



Beyond the Capital.

The NorthEdge. Podcast

Season 2: Episode #3 – Getting to know Charlotte Farrington

Transcript

Lucie Mills

Today we have got a very special edition of the Beyond the Capital podcast, with Charlotte who is the founder and CEO of Yorkshire Children's Charity, which is a charity that NorthEdge has worked with for a couple of years.

So we're going to ask Charlotte lots of questions about the purpose of the charity, the background, but also then what NorthEdge has done and some really big lessons that Charlotte has brought to the charity in terms of how do we run it like a business.

So thank you so much for joining us. This is our first charity edition of the podcast. No pressure.

Charlotte Farrington

Thank you for having me. This is my first podcast that I've done so yeah, I'm really, really excited, but also a little bit nervous as to what questions are going to come my way.

Lucie Mills

We're very excited to have you. No trick questions, I promise.

So, to start us off for people who kind of haven't heard of Yorkshire Children's Charity, just give us a sense of kind of the background. How did you set it up? What is the purpose of the charity? And I guess to bring it to life with some real life examples of who does the charity support?

Charlotte Farrington

Yeah, goodness me. I mean, it kind of feels Lucie like, where do you start? Although we've only been operating for 2 1/2 years, it feels more like 20 years.

So yeah, a lot has happened in a short space of time. So my background is actually corporate. I used to do the marketing for a national insolvency company in the north. And yeah, do you know, I always think with the charity sector, it's one of those things that kind of finds you. And it definitely kind of came and found me whilst I was in my role working in that corporate organisation and I'd initially been asked if I could volunteer on a trip with some kids. It was an initiative that one of my colleagues was involved in and it was short of volunteers and he said can you come along and help? And I was like, yeah, you know, why not? That sounds like a brilliant day out. And you know, that was kind of it for me, really seeing, you know, children experience a school trip for the first time in their lives when they were seven or eight years old and the happiness that came from that.

I just, yeah, suddenly everything else kind of feels quite almost like a little bit fickle and a bit superficial to then go back to kind of working in that very kind of corporate environment.

So yeah, so I spent ten years working in the charity sector. I was offered a brilliant opportunity, you know, they said, do you want to come along and work for a national charity? And I think when people go into the charity sector you do sometimes kind of have this view of like, oh, you know, it's going to be amazing. It's like sunshine and rainbows every day. And I'm going to get up, and I'm going to make a difference to the world. And, you know, of course, there's an element of that. But the reality of it is as well, it is really, really, really hard work.

So yeah, I spent ten years heading up the northern region of a national charity, and for lots of different reasons I just felt that we could get help and support to our families in Yorkshire, more efficiently and more effectively under a regional umbrella. So yeah, it was one of those things where it's like, oh, you know, how hard can it be? Surely not that difficult to set up a children's charity –

Lucie Mills

There's a beauty in the naivety of not knowing the answer to that question isn't there? Because I suspect if you knew the answer to that question, maybe we wouldn't be here having that this conversation today.

Charlotte Farrington

Definitely, but I think I'm probably someone that doesn't see risk from that side of things. I just work on the basics just like, well, it can't be that difficult, hook or by crook somehow we'll get it done. So there's no point kind of worrying about the detail.

I always say that one of my all-time lows was when I was on maternity leave at the time and was like breastfeeding at 4 o'clock in the morning trying to finish a 68-page Child Safeguarding Policy that I knew the Charity Commission we're going to ask me for, and I just remember thinking this is like, this is my all-time low. It can only get better from here. But yeah, it was tough. It was tough to get it over the line, but we did and we launched in January 2022.

And then, yeah, we've just kind of not really looked back from there really. It's just gone from strength to strength and it's been an amazing couple of years and there's been so many highs. There's equally been, you know some really difficult points and challenges that we've had to overcome.

But yeah, every day just feels like we are, you know, the trajectory of where we're going it just kind of it just keeps on going, which is just amazing.

Lucie Mills

And so why, I guess that the children piece and seeing children kind of experience an experience like that for the first time was kind of the real catalyst for you moving into the kind of charity sector.

Yorkshire Children's Charity, for the people that don't know, there's an astounding stat around that a third of Yorkshire's children are living in poverty, which, as somebody from Yorkshire I find surprising and devastating all at the same time.

