

Educafe Podcast

Episode 4 - Stepping Stones

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Educafe, social wellbeing, community projects, mental health, volunteering, social interactions, belonging, work experience, flexible volunteering, trust building, social isolation, practical activities, community support, nonprofit organization, local partnerships.

SPEAKERS

Isabel King, Penny Locke, Magdalen Wind-Mozley, Jamie Adam, Ginette

Jamie Adam 00:13

Hello and welcome back to Creating Communities, the Educafe podcast. In this series, we shine a light on the amazing work being done by Educafe, a non-profit organisation based in West Berkshire that delivers people centered projects that strengthen communities. In this episode, we'll be exploring how Educafe opens pathways to social wellbeing, work and belonging. I'll be speaking to two Educafe volunteers, alongside Isabel King, who works with service partners that utilise Educafe to support local people back into the workplace. But before we dive into that conversation, I met with one of the Educafe service users, Ginette, to hear firsthand how Educafe has helped her. A quick warning that we do discuss mental health and suicide during this interview.

Ginette 01:02

Okay, so I'm Ginette. I've been coming to Educafe, probably from for about three years. I should think I help out on the Knit & Natter table. So, yeah, I help out. What it was a friend of mine, I was going to a group with a friend of mine, and the group, for various reasons, packed in, and my friend of mine said, Oh I think we could go to Educafe. So that's how I started coming along. And then I met Penny who runs Penny Post, and she got me involved in the Knit and Natter group. And this was back when, when it was in, it was in The Globe Pub in the Kennet Centre, and started out just helping with making blankets so blanket squares, knitting blanket squares. And I hadn't knitted for 20 years, odds, so I had to sort of relearn how to knit. Anyway, and then it and then it came to the library. And over the sort of past three years, people have got to know each other, and people have made friends, and the nattering is as important as the knitting. I've always found it difficult to socialise, so when I'm knitting, it helps me, it helps me relax a bit more and talk to people a bit better. And I've definitely got more chatty as the time's gone by. It's just nice atmosphere up here, and people are friendly and yeah, so yeah, I was just, I was just telling one of my friends that I have, I have mental health problems, but this has been like a lifesaver for me. Before I started coming here, I was in Prospect Park in 2018 up in Reading. I did try to commit suicide, but gradually over the last few years, that feeling has lessened, that that's what I want to do. So, I think, yeah, it's improved my confidence to come out. And, yeah, sometimes, some days I have to really push myself to get here. But once I'm here, you know, I'm okay, yeah. And it's nice to see other people making friends as well. You know, there's some of the ladies are, you know, friends with each other, and that's nice to see as well. It helps you feel less alone as well. It's like, I lost both my parents last year, and then so I've spoken to a couple of the ladies who've also had a loss, so knowing that when we're not alone, you know. But it's just also nice to be doing something practical too, I mean, some of the ladies do like hats for premature babies, and we do blankets for homeless people and some, I think some of the blankets go to Ukraine as well. So, it's just really good to be doing something practical as well. And keeping busy, just having a purpose, you know. I just, I just do feel

welcomed, you know. And having a routine really helps as well. So knowing I've got to get here, that really helps so, and actually, through meeting Penny, I've been able to do a bit of work for Penny for on Penny post. So, so that's helping me sort of try and get back into the workplace.

Jamie Adam 04:15

Thank you, Ginette, and thank you for talking so openly, honestly and candidly. And I'm delighted to hear that you are doing better and that Educafe has had such a brilliant impact on your on your life and wellbeing. I'm now delighted to be joined by Magdalen, Penny and Isabel. Thank you all for joining us today on creating communities. Now I always just like to start by asking you to introduce yourself and your connection to Educafe.

Magdalen Wind-Mozley 04:42

Okay, hi, I'm Magdalen Wynn Mosley. I've been volunteering at Educafe since it was at The Globe so, so quite some time, not quite right from the start. I generally volunteer either in chatty corner, um or in parent village, and obviously, both of them are wonderful, vibrant communities. I have absolute joy in helping out in them. It's lovely in parent village to meet the mothers with their little children, and it's fantastic meeting people in chatty corner who come from all over the world and are a pleasure to talk to.

