**NHS Education for Scotland**

**Talking about Bereavement Podcast Series – Transcript of ‘A prison chaplain on listening, love and loss’Podcast**

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**Speaker**: Jill Clancy (JC) Chaplain, HMP Barlinnie

**LI:** Hello, I'm Lynne Innes and welcome to the Talking About Bereavement podcast, which is brought to you by the Bereavement Education Programme from NHS Education for Scotland. I'm one of the educators in this team and in these podcasts, I'm going to talk about bereavement with our guests who will be sharing and reflecting some of the work and the learning they are involved in as they talk about bereavement.

Hi and welcome to this episode of the podcast. I'm delighted to introduce my guest today, Jill Clancy, who is a chaplain in HMP Barlinnie in Glasgow. And I'm going to pass over to Jill now for her to introduce herself and tell us a bit more about her and her role and how she came to be in her role. So welcome, Jill. I'm delighted you've agreed to be on this podcast.

**JC:** Thanks, Lynne. It's nice that you've invited me. Well, yeah, I'm Jill Clancy and I'm from Ayrshire, down in the, the sunny side of Ayrshire near the, near the water. But it's good to work in Glasgow. I love working here. I've always loved the banter of Glasgow. I did my probation as a minister in Castlemilk and I was a minister for five and a half years in Balornock at the Red Road flats. But my first charge wasn't there. My first charge was in Gourock where I was for eight years, again down by the sea. I like the water. Then Glasgow and then back to Ayrshire. So, I came to Barlinnie seven years ago as a full-time chaplain. Previous to that, when I was in the minister in Tarbolton in Annbank, which is really in the deepest, darkest Ayrshire at the farming community, I was part time in Kilmarnock Prison at that time. And I was there for four and a half years, and it was during that time somebody asked me to consider the, the what it was known as at that time, the coordinating post at HMP Barlinnie. But that was a huge, huge change for us as a, as a family, really, because we always lived in a Manse, we had to find our own home and it was out with what I'd always known. But I've got a husband that is so laid back he's horizontal at times and said to me, Jill, if it's God's will, it'll all work out. And it did all work out.

**LI:** Ok.

**JC:** So, seven years ago I came here.

**LI:** Ok and, and what has that been like? I mean, it sounds like a really varied career that you've had and, and a kind of interesting trajectory towards where you are now. What, what is that like for you now working in Barlinnie?

**JC:** I love my, I love my job, but it's definitely a job that I'm glad I'm doing now and not in the early days of ministry because I don't think I would have been ready for it. I wouldn't have had the life experience. I wouldn't, I wasn't, I don't feel I would have been old enough. Now I'm more kind of motherly in some respects. And I think that's a good thing rather than being young. And sort of the boys don't want that, they're not, I personally feel that they're looking for somebody that they can just share with, that they can, that would listen to them. And I think being female’s also good because I worked, I was the only female at the beginning of my time here. I was the first Church of Scotland female minister to have a job here…

**LI:** Ok.

**JC:** …and I think that has really been beneficial ‘cause the, the guys open up in a different way to women than they do to men. I'm now not the only woman. We now do have a younger chaplain with us who's female, and she is fantastic. So, they've got, you know, the whole spectrum now, which is good. But yeah, I'm glad. For me personally, I think I would have been too naive, maybe a little gullible when I was younger. And you need to have your wits about you when you work in a prison.

**LI:** Ok and, and how many, just out of interest, how many chaplains are actually in the that work in the prison?

**JC:** Well, I'm the only full-time chaplain.

**LI:** Right, right.

**JC:** Everybody else is part time. But we do have a seven of us now. Six of us.

**LI:** Oh right, ok.

**JC:** Six of us, sorry. Seven if you include. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, oh no, I'm wrong. Seven. We have seven. We have seven. And then we have an Imam that comes in on a Friday…

**LI:** Ah right, ok.

**JC:** …just to take Muslim prayers. So, we, we're a mixture of both Roman Catholic and reformed tradition. So, we're not all Church of Scotland. There is two of us that’s Church of Scotland, one Episcopalian, one Elam, 3 Roman Catholic Priests and an Imam.