So, what's the mission from a charitable perspective and what type of children do you help and with what type of things? Because I think that really brings to life why I guess you were so attracted to this opportunity to go and help lots of amazing families who are at disadvantages for lots of reasons, I guess.

Charlotte Farrington

Yeah. Say we support children at a disadvantage. So whether that's due to sickness, disability or financial circumstance. I've experienced a lot over the years working in the charity sector that I think sometimes charities can become very focused on what it is that they've traditionally delivered and what they've traditionally delivered isn't necessarily what families need at that very point in time.

So when I set the charity up, that was something I felt really passionately about that I wanted to create a broad enough set of programmes in terms of our delivery and our output that we could be really responsive to lots of different situations.

And it was, you know, we launched in January 2022 and then of course, Ukraine happened, you know, within a couple of months of us launching. And that has then pushed us into a cost-of-living crisis, but actually to be able to really adapt our programme.

So, for example, we have a programme called 'A Helping Hand' for families. So that is where we can give up to £200 of funding per child within 24 hours of receiving the application and you know that level of support has been an absolute lifeline for some of our families over the last few years.

I always say with the Yorkshire Children's Charity, it's probably easier to, like draw up a list of the things that we don't do as opposed to the list of the things we do, and we do have a very, very broad spectrum of what we deliver. But you know, to simplify it, we break all our work down really into two areas. We have our grant giving side of the organisation which is about addressing the immediate hardships of children and making life that little bit better for them right now. So whether that is a pair of shoes, whether it's a winter coat, whether it's a wheelchair, whether it's specialist equipment for them. All of these things, it's just about providing some immediate relief to the family. But you know, we very much believe that Yorkshire Children's Charity that we also have a responsibility to break those cycles of intergenerational poverty that we so often see within families.

The only way that we can do that, you know we believe is through our project work and it's through constant intervention with our kids. It's constantly saying to them, you know, don't go that way, go this way and providing them with those opportunities. So you know there's so many different aspects to what we do.

We have our school's out events, so that is just taking children on, you know, amazing and memorable days out and whether that is a child that, you know, leaves the estate on which they live for the first time and gets on a bus, on a coach for the first time and turns up at somewhere like Cannon Hall Farm and gets to experience what farm animals smell like. You know, I remember a little girl last year and she came up to me. She was like, "do you know that horses actually have hair? They really have hair!" You know that level of excitement, you know, lots of our teachers said on that day that that is a once in a lifetime opportunity for children to go and experience that. You know, I really believe how can we expect our children and young people to grow up and make good life choices if ultimately they are missing the very foundations of their childhood.

And you know, then we have other, you know, huge benefits that come out of our schools out events. So I was talking to a parent the other day who had two identical twin boys and one of their boys, Jack, passed away very suddenly from an incurable brain tumour that he had, and Billy, who was his identical twin, had to find this whole new Billy. You know, Jack had been his other half. He was seven years old. Jack was always kind of the more dominant twin as well. And we took Billy with a load of his friends to Light Water Valley last week, or the week before it was, and you know his Dad said that they were so anxious about him going because they just didn't know how Billy would cope in that environment. But he came back and he was just like I've had the best day I've been on all the rides and you know, his dad said that suddenly this different child came home. This child who had done something on his own, who, you know, had experienced a day out with his friends and with the support of his friends. But the confidence that he had found off the back of that trip, you know, his dad said he had to go into the kitchen and cry, he just said it was just amazing to see.

Lucie Mills

I mean, do you all cry because I don't know how you all get through the day because I think. Yeah, we'll talk a lot about your background and how that's driven you to where you are and really the business as a charity and all those things which make the charity really successful. And but I think the really beautiful thing about the charity sector, but specifically the Yorkshire Children's Charity, is you know we talk a lot about what we all do to make people's lives better and to change lives and have impact. But like you see that happen live, like very rarely do we see that. Unless you're kind of in the medical profession and you are literally saving somebody's life, like very rarely do you see the kind of impact in, I guess, the way that you guys see that and I guess that purpose-driven outcome of the charity. I assume that must be, you know, one of the questions that I've got for you is kind of what has driven you throughout your career, actually, what must drive you now to do more of what you do is those reactions, is the Billy's, right? Because you see that in a very different way than lots of us do.

