary sector, there's no business. It all ties in to-gether.

Shim Gooch [00:23:25] So, yeah, ultimately, it's a three-year project. We are sort of halfway through. We offer free training; we are currently working on trustee training. It's not about... There's a lot of training out there, don't get me wrong, but it's about behaviours and leadership. How are we impacting and being aware of that? So, yeah, that's it in a nutshell, that's what I'm doing.

Shim Gooch [00:23:48] I actually secured this role during the pandemic, so when I came into it, the pan-demic was already happening. So that's... The pandemic hit in March, lockdown was in March, and I joined in August. So it very much was, this is the research we've got, what can we do with it? And we had the funding secured. So it was not about we just wait it out, we should still be able to do something. And all the face-to-face delivery, and all the areas that had been identified, we had to be quite agile with it. We have to think how we can be flexible, that we can work this while the pandemic is happening, but still utilise it when, when and if it's over. Otherwise, you know, we're sort of having to balance resources, what the ca-pacity is, and what we can actually physically deliver. It was tough. The biggest thing was upskilling people to be able to use technology, and even those that could use technology, sort of, still needed the confidence

to use it to deliver to other people. Reaching communities was really difficult. How do you get, you know, how do you let people know you're doing training? And especially because we're aiming at the voluntary sector, and so organisations that are quiet, especially in the pandemic, that were quite under pressure. Suddenly they had to up their game because they were having to deliver, you know, food projects. They had funding that they were trying to reach communities that were missing out.

Shim Gooch [00:25:14] To me, when I think about Build Back Better, and I haven't really given it that much thought until probably the last few days, and not in the past, or probably in the same way that you look at it. But one of the things is around before you Builds Back Better, you need to review where you are at. And for me, you know, talking as a context of a project manager, I don't think that our foundations are secure enough to build on yet. So, and how do we, how do we identify... And you know, I'm very much speaking about what I've experienced. So actually, you know, maybe it all needs to go back to some really basic measures, and some really basic skills that we are really lacking at the moment. For me, the biggest one is communication, and communication and all different sorts of aspects. First of all, Builds Back Better. Who knows about it? I didn't know about really. I didn't know any detail. I know it's a slogan, but what does that mean? So we're saying that this is building back better safe for Leicester. But do Leicester communities actually know what that is? Do they really understand the concept behind it? Do they understand what impact they can have? Do they understand that they can make a difference, or that their voice will be heard? How have the people that have put this policy, or this movement together, how are they then communicating to those people that really will be impacted by this? And that's from the young that will then become our future leaders, to the ones our current leaders, and the ones that are actually doing all the hard work or the hard graft, and have a real-life experience of how the pandemic affected them, and how they would like to see improvements, and what would have helped if they had been in place back then. There's power in something that we used to do back in the day. What used to happen in ancient times, we can learn. And that goes back to going back to the basics. Let's strengthen our foundations before we build better. Better communication with the right people, and through the right people, and identifying actually what our people's stories, and pulling from that what is actually needed. Because no one has, no one person has the answer to that.

Ryan Clayton [00:27:19] You've been listening to Leicester Builds Back Better Stories, conversations about how communities across Leicester are planning for change following the pandemic. For further information about each of the topics covered in this programme and to hear extended versions of these conversations, visit the Leicester Stories website: lhttps://leicesterstories.uk. Leicester Stories are supported by the Audio Content Fund and was developed with assistance from De Montfort University, the Documentary Media Centre, and the Zinthiya Trust. Thanks to Ryan Clayton for additional content production. This is a Decentered Media production by Rob Watson.