**LI:** Ok, ok. So quite, quite diverse in that respect then as well…

**JC:** Yeah.

**LI:** …in terms of what what's been offered to people there.

**JC:** Definitely. And we have a Pagan chaplain now that comes in and meets some guys as well.

**LI:** Right, ok.

**JC:** …That's in an ad hoc basis every

**LI:** Ok.

**JC:** …quarter really. But yep, he's now also coming in. So, we're here for people with faith and no faith.

**LI:** Ok, ok.

**JC:** And, and everything in between. So, no matter what you are, we are here to fulfil that, that spiritual need that you may have or whatever road that you want to follow. We have to make sure that we can help you do that while you're in prison.

**LI:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sounds very comprehensive, doesn't it? And, and, and I suppose that mixture of religious care and spiritual care that you're, you're offering to people.

**JC:** Yep. And you know, as I said, we're here for people with no faith as well. And a lot of my work during the week is just sitting listening.

**LI:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** That is my, my main, my main job, people know that they just need to ask in the mornings if they want to see a chaplain and some, I just spoke to a gentleman there a wee while ago. And all he said to me once he'd spoken, as this is the first time I've been able to tell my side of the story. It's the first time anybody’s listened, and that's all they want sometimes.

**LI:** Yeah, yeah. And that value of listening is immense, isn't it?

**JC:** Absolutely.

**LI:** I think it’s, I often wonder myself if it's undervalued and understated, and we always refer to it. In fact, you did there just now. You maybe didn't even realise when you said I'd just listen. And actually, the just part of it is, is enormous. It is immense in terms of what we do when we support people by listening.

**JC:** Yes, definitely, you're right, you're right. And, and that's what, that's a lot of my job, which is, which is a great privilege.

**LI:** So, in terms of obviously we're, we're talking about bereavement today. What is it you do to support people who are bereaved or anticipating loss or bereavement?

**JC:** Well, first and foremost, people are grieving when they come into prison.

**LI:** Of course, yes.

**JC:** They have lost so much. They've lost their freedom number one, they've lost perhaps seeing their family. They've lost their, you know, relationships with family members because of maybe their crime. So, a lot of what we do is on, on loss. But of course, when it comes to actual someone's lost a loved one, someone's died while they're in, while someone's in prison, then we support them by first and foremost, you go and see them how, how, how are you? We're sorry, you know, to hear that, that this has happened and that gives them an opportunity to share with us because sometimes the person that has died, they have they're not able to go to the funeral because the relationship's not close enough to them. They're only really allowed to go to funeral of mum, dad, brothers, sisters, gran and granddads.

**LI:** Ok.

**JC:** Not, not aunts and uncles and all of that, cousins and things. But if an aunt say has brought someone up and it's the auntie that's died, we would consider it. But there's no, there's no guarantee. The good thing since COVID has been the virtual streaming or the live streaming of funerals. And now we're able to offer that service that they can come to our office, to a quiet space in our office with an officer and they can watch a funeral of say an uncle or an auntie that they were close to, and they were unable to go to the funeral. Or indeed, tomorrow we've got one of a dad, that somebody's coming to see his dad's funeral live streaming.

**LI:** Right.

**JC:** And the reason is because the dad didn't want the son to come because it would draw attention to sadly…

**LI:** Ok, ok.

**JC:** …the fact that the son's in jail. He would need to be cuffed and, and security would need to be with him and the dad didn't want that. So, he's coming here. He'll get to share that precious moment at the same time as the rest of his family, and he'll be able to feel part of it. But there's a huge part that they don't feel part of. And you know yourself, when someone's in your family has died, the family gather around together, they get chance to support each other, they get a chance to share stories together, they get a chance to comfort one another. And when someone's in prison, they don't have that. So, we have to be that extra support for them because they don't have anywhere to go. Anybody that knows dad or knows mum or knows brother, you know. So again, it's the whole listening to the stories and I get them to share, you know what, what was mum like? What was dad like? And if they can't watch it because you've got to pay extra to watch a funeral now.

**LI:** Oh right.

**JC:** Yes, if you're organising a funeral on the outside, you have to pay extra to, to get it live streamed. So, if a family can't afford that and the person can't go, then, you know, I give them time to come down. They can, if they want to our Chapel, our church area where they, they can light a candle at the same time at the funeral's on and I'll say we prayer with them. I'll ask them about their loved one and include that in my prayers so that they're getting an opportunity to, to think about their loved one…

**LI:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** …you know.

**LI:** …and express their own grief and, and, in a, and what sounds like a very gentle and kind space that you're, that you're offering.