Charlotte Farrington

Definitely. Yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm always really honest about this and that I make 99% of the decisions at Yorkshire Children's Charity, as a mum. I just do. And I make, you know, probably 1% of them as the founder and chief executive of the charity.

I think, you know, I've always loved children. I've always loved caring for people. That's just that's just my nature. But I think since I've had my own children it's very, very different. It's very hard to sit and listen to a parent who's perhaps lost a child and not put yourself in their shoes. You know, what would that mean to me?

You know, I always say to Annabelle who co-founded the charity with me, you know, throw anything at me, I will always find a way to get through it, and we will make it work. But if someone came to me and said there's something seriously wrong with one of my children, that will be it. You know, I just, I know my limits. And I know it's something that I would really struggle to cope with.

And do you know what Lucie, I always say setting up the charity is the hardest thing that I've ever done, but equally it is the greatest privilege. Lots of people go their entire lives and have absolutely no concept of what it means to care for a child who you know is going to die before you or to try and navigate the special educational needs, you know, education system, you know – most parents to take it for granted that at four years old, their children will start school and I think you know – somebody gave me a statistic the other day that there was 600 children just across the city of Leeds that is waiting for a special needs place for September. So, you know, starting school at four, if you have a child with special educational needs, isn't a given because we are so short of spaces.

You know, for kids across Yorkshire but across the country. So I think it's one of those things where I just think the best bit about my job is that it provides that constant perspective and you ask yourself, you know, you sit, you listen to these parents, you get a phone call from a teacher who's had a child that's walked to school with no shoes on their feet in winter. And, you know, you just think, like, I cannot imagine my child going to school with no shoes on their feet.

I can't imagine as a mother, my child saying to me, "I'm really cold Mummy, I'm freezing." And there's nothing that I could do about it to make them warmer and I think that when you have that perspective on life, you don't sweat the small stuff because it's just that constant reminder every day of what is really important and actually what really isn't.

Lucie Mills

Yeah. So I think very clear on what the charity does? Why the charity is so important given some of those stats that I've shared and then you've shared, I guess.

Your corporate career has then obviously influenced how you kind of set up the charity and your mission has been to do something a little bit different in the charity sector.

Why is that your philosophy? What was the gap that you saw in terms of, obviously you'd had this very corporate career and then came into the charity sector later. What's your approach in terms of running the charity, like it's a business, how different is that in the charity sector? Cause lots of people listening to this will be from the corporate sector and from the business sector and so give us a sense of kind of how different that is.

Charlotte Farrington

Yeah. Do you know what, years ago I got asked to lecture to some final year students at Leeds University and I remember the topic that I was given was why should charities think more like businesses? And why should businesses think more like charities? And I found it like a really interesting topic to go and speak to the students about because I think there are absolutely pros and cons of both.

I don't know if it's much, perhaps it is my corporate background to a degree that has shaped the way in which I set up the charity. But I also think, you know, I have taken in my ten years of experience of working in the charity sector and you know where I believe, as a sector, we often fall down and I have tried to create something which I feel is very different in terms of how we operate at Yorkshire Children's Charity.

So I mean, there's so many different aspects to what we do and why we try to be very commercial with the way in which we operate, but I think the very foundation of that decision making for me is that charity is without question a business.

It's one of the most competitive industries to work in, but it is the most important business because we help people. And if you think about it, you know, millions of people all over the world every single day rely on charities just for their survival.

They rely on charities to provide food, water and shelter for them. So you know, when so much is at stake, we have to be, in my opinion, we have to be even more accountable in the way in which we run charities.

And, you know, over the last ten years, the charity sector has increasingly picked up lots of the services that were traditionally provided by the public sector, and I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing because I actually believe that the third sector is far more well equipped to running a lot of these services than what the public sector is. I think you know, as charities we have the ability to make the pound stretch a lot further.

I think sometimes we do ourselves a disservice as the charity sector. I think we've absorbed a lot of these services, but I personally kind of feel there almost needs to just the charity sector just needs to stop and really reflect on where we have come over the last decade in terms of what we're providing and really think about how best we can support communities moving forward.