Penny Locke 05:25

Hi, my name is Penny Locke. I run a community news service called Penny Post, and somehow got involved right at the beginning of Educafe through knowing Clare Middleton separately and I ended up looking after the Knit and Natter table. They don't really need looking after, frankly, but I helped come up with projects and what's great is that we make things that are actual specifically requested by various groups, whether it's blankets for Ukraine or baby hats for neonatal wards and local hospitals. So, it's really great to feel that this group of mainly women, but not exclusively, feel it makes them feel so valued and that they're contributing something to the community. It also is an amazing social experience, especially during lockdown, we had women joining us who hadn't been out of the house for a considerable amount of time, and they were really nervous about doing so. But there's something about sitting with a group of people where you're actually using your hands and being busy and creating something that kind of makes you feel safe. And you know, she started talking to us, and she said at the end, I can't believe I've just talked to you complete strangers, so that was lovely. I also am involved in the community through a cooking and food project that I run, and I meet people who have mental health problems, social isolation, dietary problems, and wherever I connect with them in West Berkshire, I always say, come to Educafe. Meet me there, I'm there most Wednesdays. We can continue this conversation in person, and it's just so invaluable to have a place that I know I can refer anybody to Educafe, absolutely everybody will be warmly welcomed. And I've had people come who it's the only time they come out of their house, and they now look forward to it. And on top of that, we can have conversations about, you know what I'm trying to help them coach with their eating and diet and stuff. But the added extra is they've become part of the Educafe family, and they're meeting other people in similar situations of realizing they're not alone in whatever challenges they're facing. So it's incredible. The other thing I do is I bring in work experience students through Penny Post, we offer as much work experience as we can to work on digital media basically, but now part of that week's experience is coming to Educafe with me. I've had nervous students who can't come out to where we live, who can just about get to Newbury Library. And again, they feel safe, and they give us an opportunity to interact with adults, strangers, interview people, it's an incredible experience for them.

Isabel King 08:44

So my name is Isabel, and I know Educafe over the time that it did start at The Globe, but I knew Clare Middleton, one of the co-founders, prior to that, and what brought me into contact at The Globe when she'd started Educafe, was that I worked for a charity that helps people who have a range of barriers either move towards work or move back towards being in the working world. And some of the barriers that those people might have are the adult, but

some of those barriers are around perhaps a mental health crisis that's occurred to them, physical disability, or maybe being autistic or having ADHD or a mixture, or being socially anxious about getting out and meeting new people. So as part of my role to help them consider moving back towards work, the stepping stones towards work, it's pretty important for some to just feel able to get out and meet new people. People and to have small conversations or big conversations, but finding a non-threatening, accessible and flexible place can be very hard, and one of the beauties, I think, of Educafe is that it has retained agility and suppleness, which is, well, this person's come along, what can we do? How can we help? What is it that they need? And do we need to change something? Can we move something or manipulate something to help that person get on the journey back to life, as it were, back to work, volunteering, whatever it is.

Jamie Adam 10:42

Thank you all. You touched on some really important points there, one of them being that often the pathway to work actually starts with small social interactions that can be built upon. Magdalen, you volunteer across different groups here at Educafe. How have you seen these social interactions benefit some of the service users?

Magdalen Wind-Mozley 11:01

I mean, it is brilliant watching people, for example, the chatters who come along often when they first come in, they are, you know, they can be recent refugees to this country, feeling very uncertain about their place in Newbury, and seeing people make friendships, very, very genuine and real friendships, which will, I think, continue for years. Seeing people leave not because they got bored of Chatty Corner, but because they've got jobs, you know, and they're absolutely flourishing. I mean, I love the fact that I will be walking through town, and people will say hello. I'll get big hugs quite often from people who I've met, either in Chatty Corner or in parent village.

Jamie Adam 11:49

Isabel, you mentioned the flexibility of Educafe and the openness and the warmth that people receive, and I can absolutely attest to that as well. But could you tell us a little bit more about how Educafe helps the individuals that you work with?

Isabel King 12:03

Well, I think one of the one of the aspects of Educafe that is very helpful for individuals that I've taken along, or it suggested go along, is the variety of the volunteers. It's the mixture of skills and knowledge and intelligence of the volunteers that I think make it very successful as a format. For some of the people that might have gone along, they actually really need to feel that the volunteer they're going to maybe start talking to or be introduced to, is going to get them, is going to listen keenly and smartly. So, one person that I took along, for instance, had not left her home for quite a long time. She was perfectly smart, but she was very anxious about social settings, and I was able to know that when I first went to Educafe with her, that if I introduced her to a volunteer, I could confirm that, well, you will be welcomed, you will not be judged and someone won't make assumptions about you, and in terms of for that person, the opportunities that they might get to use their skills, discover skills, or revive skills, meant that there were lots of ways that Educafe can help that person have a stepping stone to knowing her skills using them, and maybe ending up being able to put that on a CV.

