

# Elena Soper 19.07.25

**Interviewer:** My name is Laura and I am interviewing Elena for the Young Women's Remember project. To begin, please can you tell me your full name, where you're from and your previous role with YWCA Scotland.

**Interviewee:** My name is Elena Sober. It's the 19th of July 2025, I'm from Edinburgh and my role with YWCA Scotland is I was on Young Women Lead, the very first one in 2017-2018, I became a staff member in 2019, and I still work there today.

**Interviewer:** Before working for this organisation, what other jobs have you had in your career?

**Interviewee:** Before working for the Young Women's Movement, I worked for Holyrood Communications as an office administrator and then before that I worked for Waitrose for a long time.

**Interviewer:** What year did you join the organisation, I can't remember specifically if you've already mentioned that.

**Interviewee:** I first became aware of YWCA Scotland in 2017 and joined the Young Women Lead programme, then I became a staff member in 2019.

**Interviewer:** Nice, can you tell us a bit more about the Young Women Lead programme?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, so I saw YWCA Scotland on Instagram and they were doing a campaign called More to Me and it was about around the time of the Me Too movement and they were doing an online campaign about there's more to me than what happened to me. I became aware of them then and I started following them on social media and then they announced that they were doing this programme in the Scottish Parliament which was for young women to get involved with Scottish politics and democracy, so I applied to be on that programme. It was the first year that that programme was run, so that was 2017-2018. So, I applied to be on the programme and I got to be on the programme and we helped set up the very first Young Women Lead Committee in the Parliament. We did a project on sexual harassment in Scottish schools and as a part of that project I worked on the social media side of it, so we did research and experience gathering through social media and gave evidence on what we had found in the Scottish Parliament and then helped produce the report that came out at the end of it.

**Interviewer:** That's such an exciting project.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, it was really great.

**Interviewer:** How old were you when you joined the programme?

**Interviewee:** So, I will have been about 25? 26? Yeah, 26.

**Interviewer:** Fair enough, and were you based in Edinburgh at that point?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I was living in this house at that point with my mum.

**Interviewer:** Nice, when you first joined the organisation, the organisation didn't have a physical space?

**Interviewee:** Yes, so when I started Young Women Lead there was an office at St Margaret's House in Meadowbank where we went for one of our first sessions as Young Women Lead, but that whole programme was mostly spent at the Scottish Parliament.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so most of the project happened at the Scottish Parliament.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What was the community like and the neighbourhood around where the physical space for the organisation was?

**Interviewee:** Honestly, I don't really know. We were only there really briefly.

**Interviewer:** Was it at that point already the Young Women's Movement or was it still the YWCA?

**Interviewee:** So, at that time it was YWCA Scotland dash the Young Women's Movement.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** So, it was in the long title era of the organisation. Yes, so I think they were definitely at 'Young Women's Scot' on Instagram, but their full title was 'YWCA Scotland the Young Women's Movement'.

**Interviewer:** And had the change of name or I guess the addition of the second part of the name happened recently?

**Interviewee:** I think that happened in about 2015.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what was mainly on the agenda of the organisation at the time?

**Interviewee:** So, at the time that that was happening they were still researching the status of young women in Scotland. So, there had been two reports by that point on that. It was really small, I remember that, so it was split at that point into a national team and a Glasgow team. So the Glasgow team very much were running community-based programmes in Glasgow. They had a physical space which was very connected to the community, and they did lots of amazing programmes there, but the national team was really small, you only really had the CEO and then the people running Young Women Lead and their comms. So, Young Women Lead was really a big deal for them, that was really a massive priority. And then in 2018, 2019 was when they were doing a lot of research into how young women participate in politics. And that was for the status of young women in Scotland that came out about young women's political participation to coincide with the 100 years of young women getting the vote. Old women getting the vote, sorry. Well, some women getting the vote. So, that political participation was a really big priority for the national team at that point.