You know the pandemic really changed people's focus as well, I think in terms of how they gave to charity, people were suddenly very aware of those grassroots organisations that you know, are still very much the cornerstone of lots of communities, whether that's you know, your play groups that are maybe voluntarily run.

I think, last time I looked at the statistics, I think there's about 170,000 registered charities in the UK, but actually it's only a tiny percentage, I think it's about 4% of those charities that actually raise over £1,000,000. So it's yeah, you know, when you kind of really break the sector down, you know, lots of those charities are very small, kind of community led charities that are absolutely essential to those communities in which they're operating in.

I think there does need to be a shift perhaps in terms of how public sector money is distributed and there needs to be a review to see actually can the third sector deliver on lots of those services better than perhaps what the public sector have traditionally done?

So I think yeah, you know that for me like the number one thing for me, Lucie, when setting up the charity was that we have to be needs led. It's not about this is what we do as a charity. It's about what do our families need and responding to the needs of those families.

And it's also seeking out, you know, those commercial opportunities we do something called the Great Yorkshire Build. So I did a visit at a school some years ago and they'd asked for a £10,000 grant and I walked into this school and £10,000 wasn't even going to sort the reception area out, never mind anything else. And this was in Harrogate and they had, I think it was 81 of North Yorkshire's most profoundly disabled children. So these are kids that, you know, had short life expectancies and very complex medical conditions. And there was a teacher that was trying to create a sensory experience with a roll of tin foil and some like 50p light-up balls off Amazon and it just blew my mind. How in Harrogate, an area of such affluence, is this the best that we can do for our most vulnerable children?

And you know, the head teacher of the school was amazing, but I often think with head teachers of special needs schools that they are a certain type of people and they have to be a certain type of people to be able to do those jobs. But they're not business people, but yet they are left to manage, you know, huge school budgets and, you know, I think the school was £350,000 in deficit and I just said to the teacher I said like "I don't how I'm going to help you. But by hook or by crook, I will go away and I will come up with something. We will find a way to address this problem that you have."

And I stood up at our commercial property walls that we do at Reading and I said to 1,000 people that I sat there, I said "I need your money. But actually what I really need is I need your time, I need your resources and I need your supply chains."

And we did £1,000,000 project at that school, where everything from start to finish was covered pro-bono. We did an all-inclusive playground for the kids, we did a rebound therapy centre – and this was back in 2018 – we did a soft play facility and sensory facility and you know it completely changed the educational outcomes for kids in that school.

It was really funny that I think pre pandemic, you know we all talked about CSR. And then we suddenly came back from the pandemic, and I remember going to this meeting and people were talking about ESG and I'm like, OK, what's this? ESG, where'd this come from? And I'm like, I'm sorry, is this, is this some sort of replacement for CSR? And clearly ESG at that point was then, you know, the buzzword in terms of what everybody was talking about and you know, I sat there and I thought like, this is really interesting, this is something you're all having to do. And you have to do this because it directly affects your bottom line. You know, it directly effects, you know, the interest rates in which you can borrow money from and I just remember sitting there thinking like there's definitely an opportunity for us to, you know, to capitalise on this in some way, shape or form and you know, that's exactly what the Great Yorkshire Builders is, you know, we recognise that the property sector, they have to deliver on these things and how can we deliver, you know, projects collectively and how can we as a charity really capture that impact so their companies feel it's a no-brainer to come and work with Yorkshire Children's Charity and it's not, you know, that's not taking away anything from the amazing companies that are involved and to be very, very clear, you know, the people involved in these projects are absolutely driven by the right reasons.

But I think charities could do more in terms of capitalising on, you know, on the commercial sector for the good of other people. And I think that's where we can be better at what we do.

Lucie Mills

So give us a sense then, since it's kind of started 2022, you do a lot of work in the kind of commercial and property sector with lots of that kind of with lots of businesses in that sector supporting you.

We'll come on in a little bit in terms of what work you've done with NorthEdge and how that's impacted and what you would kind of recommend to other charities.

But give us a sense of scale. What have you raised so far? What do you want to raise this year, which I'm absolutely certain you will raise, even though it's more difficult?

Because by hook or by crook you find a way, give you the sense of scale of the charity so far right you are not one of the charities that has not managed to raise £1,000,000.