Jamie Adam 13:48

Penny, you look after the Knit and Natter group, although, as you say, they don't really need looking after. And we also heard from Ginette right at the start of this episode. So how important is this group and groups like this at providing a sense of belonging for people and helping them with their well-being?

Penny Locke 14:07

It's been life changing for these women. I mean, you know, there, there are women who have met through Educafe, who've become firm friends. They go on holiday together now, let alone kind of weekly lunches. And often these are women who've perhaps been recently widowed, who live alone. And we they keep in touch, so again, we have a WhatsApp group as well, and I know that they see each other during the weeks that Educafe doesn't, doesn't meet physically in the library. And over the years, we've welcomed, I mean, we have a core of kind of seriously skilled and experienced knitters and crocheters, but we, we welcome in anybody. And we've had, you know, from kind of seven-year-old boys right through to, you know, people who've lost, completely lost their confidence. So, we like to support new, new comers as well. And again, people who does, don't have English as their first language. We have, I'm just thinking, we've had some women who obviously have domestic situations and they can't come out, but we give them the wool and everything that they can do at home in their own time, in their comfort zone, and then they bring back what they've completed back to us. So again, what Isabel was saying, we try and be flexible and tailor what we're offering to that absolute individual, and a point I'd like to make personally as a volunteer, my experience of people and the needs people have has been invaluable. Thanks to Educafe, I've met so many different people who out on the street I wouldn't have understood. I would have walked past or, you know, just not cocked what was going on with them, and an Educafe gives us, gives a safe space to for everybody, just to get to know each other on across so many spectrums, and that has been a real privilege. And I think that helps me as a human being, but it also then helps me be able to help other people in the community as well. So, it's almost like a little microcosm, if you like.

Jamie Adam 16:39

Yeah, I can imagine that is such a huge value in volunteering, and like you say, getting a much deeper understanding of others. Could you describe what it's like, or maybe the feeling you get when you arrive at Educafe on a Wednesday morning?

Penny Locke 16:54

It's brilliant when you walk into the room and Jules brings you a cup of tea, and it's lovely, you know. It really is, is a group, we all know each other, you know, we find out, you know, who's coming to Parent Village, where you're needed to be. And, yeah, I mean, I really enjoy it. I look forward to it. And I love the fact that when I'm doing other things, which I, you know, I do, do, you know, I'm a volunteer at the local schools as well, is that if you meet people who have a need, then Educafe is somewhere that is often a place that, if they can't get the need answered there, then perhaps they can find somebody who can direct them, you know, to somewhere where they can, and it is amazingly welcoming and friendly place. And I think for some people, that's what people need, somewhere where they can go along on a Wednesday and be sure of a warm welcome.

Jamie Adam 17:53

So this brings us nicely onto something I was keen to discuss, which is how often what appear to be relatively small actions, like being bought a cup of tea, or like that warm welcome you receive when you arrive. How these things can have such a big impact on someone's day, week, month?

Penny Locke 18:12

I think, I think smiling is such a simple act you can do. And I had a student from can't remember if it was Newbury College. Now, I think it was Newbury College, confident lad, or at least on the outside, but he said to me, wow, I can't believe the atmosphere of this place, it's so positive. And in the world, we live in, especially for teenagers, I think they get a lot of negative feedback from the community. It was, it blew my mind actually, to hear his response to it to the atmosphere there.

Jamie Adam 18:52

Was that someone that you had through work experience?

Penny Locke 18:55

Yeah, yeah, it was one of my work experience students, yeah.

Jamie Adam 18:58

Could you just tell us a little bit more about that Penny and what it is that you offer?

Penny Locke 19:02

Yeah, so we run a website, a weekly newsletter, we do radio, podcasts, video editing. I call it a very, very small multimedia empire. I think it's called hyperlocal, isn't it something like that. And constructive journalism, and we give kids a really one to one support for a week about how to edit a website, how to write an article, how to interview people, how to talk to people on the phone, which most young people find quite challenging these days, and there are not many well, Isabel can testify, because Isabel some of those places. Well, Isabel sends adults to us, so we have two kind of cohorts of work experience people. One is students still at school, and then Isabel will sometimes send us adults who are looking to get back into the workplace, who need flexible volunteering opportunities, which, again, is what we can offer.