**Interviewer:** And you have now been involved in the organisation since that programme for quite a long time, haven't you?

**Interviewee:** Yes, so I joined the organisation in 2019 essentially to run Young Women Lead. That was what I was hired to do. So, I came on as the national programmes person to run Young Women Lead. I finished up the second year of Young Women Lead in the Scottish Parliament and then did the third year, which was obviously then drastically changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. So, we then transitioned into doing half of the last parliamentary Young Women Lead online. And then kind of as we were coming out of lockdown and out of the pandemic, we did a few years of Young Women Lead, which were based in local authority areas, so we spent a lot of time travelling around Scotland. We hired two more people to kind of work with me and we worked on these localised Young Women Lead in places like Fife, Inverness, Renfrewshire, spent a lot of time in Paisley. We did a programme in Glasgow on feminist time planning, which was amazing and we still get questions about that today. Yeah, we did all these amazing kind of local Young Women Leads and then my job changed, I took a wee sideways step and became the Partnerships and Events Lead, which is the job that I still have today.

**Interviewer:** How has it been, I guess, in the trajectory of how long you've been in the organisation? Your day-to-day workings within the organisation been like or how have they changed throughout time?

**Interviewee:** I think what's been really nice is that when I sort of started getting to know the organisation, the national work and the Glasgow work seemed really separate. And I think what we've done now is we really have become a full team that kind of works together, that supports each other, and I think a lot of that is to do with some good things and some bad things. So, the organisation restructured in 2023, but also we unfortunately lost funding, which meant that that centre in Glasgow had to close down. So, without having that physical premises kind of tying one team to there, it did mean that there was more flexibility for that kind of working across all of the teams to deliver programmes. I do think it was terrible for the women who accessed that space and needed that space when the centre closed down but I mean, we literally didn't have a choice, we lost all the funding. We didn't have the money to pay for it anymore. So, yes, I think that's been a real change and we've also grown quite dramatically in terms of staff numbers. I think when I joined, there was two part-time workers and two full-time workers in the national team and four full-time workers in the Glasgow team. And now we are looking at a solid team of between 12 and 14 full-time workers, one part-time worker and also having consultants and things that are coming on to do projects with us. So we've definitely grown quite dramatically in terms of staff numbers, but also there's a lot more cohesion of knowing we're all the Young Women's Movement rather than it being national and Glasgow.

**Interviewer:** Makes sense. And when I did my last interview, one of the women was telling me that there were centres, community centres that the YWCA run. Did that have anything to do with, when you did projects where you found young women in specific places, in terms of young women leaders, was there any connection between that sort of network that the YWCA had and the work that happened within the organisation afterwards?

**Interviewee:** No, we picked places kind of on a whim. We were really desperate to be out of the central belt. The reason that we did Glasgow as the first one was because we were still in lockdown and we already had a lot of existing connections in Glasgow, so it was easier to build on that and to recruit people to work on the Glasgow programme. We then, for our second one, which while things were still a little bit uneasy, we went to Dundee because we already had a programme in Dundee called Oor Fierce Girls, which was a programme of NSVCC Scotland which has evolved into the 'Young Women Know' project that we're still running today. So, we went there and then from that point we were really looking at where are the places that we

have at least some existing connections, but unfortunately it wasn't really through the YWCA network, simply because there's not really any YWCAs left. There's two that have kind of merged with YMCAs, so we did work quite closely with YMCA in Paisley. That wasn't through them being a YMCA group and us being YWCA, it was really more that they are such an amazing community group and they have this amazing programme for young women who are interested in STEM, so we just had a really natural connection with them and we've done other projects with them since. And then we ended up hiring what is left, which is a YWCA, YMCA building in Cooper for our Fife project. So, we didn't work with them, we hired their building, but those were the only two real YM, YWCA connections. We were looking at existing community spaces, we worked a lot with Kairos Women in Paisley as well, so really just looking at who's already there on the ground, how can we complement their work that they're already doing and also how can we, for when the project is done, is there a space that the young women that have been involved in our programme can naturally move on to? So, we know that there's young women who have stayed volunteering or getting involved with Kairos for example, which has been a really nice follow on from the programmes we did locally.