So talk us through that journey, because I think that that for me was one of the most kind of, I think encouraging things. One because of how you set the charity up. And I think there's a that commerciality is really smart in the current environment because you're right actually can you help people deliver on their ESG strategies and if you can how do you leverage that?

I think that's really clever, but there's also a piece of, you know, you have had an amazing support from the community, which has meant that you've probably raised more than you had quite imagined when you first started the charity and first set your targets.

Charlotte Farrington

Yeah, I mean it's hard in the charity sector cause until we had a first set of accounts, we were very limited to our to our fundraising streams, but we made a really conscious decision that in year one we were just going to go really, really hard on fundraising and you know, I always say to anybody that comes to work at Yorkshire Children's Charity, it's chaos, you know, from day one of you walking in, however chaotic it is that day, it only gets worse.

The Yorkshire Children's Charity is the best place to come to work if you are somebody that works well under pressure when your back is up against the wall. If you are not somebody that works well under pressure when your back is up against the wall, you drown very, very quickly in this environment and you know, we very much have that start-up feel, we say yes to everything and then we worry about how we're going to deliver it afterwards.

Annabelle and I, you know, we started the charity with £7,000 in the bank from my kitchen table in the January and suddenly it kind of really dawned on us that, crikey, this is what we've done and we've cut that umbilical cord of working for a national charity, knowing that we had, you know, a salary coming in every month and being able to, you know, clearly define what we wanted our programmes to be and what we would deliver that year.

And you know, we were kind of, yeah, in at the deep ends. And for us it was just kind of like, OK well, we're in it now. So we're just going to have to figure out how we come out the other side of this.

So I remember sitting down at a friend's house, some great support of the charity who, you know, we're very, very philanthropic. And they just said, "well, what do you want to raise this year?" And I said like, "oh do you know what if we could raise like, a million pounds? I know that's like an insane amount of money, but I just think, you know, if we could do it like how brilliant would it be?" And they said OK, well, you've got to stand up at the property walls in May in front of 1,000 people and tell them that. And I said "what, stand up and tell them that we're going to raise £1,000,000?". So it's like, yeah, unless you put it out there unless people know, you know, your ambitions, how are they going to know what you need and how they can support. And so I remember standing up and saying, "we would really love to raise £1,000,000 in our first year" and then we went on to raise £2.7 million in our first year, which was just incredible.

But you know as I'm sure you can imagine, so in the charities sector, you only get audited when you raise over £1,000,000. So we were kind of almost victims of our own success in that. We had raised all of this money, but I'm sure you can imagine the amount of you know, governance, that then needs to go into place with doing an audit and it was just enormous.

Annabelle and I had very much just kind of flown by the seat of our pants for a year in terms of, "OK, it's fine. We'll just make it happen." And yeah. So year two was very much about putting process in place and really, really laying those solid foundations and we raised £2.1 million in our second year and we have set ourselves, Lucie, this insane goal of trying to raise £3 million in our third year, which do you know what so many people have said like, loh you know you've set yourself these really ambitious goals, and what if you don't reach them?" And I honestly genuinely mean this. You know, for me, I'm like, OK, well, if we don't reach them, we don't reach them. I know that I can say on my children's lives that I have done everything I possibly can. I have worked all the hours that I could put in to try and make that happen. If we don't raise it, then we then we'll try again next year.

But I believe that if we as a charity cannot be really ambitious for our families in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis we have to question our existence. We have to question, you know, who we are and what we stand for. And yeah, it might be really ambitious and we might not reach it, but I think we owe it to our families to at least try.

Lucie Mills

I have every confidence that you will get as close to that number as possible. And you're right. I imagine if you only raised £2.5m / £2.7m, how awful! That you know, that is the reality is that's still so many people. And you go again, you go again and you regroup. But I think you're right. Now is the time more than ever when actually vulnerable people need support.

And you will see that in the number of people, number of grant requests you get etc I'm sure over the last kind of two years has been, you know, only increasing.

Charlotte Farrington

After, I mean, you know, one of our campaigns that we run, it's the Winter Support Campaign. So it's providing essential items to children. So whether that is shoes to get them into school, whether it's a winter coat.