**JC:** And then obviously there's the after a funeral, you know, say they did go out to it. I've been out to a funeral of a man that I work close with whose son sadly, tragically died, but he was lost for a wee while. So…

**LI:** Ok.

**JC:** …I had been going through that whole process with him until he was found and then planning the funeral. So, I actually went to that funeral to support the dad and he saw me there and then I could, you know, speak to him afterwards and, and that, that's a help as well. But I would always see them if they went out to a funeral, I would always make sure that they know that when they come back, whether it's that day, the next day or the next week that I go back to see them. How are you? How was the funeral? Did you feel it helped, you know, just to give them another place to share when they, you know, they can't go back for a cup of tea where everybody's going for the wee cup of tea after the funeral.

**LI:** Yes, yeah.

**JC:** You know, they, they don't have that. So, it's good that they get somebody that they can share how it went with. So, we do that as well.

**LI:** And what kind of ongoing support then do, do people get offered by your service?

**JC:** Well, what we find is they might come in and they've been going through a few griefs or deaths in their family for a few years. And it's been something that they've never dealt with. And perhaps the reason that they've, they've taken drugs or taken alcohol, being dependent on alcohol is actually to numb the pain of the losses that they've had in their lives, perhaps even from childhood days. So again, that's something we would work through with them. Go through sometime and just listening, just getting them to express their emotions, their feelings, their fears, their, their hurts. And sometimes it's been the first time that they've done it and it's dawned on them. Oh, right that's why I take, you know, that's why I'm…

**LI:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JC:** …because I'm actually really hurting over, you know, seeing my brother commit suicide. I found him or my mum was, you know, found my mum dead or she was dead, and I was sent to my grans or, you know, they, there's sometimes they've never expressed what's been going on in their lives before.

**LI:** I wonder if they've, if they've maybe not even realised what's gone on in their lives before.

**JC:** Oh, absolutely yeah. Oh, absolutely.

**LI:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. And they, they sober up when they're with us.

**LI:** Yeah.

**JC:** So, reality dawns and, and this is when they start talking about it could also be of quite a few where it's a child that's died, could be a stillbirth. It could be an, you know, the just a, a loss of a child and, and, or it could have been a cot death or, or an illness. And we've had many different ones like that. And again, I, I work through with them. I use the Sands. Sands have a great resource, a wee booklet, and there's a booklet for partners because it's men I just work with.

**LI:** Yes.

**JC:** But a lot of them haven't been able. They think it's not their place to grieve because it's the, they're loved, you know, their partner. So, you know, I've worked through stuff with them in regard to that and, and also to help them understand why they're partners the way she may be at this time.

**LI:** Yeah.

**JC:** And to give them a wee bit reflection on that and help them to perhaps get a wee bit more patience with that, that partner. And to understand where she's coming from and how she'll be hurting. And also, to point her in the right direction too…

**LI:** Yeah.

**JC:** …through maybe Sands or other organisations that might be there to help them.

**LI:** And in terms of, I mean, it sounds, I mean, it sounds like you're doing kind of amazing work here and, and it's so compassionate around what you're doing. I suppose I'm wondering, how do you ensure that you do this well? What is your support to ensure that you do this well?

**JC:** Well as you know Lynne, I've done the VBRP stuff with you before to get some support. We sadly don't have the support that we, we really do need. One of my colleagues is paying for a supervisor. I personally pay for a, a counsellor that I see once a month.

**LI:** Ok.

**JC:** My qualifications, I did do the COSCA, you know counselling qualification and I've heard that headquarters are considering, they're in discussion with Cruse and we might…

**LI:** Ok.

**JC:** …be able to get some more training through Cruse which would be great. But in regard to me getting my support, no, I don't, I don't really get it professionally. I have to look for it myself. But I, I think parish ministers have always done that. You know, it's just been that they've, we can deal with two or three deaths, funerals a week. And so, we're, they expect us to be used to doing it. And…

**LI:** Yeah, that you've got inbuilt resilience. Yeah, yeah. I think we are, I do see a shift in, in how we're looking at we, we support staff, you know, obviously I'm based in health and social care and there is a shift in, in the thinking around that. And hopefully that will, will continue to progress and, and in the future it will look different to how it looks just now as more of us realise that what we've been coping with has actually been quite hard. And we don't, we don't have it, we don't always have an inbuilt resilience to cope with it.