**Interviewer:** Nice, and what has your relationship been with other members of the organisation throughout your time here?

**Interviewee:** It's been really great. I think it's something quite special to work with an organisation that ultimately shares the same values as you do and I think that it's a real privilege to be able to have your job align so well with what you do and of course that means that everyone that you work with shares your same values. I think, because we're the young women's movement, we do have a lot of people working for us that are really at the start of their careers, which means that there is quite a lot of staff turnaround because people come in and then they get bigger opportunities, they get different opportunities and it's really nice for me to watch people kind of come in and grow and then see all of the amazing things that they then go on to do. It's funny now that I am basically an old timer at the organisation, so I've been there six years. I'm the fourth longest serving staff member and the three before me have all been there over ten years, so they're people who originally worked in the Glasgow Centre and have done for a number of years and so the four of us are like, we've seen it all, we've seen it all now! So it's lovely to watch people come in and to go on and do just amazing things while it's sad that we lose them, we then do get new amazing people but it's a good space to kind of bond with people quite quickly because you almost know for certain that as people come in you've got shared interests, shared values and it's just really nice.

**Interviewer:** Nice. Sorry, I need to regroup my questions. What did it feel like to be part of the movement? I guess both when you first started as a volunteer and also how has that developed into being employed by the organisation?

**Interviewee:** It's been a really massive part of my own personal development and growth. When I started getting involved with the organisation I was really fresh and new into a role working as an office administrator for a political communications company and I'd just come out of working at Waitrose, which was not what I had intended my career to be, and I was working really hard on myself essentially at this point in time, going through some pretty intense therapy. I was really lucky that my boss at the time had said yes, you can absolutely have time off to go to this programme for your own development and the job that I was in then ran a lot of events at the parliament. So, I was getting to meet a lot of parliamentarians and those two programmes really helped me grow in confidence and almost get ready to start my career after basically being stuck in retail and moving up the management ranks of retail essentially because I couldn't get another job. It was a few years after I graduated that I was able to get out of retail and that was amazing and then getting to stay involved with the young women's movement even after Young Women Lead finished. I joined their advisory panel, I took part in focus groups and I was on their 30 under 30 list. They then didn't give me the job, this is the funny bit about all of this, I interviewed for the job and they didn't give it to me. They gave it to someone else and I was devastated, absolutely devastated and then the person who was offered the job left I think within six months and so then they came crawling back to me, crawling back and said would you like the job. I said let me think about it and it took about five minutes and I was like yes of course I'll take the job. That was really interesting as well because at that point the job was only three days a week and I had just moved in with my partner Tillan Lifko and I was like 'what am I doing taking on a part time job' like I've just moved out again so then I started freelancing. I did all these fun cool projects like freelancing which was something that I'd never done before and that was great, then I think about six months later my job got made full time and I kept freelancing because I found that I quite enjoyed the diversity of what I was doing and then about six months after that we got a four day work week so that was great.

**Interviewer:** Amazing and I guess as part of your role you do a lot of like partnerships so like what are the most exciting partnerships that you've worked on and who has that been with if you can tell us?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, so when you're a small organisation, working in partnership is really important and I think it was quite early on into probably the start of the COVID-19 pandemic that we started working really closely with NSVCC Scotland. They had released a report in 2018 called Is 'This Sexual Abuse?' and it was about phone calls to child-blind and it was really about