But yeah, we had over 1,000 applications in last winter in the space of two weeks and we had obviously really assessed the eligibility criteria around those families, so that the referrals have to come through teachers and we've made it very clear to our teachers that look, we only have a finite amount of money, we cannot boil the ocean. Please, please, please only put forward those children, you know, that we deem to be living in destitution. Those are the kids that we need to be supporting. It was coming up to Christmas, you know, we said Christmas is a very difficult time for lots of families financially. But please only refer children for Christmas gifts that will not receive anything otherwise.

I called my trustees into a meeting and as I pick a number between one and 1,000 and they picked a number and I read out a case study for a child and you know 67% of the applications that we had – and it wasn't just poverty that those children were dealing with. There were other circumstances, whether it was child abuse, whether it's domestic violence, whether I don't know, gangs grooming, bereavement of siblings, parents, some both in families – and you know, you read these case studies for these children and you can't imagine these things up. You can't imagine the level of trauma that these children go through from such a young age.

And I think the thing that always really gets to me is that I will read case studies and I will come across kids and I know that even with all the intervention in the world that we can put in place they have seen too much. They have been through too much.

They have had too much trauma in their lives, even at the age of four or five years old, that they are unlikely to ever bounce back from what they have been through.

And yeah, my trustees just said, OK, Charlotte, you've made your point. What do you want? And I said, I want to spend our reserves and I want to help every single child that has asked for support and then I want to answer to the auditors later on next year, in terms of the decision that we've made. And I want you to trust me that by that point I will have found a way team to make the money up again.

And you know, I just said to them, I said I felt that if we cannot, if we can't say yes to children in a cost-of-living crisis, if we cannot keep our kids warm, then when can we and again, you know, for me, people give us their money and they want us to spend it. And if I could, I wouldn't sit on any reserves because it drives me mad and I think there should be this whole new thing that the Charity Commission do where they allow you to get people to underwrite your reserves just on the off chance you should ever need them. And then at that point, we can spend all that money on getting it to kids. But there are very strict rules and regulations around the amount of reserves that we have to carry, which is really frustrating. But yeah, we said yes to every single child that had asked for help.

You know, and that in itself was, you know, like, 83% of our schools came back and said that they haven't had to put children on safeguarding registers because of the level of intervention that we had provided.

Lucie Mills

Wow.

Charlotte Farrington

We had a 26.6% increase in attendance in schools purely from the shoes that we put on kids feet and you know, it's very hard to kind of imagine for lots of us that actually kids not having winter shoes is a huge barrier to their education. You know, they're in plimsolls in the middle of winter. Their feet get just, you know, the shoes get wet. That's it. The next day, they wake up, the shoes are still wet because there's no heating on in their flats or houses to be obstructed. So just don't get into school.

And yeah, I really, really believe that education is the only hope that we have for our young people and I really believe in equipping our teachers with the tools that they need to be able to do their jobs. You know, they need kids that turn up at school ready to learn. And lots of our kids turn up at school, not ready to learn.

They might have pants on that they've been in for three days and their bums are itchy, and they've got a head full of head lice and their soles of their shoes are hanging off. And they've got no socks on and they've just got a t-shirt on in the middle of winter and they don't have a winter coat. And you know those children are not arriving in school in a position to be able to learn, and that's something I really believe you know, we, all of us, all of us have that, you know, that ability to be able to do something, you know, whether that's buying a jumper for a couple of quid to give to a kid or putting a pair of shoes on their feet. That's within all of our means to be able to do that.

Lucie Mills

So I think you know for us, we've been really touched by your story. We, you know, one of our founders has spent quite a bit of time with you. That's how you've kind of got involved or how NorthEdge has got involved with the Yorkshire Children's Charity. But I guess not necessarily in a super typical way because what we've done with you is not necessarily all just fundraising focused, but in that context of running the charity like a business.

We've spent some time with you on that. So just give a sense of, I guess, how has NorthEdge supported what you guys do and what impact has that had and what would you kind of share or give to other people as learnings from that experience?

Charlotte Farrington

Do you know what you tend to find when you work in the charity sector that actually one of the things you are most short of is resource. It's the thing that we lack the most. If you come work in the charity sector, you do the job of five people. It's just the nature of the industry.