Jamie Adam 20:05

Isabel, can you think of any particular examples of where you've introduced individuals to Penny in this opportunity and they've really benefited from it?

Isabel King 20:15

One person that I worked with had many skills and many abilities, and had been in work, and the work process that had involved this person had almost crushed this person. And you know that they also had complex medical issues, but even so, they still didn't want to be crushed, and really didn't help them. And what was revealing, in a way, was that the opportunity of Educafe and working alongside Penny was that in a way, they could be rebuilt gently, and respectfully and carefully in a very genuine way. You know, you can just slowly see the lights of confidence go on. Now that's a long process for somebody as complicated as the person that I introduced, and sometimes there are steps forward, and sometimes there are going to be steps backwards, but, but the something good about Educafe is the almost the acceptance of that ebb and flow, and the patience to allow somebody to grow, and motor on, and if there's a setback, well, we'll still keep in touch with you. No, you're still part of this whole outfit, you haven't been cut off. Come back when you're ready or keep in touch in another way. Or if you just want to come along, sit down and not really talk to anybody. Well, you can do that too, until you are ready to as it were, re-gather yourself. And again, as I've said before, there, there are other formats where that rebuilding patience is not possible or doesn't seem readily possible, and that the volunteers aren't geared up always to let that process of toing and froing going. Now the outcome for that individual was that they began to be able to manage other aspects of their life To start going back to using their skills, to start going back to making their their own choices and decisions and feeling encouraged. They began to be able to just talk about themselves differently and be able to itemise. Well, I'm good at this, I'm good at that. This is what I've managed to do at Educafe. This is what I feel responsible for, and that was, you know, even something like that's quite a big step for some people. Was for this person.

Jamie Adam 23:12

And we've been talking rightly so, I think quite a lot about individuals. But on a bigger scale, how does Educafe benefit the community as a whole, in terms of belonging and developing these pathways to social wellbeing for people.

Magdalen Wind-Mozley 23:27

I think it's brilliant that it's there. You know, so many different groups intersect in Educafe, and that's a brilliant way of getting people to understand each other and be able to help each other.

Penny Locke 23:42

I would agree that outside of Educafe, you might have a parent group, or you might have a an asylum seekers group, or you might have a mental health group, but to get everybody together is quite rare, I think, and hugely beneficial, because, as I said before, it's like a little microcosm of what the real world is like. And you have, you know, you're going to meet all these different people that you are different from you, and if you don't understand where they're coming from, if you don't recognise the humanity in that person, then this is where social media and the media and we all get kind of divided.

Isabel King 24:24

I think in that wider, you know, wider impact. You know, wider impact starts with somebody knowing that they can trust somebody else. Take the individuals that they've taken along, some of what they needed was trust building, or trust rebuilding and having real evidence that other people were worth trusting can come from somewhere like Educafe and then the next setting that they might be in. They do at least have some evidence that, okay, trust exists, exists in Newbury or exists in Thatcham, wherever it is that they're from. So, yeah, I would think that might be an intangible ripple out into the community for some people.

Jamie Adam 25:12

Yes, yeah, that's it, it's the ripple effect exactly that of these small acts into people's lives and the wider community that has just such a big impact, for sure. And we could talk for hours more about this, I'm sure, but we are sadly running out of time on today's episode. But I did want to leave with one more question, and that is just to get your advice or top tip for anyone that is potentially looking for support with getting back into work, or starting the process of getting back into work, if that's through socialising or whatever means that that might be.

Penny Locke 25:42

Come along.

Magdalen Wind-Mozley 25:44

Yes, come along.

Isabel King 25:45

I would say yes, of course, to all of that. But in terms of an advice or a top tip, if someone's really unsure or really reluctant or really hasn't been out, I would say to them, go along, imagine that you're only going to spend five minutes there. That's all it is, five minutes, if you can do that, and then you just want to leave. That's fine, too, but the chances are, I know that after five minutes, they'll feel comfortable.

Jamie Adam 26:22

Thank you so much to Magdalen, Penny, Isabel, and Ginette for their contributions to this week's episode. You can tune in next week where we'll be speaking to Janine Ford and Chris bond about the Educafe recipe and how Educafe can continue to grow sustainably. Educafe is a nonprofit organisation, if you would like to support them, to continue to grow the thriving community that is helping so many people, you can donate by the link in the show notes. That's all we've got time for today, tune in next week, and don't forget to subscribe wherever you discover your podcasts. This has been a Research Podcasts production, produced and hosted by Jamie Adam. The exec producer is Krissie Glover.