this kind of peer-to-peer sexual abuse that young people were phoning about and this had come out around the same time that our report from Young Women Lead about sexual harassment in schools. The two reports came out quite at a similar time and so before I joined as a staff member, there had been conversations between the Young Women's Movement and NSVCC about, is there potentially a piece of work that we could do together and essentially during COVID we were like we'll just do it. We don't have any funding and it was in lockdown and we were like let's just do it, so we basically approached Dundee City Council and were like we would like to do a campaign to kind of address sexual harassment in schools and peer sexual abuse, what do you think. They were like 'okay' and so we ended up working kind of with a group of high school students in Dundee from across quite a few different schools online at this point it, it was all done through Teams, and we came up with this amazing campaign called Oor Fierce Girls which is still running in Dundee today. We still have it as part of our Young Women Know programme as well and so that project, we then got funding for it the next year and so we delivered it the second year in Dundee. We then went to Perth, Kinross, Angus and nationally, so we have all these amazing resources created by Young Women in schools to tackle peer sexual abuse and sexual harassment. So, that's been amazing and actually working with those Young Women has been particularly amazing, we're still connected to a lot of them and a lot of them are on our advisory collective or are our volunteers for Bold Girls Ken which is the kind of Perth edition of Young Women Know and just won an award the other week in London. So that partnership, those programmes and those young people has been incredibly fulfilling. We've done loads of other exciting things also, we're working at the moment with the Scottish Youth Parliament and 'Elect Her' to do a summit at the Scottish Parliament about young women's involvement in democracy which is really exciting. And actually, all of the work that we've done for the Scottish Parliament has just been so meaningful for the young people to have that access to the Scottish Parliament, so that's been really great. The third sector and especially the women's sector have had a pretty rough few years, it's been pretty rocky funding the change in global politics. I feel like there was a real high around the 100 year anniversary of women getting the right to vote in the UK, it was around women's rights and it was really great and there was all these amazing things happening for feminism and now it's really bad. There's this push back, the rise of misogyny and it's really tough but actually the sisters in the women's sector in Scotland really have each other's backs and I think that's really special.

**Interviewer:** That's so nice to hear, what do you think or what do you feel has been your biggest impact with the organisation in the time that you've spent here? I don't know, is there anything you're particularly proud of?

**Interviewee:** I'm really proud of all of the Young Women Leads, especially the ones that were done through Covid because that was really hard trying to build a community online, trying to

do a piece of work online and I think the Glasgow one felt really special. It was the first one that we had done without the Scottish Parliament, not because of anything bad but just the original agreement with the Scottish Parliament was for three years due to their capacity. Also, it was Scottish Parliament election year and obviously we were still in lockdown, so we had anticipated that we would be applying for new funding but most of the funds in 2020 were extended a year so we had to think really fast about how are we going to do a Young Women Lead programme when we can't go and see people in person and when we don't have the Scottish Parliament infrastructure we did. We managed to recruit an amazing group of young women in Glasgow who produced an absolutely, insanely brilliant report on feminist time planning and six months after that report was released, one of the people who was on the group was elected a councillor for Glasgow City Council, Holly Bruce. She put forward a motion at Glasgow City Council to make Glasgow a feminist city, and it passed. So, that was something just really special because it came out of a time where honestly, I think we met for the first time about five months in and we had to meet outside unfortunately. It was a gloriously sunny day but all of the research and everything was all taking place without anyone having been in the same room as each other and actually then getting to be in person, we booked the Hidden Gardens at the tramway in Glasgow. We got to do this really nice outdoor session where they started analysing their data, and we had someone come and do a poetry session which was really nice, so that was really special. Then, for Holly to have taken that report to council and for there to be an actual motion at the end of that, that's pretty great. Also, I think I'm quite proud of everything we've done around the 100th year celebration, so we started our year of birthday partying in 2024 and had kind of a stakeholder event at Edinburgh City Council in the city chambers. But, what some people don't know is that it was meant to be at the Scottish Parliament and we had five days notice that we could no longer hold it at the Scottish Parliament because if you book an event at the Scottish Parliament you run the risk that they might schedule a debate at the same time, which is what happened to us. So, with five days turnaround we did manage to still run the event, so I'm really pleased with that. Then we held an event in March this year which was for young people, we booked out the boardwalk in Glasgow for the whole day and we just did silly things like have a silent disco, we had dance classes in the craft room, so I think I'm particularly proud of that and proud of being able to really meaningfully put events as a way that people can engage with us. That's been a highlight for me.