Andy. Andy Ball, your Andy Ball, was one of the first people that I had a conversation with when I set up the charity and I just said to him, look, you know, Andy, this is what I've done and these are the reasons why and this is what I believe in and he immediately just grasped it. He got it and he was like I absolutely understand what it is that you want to do. You know, how can we help? What can we do? And I think sometimes you know that that default position is like, great, you know, can you fundraise? Can you do something for us? And, you know, Andy was very much like, yes. Of course, you know we can help financially in terms of, you know, organising some events and bringing some of our clients and word and network to it. But we can also help maybe in terms of you know helping you guys with the structure of this new organisation and you know, helping to really lay those kinds of solid foundations for you to then be able to build on.

I've seen it when it doesn't work when you don't have those solid foundations and you know that was something I again felt really passionately about with setting up the charity before I wanted to start inviting people to be a part of what we're trying to do. I felt it was really, really important to know who we are.

You know, and I think by having those solid foundations, it gives you something to anchor your decisions back to. And it also stops things becoming subjective. And so Andy had said like, do you want to come into the offices and you lovely Lucie can sit down with us and, yeah, kind of maybe help us put some structure in place around what we're trying to do.

And it was without any question one of the most useful days that we have had. And actually, when I articulated earlier, you know, that there's two very clear approaches to what we do that that came from that session. You know, I remember you saying to me, so I've been on the website and I've looked at all the different things that you do and I get all your programmes – this, that and the other - But there are some things that are really, really unclear to me. And then he went on to tell me two or three things that were really unclear. And when he said to me that they were really unclear at that point, I was like, oh, yeah, of course they're not clear. I'm like, why would you like, why? Why, yeah, why would you know how that works internally or how that looks externally in terms of what we're delivering? You know, I remember you saying for me, you need to be really clear in terms of the way in which you articulate what you do.

And that was actually essential for us being able to go out and apply to trust and foundations for fundraising as well, you know, off the back of that session that we had with you, we came back and we completely rejigged our entire website as to how we presented what we did and I think had we not done that, we wouldn't have been successful in some of the applications that we've had from trusts and foundations and I think especially when you're running a charity, but I think when you're running any business, sometimes it's very, very hard to be able to see wood for the trees.

Lucie Mills

Yeah.

Charlotte Farrington

And you know, coming in and sitting down with you guys was I think probably the first time since launching the charity that I had actually felt really quite excited about what we were doing and not just felt completely overwhelmed.

And, you know, there's a number of different companies. We work with a company called Modo, who is just a huge amount of supporters in terms of running some of our campaigns and our marketing. And, you know, actually sometimes giving charities resource is more valuable than giving monetary donations and yeah, I think it would have taken us, well I don't think, I know it would have taken us an awful lot longer to get to where we needed to be had we not have had that intervention and that help from you and Andy and the team at NorthEdge, it was, it was invaluable to us. And it was something that we would never ever have paid for as a charity to do, you know, and not because I wouldn't have seen the benefits in it, I would have done, but it's just that it's something that we wouldn't have even known existed.

You know, we wouldn't have even known it was an option to go and have a session you know that would have such kind of like profound outcomes really to how we structured the charity moving forward. I think the fact that you gave us that support and that level of intervention at such an early stage, you know really, really set us off on the right path from there to go on to do what we did.

Lucie Mills

And I think it's, you know, we see this all the time, right? That's our job to help businesses set themselves up to succeed for the long term. That is why, ultimately, NorthEdge and private capital as a sector exists.

But for me that was a real moment of showing actually how applicable what we do from a business sense is in the charity sector and actually every business whether you are not-for-profit in the charitable sector, whether you are trying to grow intentionally, whatever that looks like, taking that moment to pause and being super intentional about who we are, what do we want to achieve and working backwards from there, I think, you know, I think it just shows that kind of having that moment of – I didn't tell you anything in that session really – I just asked you, well, maybe I told you some mean things at the beginning, it sounds like I was really harsh!

Charlotte Farrington

No. Yeah, you definitely weren't. No, you were really truthful. You were just very honest with your overview I guess of you know the fact that you really went into the ins and outs of the charity and you, you know, you really started to pull it apart. That was what we needed. You know, we needed to understand where all where our weaknesses were I guess to be able to, you know to be able to build on those and focus moving forward.

