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**Talking about Bereavement Podcast Series – Transcript of ‘Foodbanks…offering more than food’ Podcast**

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**Speakers**: Steve Blake, Manager, Cupar Foodbank (SB)

Julie McLay, Volunteers Coordinator, Cupar Foodbank (JM)

**LI:** We are aware that the sound quality for this podcast may not be perfect, but we hope that you can still enjoy the conversation and gain some learning from hearing about how people support those who are bereaved in a food bank context.

**LI**: Hello and welcome to the Talking About Bereavement podcast, which is brought to you by the Bereavement Education Programme in NHS Education for Scotland. I'm Lynne Innes, one of the educators in the 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 learning they're involved in as they talk about bereavement.

**LI**: Hi and welcome to this episode of the podcast. I'm really pleased to introduce my guests today, Steve Blake and Julie McLay, who both work at Cupar Foodbank. Steve hails from Campbeltown so it was probably destined that after gaining a chemistry degree at Heriot Watt University, he would find his way into the world of whiskey when looking for his first permanent job. He started working with United Distillers, which later became Diageo and was lucky enough to enjoy a varied career with them, which spans over 30 years. Julie is currently the Volunteers Coordinator for the last 18 months, prior to which she was a volunteer at the foodbank for approximately 2 years. Her background is in the financial industry, and she was formerly a mortgage advisor and latterly in the fraud department. She's delighted to be able to join the foodbank and offer something different there than she felt she was offering in the banking industry. I wonder if you would like to both expand a bit on your introduction and tell us a bit more about yourselves and how you've got to where you are in terms of your life and work. Steve, I'll come to you first.

**SB**: Yeah, [inaudible] whisky for about 30 years, just looking after various distilleries across the whole of Scotland really, and very enjoyable really. Yeah, had a lot of fun and really interesting role. I ended up down at Cameron Bridge Distillery in Windygates, so not too far from here. And then after 30 years, basically just retired and was looking for something to keep me busy. So I ended up volunteering here at the food bank, looking to try and make a difference, I suppose, and give something back. Totally different, really, really, really, really enjoyed it. And then the opportunity came up to basically manage the, the food bank, and I really thought, well, that's, that sounds great. And because I enjoy it so much and I thought, well, we'll see how it goes. And I'm so glad that I did because it's made such a difference to my life actually, and also hopefully making a difference to the people that we look after as well.

**LI**: Thanks, Steve. And I think the food bank’s associated, or affiliated to Trussell, isn't it?

**SB**: Yeah, that's right. We're, we're a charitable organisation in our own right, but Trussell is the kind of umbrella organisation that helps and supports us. Yeah.

**LI**: Okay. Thank you for that. Julie, if I come to you next. What was your motivation to come and volunteer I suppose initially and now obviously you work here as well?

**JM**: I do, yes. Hello Lynne. So, I was working in the banking industry and then I spent quite a few years being a homemaker. My husband was in the military, so we spent a lot of time travelling to different countries, lived in Germany for seven years and then we came back here. When we moved, we moved up to Scotland in 21 and so basically we had moved from the south of England to Scotland. He was still working, and I just needed something for me. Children were at school. So, I was looking for, like Steve said, something to contribute back to society and I happened to know Joe, the old manager. So I kind of came in and said do you need me? And then took it off from there. Absolutely love the food bank. Absolutely love the food bank. When you… in banking, there's never a day that you really go out thinking that day I was going, I've really made a change to someone's life, I've really affected a difference. Whereas every day when we leave here, there will be somebody who you have met through the day that we've made a difference to, whether it's giving them food or whether it's helping them with referring them to other agencies that can help to break the spiral of despair that so many of our service users find themselves in. So really, really fantastic.

**LI**: Thanks Julie. And I wonder what, I know you’re Volunteers Coordinator, so how many volunteers does the food bank have? And what is that like working with a team of volunteers?

**JM**: Oh, they’re amazing. Absolutely. We literally could not, we couldn’t open our doors and actually do, effective business without them. We have 22 amazing volunteers here. Some people do a couple of hours once every few months, but the majority of our people will do two hours every week, sometimes more than those two hours. And they are, really are just such a massively dedicated team of people that just come here and they do it because they want to help their local community. Really, really fantastic to give up their time. They've all got different skills. Some who are just like, the guys that work downstairs are amazing at organisation. We've got our team up here that will, some people would love to sit and chat with people. Other people want to be practical. They want to be packing the bags, putting the food in, making sure that everything's in date. Everything is as it should be to help our service users. So really, really fantastic.