**Interviewer:** Has that been something that has changed in your time in the organisation? The way of engaging with people through events?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, it has. So, we always would do events as a way to mostly engage with stakeholders but the way that young women could engage with us tended to be through our

programmes. However, our programmes would often run for different periods of time and so not everyone could commit to being on a programme and not everyone could deal with that time commitment, so we started looking at one-off events as a way of engaging people that didn't have that time commitment. We also didn't have a set events person that we do now and so part of my role has been about well, what can we offer people to participate with us on their own terms. You know, we're asking people to come and join us for two hours a week rather than committing to like a six month, a year, whatever it is, project so that was something that has been really impactful. We started doing that probably around 2024 after I started my role and it's basically, it's been really great because we are getting people at these events who we haven't met before and we're able to now offer events as a way of, sort of opening up a partnership of organisations. We've done quite a few joint events with different organisations including Smart Work Scotland, Project Change and we're doing one next week actually with Bright Red Triangle who are the social enterprise wing of Edinburgh Napier University, that's just a really great way to introduce people to our organisation but also to offer them a way to participate without, you know, having to commit to anything with us. What's also been great about that is that this year we've been able to bring on volunteers to support with that and that's just another way that young people can get involved with us. I've been working with the volunteers on co-designing now what those events actually are, so rather than me sitting and going 'I wonder what events people would like' being able to say I've got this money, this is what this money is to be spent on, what do you think I should spend it on and that's been really great as well.

**Interviewer:** Makes sense, and the youth participation, is that something that has already been part of the organisation or is that something that kind of came into the picture afterwards?

**Interviewee:** I think especially with the national work, youth participation has been a really big part of it certainly since I've been involved, so that first year Young Women Lead was very much a pilot year. So, while we were on it we were constantly being asked, are we doing this properly and what are the ways that we can improve this and there was really that feeling that what we were saying and what we were experiencing was really being heard. So, then when it came back for the second year, there were changes made from our feedback from the first year and then when I came on board I changed it again for the third year. Then obviously we drastically changed it during Covid and then moving locally but there was really that sense that this should be something that is co-designed and co-offered. I think everything that we have been really keen to do is ensure that the voices of young women are constantly heard in whatever we are designing. We have always had volunteers on the status of young women in Scotland so that was people again helping us to shape the status of young women in Scotland and then our advisory panel and our advisory collective as well being there as a strategic body to tell us when

we are getting it right when we are getting it wrong. And ensuring that that participation and that voice is part of what we do and that we are accurately reflecting what young women want, what young women need and not just being like 'oh we read this online' especially as we are all getting older. Now, I am putting things out and I am like 'oh my god I am too old for my own events' this is not what it was when I started.

**Interviewer:** Yeah fair enough and at the beginning what was it that motivated you to be involved in the organisation?

**Interviewee:** I think I was really looking for something that was aligned in my values. I had just come out of working in retail and I was looking for, I had been looking for charity jobs and not got anywhere but then got this break to work in the political communications charity so that was fulfilling my needs of not working in retail and also unexpected things I really enjoyed engaging with Parliament. I am quite a nosy person, so being in the know of politics was really exciting for me and I think that that was great but then I really needed something as well that really felt like it was feeding my values and a community. I have an amazing community of friends but I was really looking for that professional community as well, so I really liked their social media and I enjoyed following them. Then when they had the young women lead thing, I was like 'oh no I want this, this is where I wanted to go' I was really a student activist at university, was really involved at the state international but then after leaving university, I kind of lost that part so this seemed like a really good way to get back into being an activist and come back into those circles, so that I guess is what drew me to the Young Women's Movement.