**JC:** Yep, yeah, I do hope it filters down to the SPS as well and realise that there's some chaplains here that are dealing with some tough stuff.

**LI:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**JC:** So, we sometimes also have, you know, inmates that die while they're in custody as well. And we have to deal with in that occasion, staff, prisoners that have been sharing cells and landings and workplaces…

**LI:** Yeah of course.

**JC:** …and, and also the families. We, we, we support them as well when a loved one has died in custody. So, I've, I've recent, you know, recently had two little memorial services in our Chapel where the prisoners have been invited and family members have came along. And it's been such a blessing for the family members to hear. I get the, the prisoners to share what that friend, let's call them in our…

**LI:** Yeah.

**JC:** …care meant to them. And that has helped the families tremendously to have a little short service together to hear those words from their friends who will be unable to attend the funeral. And that's been nice. That's been really, really nice. And recently we also had a colleague who died while in service, they had cancer, got, got diagnosed in April and died in June. And she was a very big character in personality within the prison service here in Barlinnie. And the, we've had a big, big funeral for her, which I also had to take. I also take some…

**LI:** Ah right ok.

**JC:** …some of the funerals of the men that have died in custody. I had to take her funeral, which was tough with all my colleagues…

**LI:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** …I mean, hundreds of my colleagues there. But now the boys here are saying, what are we going to have for her? Can we do something? So that's going to be something else that we're going to look at. I'm going back to see her family tonight, so I'll mention it. And maybe they would like to join us again. Just very similar to what we do when a prisoner has died. Maybe they would like to come in. So yes, that's another angle…

**LI:** Yes, yeah.

**JC:** …to yeah to bereavements that we have within the prison.

**LI:** Yeah. And that must be really tough ‘cause I mean, what you were kind of describing there with if, you know, which I don't know if, if it sounds a bit odd or not, but it sounds like you're describing a community of people who, who have come together in, have been thrown into circumstances that they not wouldn't necessarily have built that same community, but they have nevertheless built a community. And, and now they're coping with having lost somebody in that community.

**JC:** It is completely a community. You have got it right. If you, if you worked here and, and realised the, the dynamics, but also the actual physicality of this, of this thing that's called Barlinnie it is like a wee village.

**LI:** Right ok.

**JC:** You walk out of your area, and you walk outside and then you go into another hall and you walk out of that hall into another hall. Everybody's got their areas and their sections of where they live or work.

**LI:** Yes.

**JC:** And so, it is completely like a little village and the community is like that. Yes, very much so. You've got it, nailed it Lynne.

**LI:** So, I suppose as we come to the end of the podcast, Jill, I'm just wondering if there are any kind of final thoughts you would have around, around your role and, and bereavement in that role, if there's any final things you'd like to say?

**JC:** Not really. I just guess that sensitivity and every situation is different. Everybody's different. Everybody deals with death and loss differently. But within our role, we just have to remember that the minute somebody walks through the gates of our prison, they are grieving.

**JC:** They have lost so much.

**LI:** Yes, yeah.

**JC:** And we need to be very sensitive about that and understanding about that. And I’m so grateful that chaplaincy still has a very prominent role within the prison system and that we are here for them, in a, in a way that is not anything like anybody else because it's not management and it's not an officer.

**LI:** Yes, yeah.

**JC:** It's so unique, but yet it's so important. And, and I feel very privileged to, to be here and to have that role.

**LI:** Thank you, Jill. I think they're very privileged to have you doing that role. And it's been lovely to speak to you and to hear a bit more about what you do and, and how, how much passion you have for what you do and how much love and care that you bring into this role. So, thank you so much for sharing this with us today.

**JC:** Thank you.

**LI:** Thanks very much.

**JC:** Thank you Lynne, you've got me all emotional.

The podcast was recorded in July 2024 and can be found at <https://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/podcast/> or <https://open.spotify.com/show/11AORpjHqbsYwgg1DJUtLk?si=687dba351d1f45d4>

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