**LI**: So really utilising the skills, the different skills that they bring.

**JM**: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

**LI**: Yeah. So, in terms of, this podcast is about bereavement and how we support people who are bereaved. And I suppose it might sound a wee bit odd to have a podcast coming from a food bank about bereavement maybe for some people, but I wondered what are the ways that the food bank, or the people that work or volunteer within the food bank, support people who are bereaved or, or perhaps anticipating loss or bereavement? So thinking about, you know, especially in the context of people that come into the food bank.

**SB**: Yeah, I mean, I think, I think that's very similar to how we would treat anybody that came into the food bank, any visitor here, at the end of the day. I mean, what we try to do is make sure that people get a real warm welcome, that they feel respected, that they feel listened to. So, you know, we like to bring them in, offer them a cup of tea, offer a cup of coffee and a biscuit and just, and just chat really and just listen. And I think that's really important thing is just to understand what people are going through, what challenges they're facing, how they're feeling, and then just try and understand how we can help them. So obviously we're here to provide emergency food for folks that are really in need of it. But it's also trying to find a bit of time and bit of space to be able to, to listen to folk and help understand how they're feeling and what we can do to, to help support. And if there's another way that we can find that we can help to support them, either by referring them on to some other agency or, or just providing any other, any other way of helping, we'll do that.

**LI**: Julie, anything you want to add to that?

**JM**: As you said, it's very much a case of just empathising with them and actually giving them the space to talk, because it may well be that the situation that they're in, that they haven't got that many people who they can talk to. And not that we're professionals in, in that way, but just to have somebody to listen to them and to empathise. We have got some of our service users that the reason they find themselves coming to us is because they've suffered a bereavement, from there everything just went out of control. And so they've come to us because, you know, there, there's one person I'm thinking in particular, and he, his mother died. He lived with his mother. His mother had done everything for him. His mother passed away and he literally didn't know how to be, how to cope on his own 'cause he never had to pay a bill, he'd never had to do the shop, and he'd never had to cook or do his own washing or anything like that. So we just started to understand where he was coming from because for a lot of us, we'd look at a grown man and think, you know, you must know how to do that kind of thing. He genuinely didn't, and from that, the effect of her passing on made everything spiral out of control. And it was just, you know, so we've continued to support him for longer than we would normally support people with food purely because he genuinely was in that space. And it all comes from the grief of losing his mother. So it's, it's, you know, sometimes we, it is just listening, but sometimes it could be more practical than that as well. But like Steve said, it's just a case of, you know, giving people the space to talk, know that they can come here and it's a, it's a safe space, which is very important to us, that people feel that they're safe here to express how they feel.

**LI**: So, it sounds like something that you're offering, is that something that's really kind and compassionate, and I know you, you alluded there to, you know, you supported somebody longer than maybe you should have been. And I'm assuming that means there are some guidance on how long you would support people for?

**JM**: That's right. So, Trussell Trust, it would be normally that it would be three emergency food parcels, for, each emergency food parcel is for three days and we're ought, we ought to be giving no more than three in, in every six months.

**LI**: Okay.

**JM**: The decision was made that we would actually stretch that to five or six because it takes five weeks for Universal Credit to kick in after it's been applied for.

**LI**: Okay.

**JM**: So, if you can only support somebody for three weeks, what are they doing for the other three? So, we look at it that way. But some people it is genuinely a case if they will come once or twice and then they've got themselves sorted. It was just that's, just a little buffer that they needed just to get them over the hump. But if needs be, we, we can support for longer.