**Interviewer:** I've got a bit of a touchy question but was the fact that it was a feminist organisation something that appealed to you? And what do you think makes a feminist organisation?

**Interviewee:** I think for me they seemed really in touch with the kind of feminist themes of the time, so you know it was all about, 'Me Too' was kind of at its peak at that point and so for me it felt like they were speaking out about the right things that I agreed with and the things that they were posting on social media. I liked that they were really like, that they were intersectional, I'm not afraid to say that they were trans-inclusive. They just really seemed to be led by young women, all of the pictures of their staff team and things that they were doing I was like 'no that's an organisation that I see that reflects me' especially at that point when I was within their age demographic. This feels like an organisation that really fits for me, so I guess for me a feminist organisation obviously has human rights and equality at the centre but is also

brave to stand up for what it believes to be right. I think that's for me what really drew me to them, they really just seemed bold and brave and just really aligned with my values.

**Interviewer:** Nice, and what sort of also, sorry we didn't say this but we can take a break at any point if you feel like we need to take a break, sorry we didn't say that. When you joined the organisation what were your hopes, what were your hopes about the experience and has that changed at all throughout your time there?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, I think it's been interesting because when I started at the organisation and I've been reflecting on this a lot recently because we've been doing a lot of recruitment, I was really, I had never done anything like this before, you know. My experience for running Young Women Leads was that I had done Young Women Leads, you know I've always been good at organising things, I love a spreadsheet like I just love a spreadsheet, and so you know I had all of that. I had on the admin I had done like events management and all of that stuff but in terms of engaging directly with young people I think I'd just become a guide leader as well. At this point, I didn't have that experience so for me it was about really learning to grow professionally and really committed to making sure that the people doing Young Women Lead had as good a time on the programme as I did. I think, you know, I'm six years in now, I'm much further on in my career and in my professional development. I think what has changed is obviously I'm much more on the business side of the organisation now, I guess you could say I've got much more kind of insight into what we need to ensure the organisation runs and so for me it's a treat. I love it when I get to directly engage with young people doing the programmes which is why I love that the events are a part of my job because that means I get to go and do stuff. I get to be there, so yesterday I was with the advisory collective and we painted plant pots and I'm like, that is such a treat to do and it's the thing that totally keeps me going while I'm doing funding applications or reading 300 job applications, it's like the bright spark. So, I think what's changed is that engaging directly with young people isn't my entire job now but now I feel a huge sense of responsibility to ensure that the organisation keeps going and is sustainable so that other people in the organisation can have young women at the forefront of their minds at all the time. So, I think that's really what's changed for me is being like no, I need to keep this organisation going and together so that young people can keep having the same amazing experience without being directly on the front line of delivering that.

**Interviewer:** What's your favourite memory about your time at the Young Women's Movement?

**Interviewee:** So I've got a favourite memory from before I joined as a staff member and that was the day that we finished Young Women Lead 2017-2018. We had a little graduation party

at the Scottish Parliament but after the graduation ceremony we just like, a couple of us, just stood in the water outside Scottish Parliament drinking Prosecco. I was like, I feel now when I look back at it, I'm like why did the police not tell us off. There are pictures of us just standing in the water, bottles of Prosecco in hands, so that was a particular highlight from that and yeah not getting shouted at by the police for behaving like that is probably a good thing as well. Then, my highlight for my professional career has, oh what has it probably been, it's probably been the moments that I've been at events, I've been able to take a step back and just go 'yeah I did a good job on this one' and I definitely felt that on our 100th birthday this year. I was standing watching the dance class and there was just such joy for the dance facilitator. The young women who were in the dance class, the energy was just so good and it was like this pure relief that I'd managed to pull off. Also, I was like no this is good, this is a space where people can come together and be joyful, that's what I wanted that day to be so that was special.