**LI**: So it sounds quite, so in healthcare, we speak a lot about person-centredness, which is focusing on the person, not the condition, not even the patient, but actually the person who, who is at the, kind of, centre of this and making sure that care’s tailored to them…

**SB**: Yeah.

**LI**: …rather than we have to fit around whatever care that's been applied. And that sounds like you're offering a person-centred service here because you're tailoring it to, to the needs of, you know, in that case, that particular person. But I'm imagining you're doing that…

**JM**: Yes.

**LI**: …most days actually?

**JM**: Yeah, absolutely.

**SB**: Yeah, I think that is important. And I think that again, we're, we're quite fortunate, we're very fortunate in terms of the volunteers that we've got who are able to have that sort of discussion and take that approach as well. And I think that's something that we really try and stress, is that we want to make people feel welcome, respected and listened to. And that's, that's really, really important. And that's all about the person at the end of the day and trying to focus in on that. So, yeah, I think we’re, we're here to provide a service, obviously. And the primary service is to be able to ensure that people have food to keep them going. But at the end of the day, it's very much about the person.

**LI**: Yeah, yeah. And that's certainly what it sounds like. So are there any specific ways that you feel that you offer support to people? You've mentioned kind of a few things there, but is there any maybe additional ways that you might support people, their families, carers, relatives over and above what you've already mentioned?

**SB**: I think we're, we're very lucky in that we've got help from a chap from Citizens Advice,

**LI**: Okay.

**SB**: every Friday. So, a chap called Paul, who’s really, really good in terms of the understanding of benefit systems and just any kind of welfare aspects. And so if we're able, or if we think somebody would benefit from a referral to Paul, or a chat with Paul and just some advice and some help from him, then we'll make sure that they have access to that. And I think, you know, he's really helped an awful lot of the people that come to the food bank to work their way through the situation and be able to move on to, you know, a better place at the end of the day. And I think the, the, that kind of wider access to potential support services is really important that we're able to provide as well.

**LI**: Yeah, absolutely. Julie, are you wanting to come in there?

**JM**: I was just going to say, and that is that kind of goes hand in hand with what I was saying earlier about extending the, the number of food parcels we can give to somebody. We would require that if we were going to continue looking after someone over the three and onto the five and the six, we would want them to be engaged with Paul from Citizens Advice. We'd want them to at least have a conversation to see whether there's anything that he can do because there's no point in, it’s almost like a sticking plaster, if we're just give, giving food every week and then after the six weeks, the food stops, but nothing's changed because you, nothing has changed. So, engaging with Paul, at least he would then know, right, okay, well, there's nothing we can do money wise, but maybe there's this for, you know, budgeting or this for something else. And, and he would also know about things that people would be able to access if they were looking at bereavement or they've just suffered a bereavement. They would be the, the funds that are available for such things. And also, if somebody has been bereaved, you're then looking possibly at going from two salaries to one. You're looking at pensions. If there was a pension involved, the surviving spouse only gets half of that in a lot of cases. So,

**SB**: If they’re lucky.

**JM**: Yeah.

**LI**: Yeah, they might not get any of it.

**JM**: Yup. So then, you know, so there's financial implications. Going back to what you were saying, you know, that, about bereavement that, you know, people can find themselves, because they were getting along when there was two of them,

**LI**: Yeah, yeah.

**JM**: and it was all right. And then all of a sudden half the money's gone or all of the other money's gone, and so he would be able to help to signpost them to different places.

**SB**: I think that's the thing, is that it's all the emotional trauma that goes along with bereavement. But then there's also the practical aspects as well. And you know, if you, if you have suffered a bereavement, you're not probably in the place where it's easy to deal with these things either. So if we can help with that and if Paul can help with that, then you know, any way we can support is what we're here for.

**LI**: And that sounds like really practical support from Paul,

**SB**: Yep.

**LI**: from Citizens Advice. And so, he's, he's [inaudible] people not only by signposting he's actually giving them practical support on…

**SB**: Yeah, yeah.

**LI**: …how to budget or, or how to manage. And how did that service come [inaudible]?

**SB**: It was actually through Trussell, Trussell. When it comes to people who need to use food banks, it's not that there's a lack of food, it's that there’s a lack of income. So this was all about income maximisation, being able to ensure that people understand what benefits they're entitled to and being able to access those benefits, be able to manage debt better and, and any other types of welfare support that they're provided with. And so we were able to secure some funding to be able to engage with Citizen’s Advice Fife and Paul come here once a week to look after specifically and advise our food bank users.