**Interviewer:** Nice and have you gained any transferable skills from the time that you've spent at the organisation either as a volunteer or professionally?

**Interviewee:** I mean I was on a call the other day with someone asking them about their experience of working with advisory collectives because I was looking for tips about how we can improve our advisory collective and their relationship with our board of trustees. He asked me 'can I ask what your background is' and I said my background is the young women's movement. I was like, I have no professional qualifications for this work beyond what I've done at this organisation so it is not nonsense to say that my entire professional development and wherever I go from here, whether I stay with the young women's movement, whether I move to another organisation, whatever it is that this has been the entirety of my career. It is everything that I will ever be able to say started and ended at this organisation. And talk about transferable skills or things that you've learnt, if I were to ever interview for anywhere else, every answer would be to do with what I've done in this job. This is my career, so yes, all of them is the answer.

**Interviewer:** And what have you learned in your time at the organisation?

**Interviewee:** Everything. Yeah no, I mean it's taught me how to be a manager, it's taught me how to do funding applications, it's taught me how to be a facilitator, it's taught me how to be in a room with people who have much more power than you and still feel confident enough to challenge them on the things that they're saying. It has been the organisation that has taught me the importance of sticking to your values even when it's difficult and also the importance of ensuring sustainability. I think often when you start working for a charity you've got grand ideas

about what you can do and then suddenly when you get into the mechanics of it you're like 'oh no' we have to work within a system that's inherently misogynistic and broken. But unfortunately, sometimes we have to play by those rules in order to keep making change and hopefully for the generations to come those systems are a little bit better yeah.

**Interviewer:** What are the main challenges that you've faced with the organisation?

**Interviewee:** I think it's been challenging, it's challenging when you are so value aligned to switch off, like I don't stop being a feminist at 5 o'clock on a Thursday so sometimes it can be challenging to maintain boundaries between work and social life, I'm much better at it now. I definitely had times where those boundaries were very blurred but I do feel that along with my professional development that's something that I've really learned and really maintained well now. I very much have work life boundaries and things which is good and I really recommend that everyone has those but also it's just really challenging to be a feminist organisation in Scotland right now. There has been immense push back from people who do not share our values especially when it comes to trans inclusivity and that has been extremely difficult to deal with because that really does seep into your personal life you know. I've had personal experience of organisations directly targeting me because of what we do in the organisation and that shouldn't happen to anyone. I think it's hard now with things that are happening with the Supreme Court ruling that those voices that have been a cause of such pain and stress and anxiety are now gaining such traction in positions of power. I think it's really hard not to be overwhelmed by that and not to kind of take that home with you especially when it's so pervasive, like everywhere, I talk about it with my friends and it feels like all we do is talk about it so that has been really challenging. Then I think we're also facing a moment right now where everything that we are doing we're always getting questioned about why, about what we're doing to include the voices of young men, and I think there is a push back around spaces for women. While there is this awareness of how challenging it is to be a young man now but also acknowledging that we don't have the resource to support young men that are going through this but also we don't have the expertise and actually it's two-fold because it shouldn't be the responsibility of women's organisations to stop young men falling into this toxic masculinity trap. But, at the same time there aren't organisations out there working with young men and I find that really challenging because it's coming up more and more often now when we do events, when we launch things that people are like 'did you speak to young men as a part of this' and if you didn't 'why didn't you' and that's just a battle that we're having to face. We don't have the expertise to talk to young men and also a lot of young men wouldn't want to talk to us so we're just battling that. And, just in general there's this push back against women's rights and that's affecting funding, and it's affecting who's engaging with us. I think women's rights just don't feel like a priority at the moment and in some places they're actively being

pushed back so it's like we're having to fight for things that we've already fought for and that's been challenging as well.

**Interviewer:** Have you felt a difference in young women's impressions or attitudes towards politics, towards the organisation or just in general?