**LI**: So it sounds like the food bank's more than a food bank?

**SB**: Well, no, it really is. I mean, I think, you know, we're here, that's what we're primarily here for, but we're, I do, any way we can support anybody in need in a particular time, then that's what we strive to do at the end of the day. So, you know, Julie's been very, very proactive in terms of widening the support that we can provide as well. So household items or clothing, but a lot of the time people need these things and they haven't got them at that time. So anything we can do to help is what we're here for.

**LI**: And Julie, I think I remember once before you talking about the food bank being more than a food bank. You had a little kind of phrase, and I think it involved dressing up in a Heinz beans outfit or a beans, maybe not Heinz, but a beans outfit.

**JM**: Would you like to hear my catchphrase?

**LI**: Yeah, please. Yeah.

**JM**: ‘Cupar Food Bank – more than just beans in a bag’. And at the time also sporting a wonderful and beautiful baked bean outfit. So yeah, no I enjoyed that and I was, I, I was saddened that we couldn’t roll that out as a mandatory uniform to everybody to prance around in baked bean outfits. No but to echo what Steve was saying, we try to make it so that, for example, we had a chap that came in after a few times he'd been he said, oh, can you not give me stuff in tins? And then the question was asked, why do not want stuff in tins? And I thought, we thought that maybe it was like that he objects to tinned food and it was because he didn't have a tin opener, but he didn't have the means to purchase a tin opener, you know, so we have got the little home zone area that's got, like Steve said, bits of household items, clothing, bedding. There's some people that go into scatter flats and they haven't got, you know, a duvet and a, and a towel. So we've got a few bits of these, and a lot, and again, they've all been donated because people are really kind and super.

**LI**: Yeah, yeah.

**JM**: We're also lucky enough to be a fuel bank. So if people haven't got any gas or electricity and they're on a top up meter, we've got an association with the fuel bank, so we can actually do them a voucher for that as well.

**LI**: Okay, okay.

**JM**: Because there's no point us giving them food, give them a bag of pasta, they need at least 10 minutes to boil the water to cook the pasta. And if they've got no gas or electricity, then they can't do that.

**LI**: Yeah, yeah. And what about, talking about fuel voucher, I thought you were going to talk about transport there for some reason. Is that an option for people?

**JM**: We, we do have via Fife Council, they have actually given us bus tickets,

**LI**: Okay.

**JM**: for both of the two main bus companies in the area, which is great. We hold them here on site. The problem is there needs to be a bit of a tweak in the system because if they've already got to us, then they've already bought a ticket. So there needs to be somebody at the other end. We need to ideally have books of tickets in different places in the outlying villages and in the towns that we cover so they can go there and say oh we need it and then they can get a voucher, a ticket to come and see us.

**LI**: Yeah.

**JM**: Because otherwise it kind of, by the time they're here, they've already bought it.

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

**JM**: So it does need a tweak, but that system can get ironed out then that would be ideal. We have given out a few tickets haven’t we to people…

**SB**: Yup.

**JM**: who, or they, they were able to get here, get a lift here but the person had to go.

**LI**: Yeah.

**JM**: So they need to get the food back home again. [inaudible].

**LI**: Yeah. And I imagine the bags are quite heavy?

**JM**: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. The average for a one-person bag, you’re looking at around about 14 to 15 kilos.

**LI**: So it sounds like you're supporting people really well around bereavement, in a very person-centred way. I wonder if there's any ways that you, you've thought about to do this even better?

**JM**: It's difficult because with bereavement it's super personal, you know, and so you could talk to one bereaved person and say one thing to them and then they find that soothing and perfectly okay. And you could say the same thing to another person who's bereaved, and they would take offence and get upset by it. So it's very difficult. I don't know. I have looked at the idea of kind of like mental health or some kind of like course on such things. But I've not actually gone any further than looking. But you see where I'm coming from on that?