**Interviewee:** I think it's been challenging recently to engage with young women because frankly they're exhausted. I think that we've certainly seen that when we've been asked by, for example, the Scottish Government to conduct a focus group looking at, for example, young women's experiences of menstrual education. What we're finding is that young women are at this point where they're basically sick of being asked about their experiences without seeing any improvement in the conditions. And I think we're seeing this, we're finding it more and more difficult to ask people, to be constantly asking people to contribute to research, to contribute to focus groups and we're feeding this back to government and we're like look there's just fatigue, there's fatigue because they're being asked by us but also in general by politicians, by other organisations to share what their lives are like and what they wish for and what they want but what they're not seeing is legislation change, they're not seeing bills being introduced. It feels like quite a long time since we had a really big win. I feel like the last really big win we had was the period poverty bill, the free menstrual products where that was such a great amazing moment and I think that that's been, that fatigue, we're really seeing it and we're really seeing more people want to just come and do like our events. They just want to come and hang out and speak to other young women without being pressured to share sometimes really horrible experiences or things that they find difficult. So, we're seeing more focus on the like, actually no, I do want to come and paint a plant pot or I do want to come and make a terrarium but what I don't want to do is have to make a terrarium while being asked about my education or any trauma that I might be carrying. I think it's particularly noticeable trying to engage with LGBTQ plus young people, we were asked to do a focus group by the Scottish Government directly with queer young women and they basically were like, no. I think it's in the light of the Supreme Court ruling and you know how different the Scottish Government have been reacting to that versus tackling the UK Government in court over the blocking of the Gender Recognition Reform Bill, I think they see that the energy is different and so they're not as willing to give up their time, you know, and to share that with institutions that they see as not friendly to them or their community.

**Interviewer:** What are your hopes for both dealing with these things or the direction that the organisation will sort of grow into?

**Interviewee:** I think we're just needing to shift our perspective a little bit, you're always going to get people who are super passionate and have the energy and want to give. There's always going to be young women that do that and we want to be a home for them and we are a home for them but we also need to now think about how we can be a home for the people that just need community and just want to have a community without feeling the need or feeling pressured to give back in some way. I think that's really what youth participation is all about is meeting people at whatever stage they're at on their journey. So what I've really enjoyed doing is getting to organise these things where actually the main purpose of them is just joy or like the main purpose of them is just fun, it's like no just come here and we're just going to do something creative that normally if you wanted to do you would have to pay £30, £40, £50 to attend but we're going to put it on for you for free. And actually, engaging with people in that way means that actually, at some point, when they're feeling a bit more healed, when they're feeling a bit more energised, when they're feeling a bit more ready to maybe pick up the fight again that we're also there for them when that shifts for them. I think that can be difficult to justify to funders, for example, like yes I want you to fund us because I want to put on a fun day, I want you to fund us so I can take them to the science centre, I don't want you just to fund us because they're going to tell us about their experience and then we can lobby for change. It's about the equal weighting of those things like yes activism, safe space to make change but also having those opportunities to just come and be together and enjoy being together in a space, doing something fun. So yeah, from my hopes, that is my hope that we can grow into being a space that holds equal balance for both. It's difficult to do because we don't have a physical space and I think that's something that we've lost by not having a physical space, you know we don't have the just come in and see us you know, we don't have the 'we're open on a Tuesday evening' if you just want to come in and watch a movie, you know we don't have that. Hopefully, maybe someday we'll have that again, so yeah that's my hope is that we'll be able to hold space for both and not have to be so consistently coming up with new innovative things to get young people engaged because that's the only thing that we can get funding for. So, my hopes are that we're able to be sustainable to offer both.

**Interviewer:** Makes sense. Yeah I think that's all the questions, is there anything else that you feel like I've left out, that you would like to ask or is there anything else that you want to tell us that I've not gone through or not asked you?

**Interviewee:** No, no, I think I'm good.

**Interviewer:** Cool.