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

**JM**: Because it is such a personal thing and, and things can be, anything can spark it off. I know personally, I was, my first dalliance with bereavement was when I was 16 and my father died. And I'm, you know, believe it or not, it's been a few years since I was 16…

**LI**: Really?!

**JM**: and still, I know, I know [inaudible]. No, you're too kind.

**LI:** Steve’s not actually saying anything!

[inaudible]

**JM**: Still, still 30 years on, and certain things can still spark me,

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

**JM**: you know, and it just is, so it’s a, bereavement’s, it's a tricky old dance to get right, isn't it?

**SB**: I mean, I think, I think in terms of what can we do better, there’s, there's maybe something we can do, working more closely with some of the referral agents. So, this, Cupar Food Bank, we need, if somebody wants to come and use or needs to come and use Cupar Food Bank, we need a referral from a referral agency. So it could be a council department, it can be NHS, it can be various things. But I think maybe working, we could work a bit closer with the referral agencies to better understand some of the issues as well and maybe be able to again, be a bit more proactive in signposting folk to where their appropriate support might be.

**LI**: Yeah, yeah.

**SB**: We, we tend to assume that the person's getting the support that they require from the referral agency, but that might not always be the case. And it might be that we can help to find some better support or some additional support as well. So I think there's something that we can do there. I actually think also that it would probably be worth us asking for some feedback from the folk that use the Food Bank and just seeing how they feel their experience has been, and what they would like…

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

**SB**: to see. So, you know, I think that would be worthwhile doing at some point in time as well.

**LI**: Yeah, that sounds really proactive.

**SB**: Yeah.

**LI**: And it's always, it's really good to hear from people that use services, you know, because we have, we have an idea of what that service might look like,

**SB**: Yeah.

**LI**: but then when you're the actual user of the service, it doesn't really work in the same way that you, that you imagine it might work.

**SB**: Yeah. And there might be some things that they are able to, no doubt there'll be some things that they are able to suggest that we just think, oh, that's, that's just so obvious,

**JM**: Yeah.

**LI**: We've not thought about it.

**SB**: but we just haven’t thought about it, so.

**LI**: Yeah, yeah. Did you want to add something in Julie?

**JM**: I was just going to say, I mean we do, I often will give out The Well pamphlet and we've, just looking around the room, and obviously this is broadcast, you can't see it, but there's posters up about kind of wellbeing and, and Cupar walk and talk and you know, different things that we can kind of point out to people. But like Steve said, it probably would be better if we were more engaged with the, the referral agencies.

**LI**: And just for the benefit of people listening to it, The Well is an agency, very particular to Fife Health and Social Care Partnership that supports people in the community. And we can, we can put in the podcast notes something about The Well so that people can access it to see what it actually does,

**JM**: Yes.

**LI**: if that's helpful for folks. And maybe, there'll probably be other health boards in Scotland have something similar, but it might be called something different. I, I'm getting a sense of a real community here that's been created and built. And I suspect you, you both are at the centre of that community, in terms of the volunteers, the people that come in to use the, the food bank.

**SB**: Yeah, I hope so. I mean, I really hope that, we seem to have a good team. Volunteers all enjoy it, seem to all enjoy it. And they all say that they get something out of coming and helping out here as well. And they certainly give an awful lot back in terms of the folk that we help as well, I think. And, you know, we, we do get a lot of positive comments from people that have come in to the, to the food bank, to use the food bank in terms of how they've been welcomed and treated and looked after by the team. So, I think that makes a real big difference, yeah.

**JM**: Yeah, absolutely. It is, like I said earlier, the team are the backbone of the food bank. We're just here kind of like doing the, the bits and the bobs, but the team are the, we wouldn't be able to do it without them. And actually, I do believe that they do enjoy being part of the, the team. To quote one of our, one of our team, she actually said that she enjoyed coming here on a Friday because it was her jolly end to the week to start the weekend nicely with just coming and being part of the team and then going off happy. So that was really, really lovely to hear.

**LI**: Sounds like a really good place to be. So thank you both very much.

**SB**: Thanks for taking the time to come and talk to us. It's been really good, really useful.

**LI**: No, it’s been great. It's been great talking to you and hearing about what the food bank actually does, which is much more than a food bank.

**JM**: Yes. Thank you. Thank you very much, Lynne.

**LI**: Thank you. If you'd like to listen to more episodes of this podcast, you can do so on Podbean or Spotify. Just search Talking about Bereavement, or if you'd like to find more out about the NES Bereavement Education Programme or have any questions, please get in touch or check out the Support Around Death website at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/podcast](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/podcast).

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