But I think you're right Lucie in that, I think whether it's a business or whether it's a charity. I guess this is maybe slightly different because most people in business are working towards the end goal that they will maybe sell their company out or that there is at some point an exit strategy from what they're doing and the charity sector is very, very different.

You know we are never going to arrive at our end point. This is a journey that we are on and I try and remind my team of this. You know, we're never going to get to the point where one day I walk in and say great job everybody, we've solved child poverty and we've no disabilities in Yorkshire at all, you know? That's just never going to come.

So we have to, we have to take time to reflect on what we've done. We have to take time to reflect on our successes. But we also have to take time to constantly check in. Is it relevant what we're doing? Are our programmes still applicable for what our families need and, you know, do we need to funnel more of our income into different programmes.

You know it's that constant check of the market as well and our market is where is Yorkshire. Is it that South Yorkshire are mainly struggling with teeth, decay in children? Therefore actually we need to plough more support into supporting them in that particular area.

But then you might work in East Yorkshire where we've got some schools where 30% of the kids in the school are in care. How do we support them? And you know, I think that's really, really important for us that we constantly reevaluate where we are and whether we are meeting the need of our families and that session that you know that you did with us was –

The number of times I've said to people like we went to NorthEdge and we sat down and you know, and we did this session and this is what we got out of it, at the end of it, we built this house and this is what the house looked like. Then I'll draw a little diagram of this is what the house looks like, and this is where we're going to be now, and this is where we're going to be in five years time. Honestly, you should go and do this like, you know, it should be something that you do as business and, maybe I should be selling your services Lucie.

Lucie Mills

Ha. Maybe one day, maybe one day, when I'm ready to.



Charlotte Farrington

Regardless of whether they're a NorthEdge business or not, I think, yeah, maybe this could be a whole other branch of something that you guys do, but yeah, it was an amazing workshop.

Lucie Mills

I think what we've been really encouraged by is actually you know that clarity has properly unlocked your ability to raise more money because you know we will raise money. You know, we've done the walks for the last couple of years and Andy gives lots of his time and resources as well, but actually has been able to kind of do something that is a more fundamental to how you grow and sustain something that's so important in one of our regions, I think was something that we were, you know, really delighted that we could help with and have an impact and I know Charlotte we've talked about, you know, maybe we do a refresh every couple of years so that actually we just constantly check in on is that still working is our communication clear, are we communicating ROI so that you know companies can be able to communicate their impact from an ESG perspective which makes it easier for you to unlock funding.

So I think you know hopefully anybody that's listening to this whether that is from a business perspective or from a charitable perspective kind of taking that time to pause and really think about what are we trying to achieve here and constantly coming back to that as the kind of the compass of the organisation, I think hopefully something that everybody can kind of take away from that experience. I think it shows if it works in the charity sector. Yeah, the kind of the breadth of that.

Charlotte Farrington

I think it's something that is so obvious that actually it's the last thing you think about when you're in it.

Lucie Mills

Yeah.

Charlotte Farrington

And I think it's having that someone to say, OK, let's just check in. Let's make sure that we're still on track because you know, lots of business owners will say, especially those that you know, like us are start-up organisations that you know, every day you are just firefighting and actually having that time out having that headspace to really focus on that bigger picture is so important and for so many different reasons.

So important to your team, it's so important to retaining staff. It's really important to engage in supporters and new clients. You know, it's important for everybody operating in business that you absolutely take that time out to make sure that not only you know what direction you're heading in, but everybody within your organisation can communicate what direction they are heading in and I think you know, sometimes as leaders of business, you assume that everybody knows what goes on in your head. But the reality of it is that, you know, actually people don't and it's our responsibility as leaders of business to make sure that you know, that we really do communicate that message clearly to our teams.

Lucie Mills

Yeah. So I guess last thing, we've talked about, your very ambitious, but achievable I think fundraising target for this year.

Call to action. How can people help? How can people listening to this, members of our community, how can they help you?

Charlotte Farrington

Oh yeah. Well, I mean, I'm going to say this on the podcast Lucie. So then this is it, we have to hold each of the to it. So you can help by doing another session with us –

Lucie Mills

Done!

Charlotte Farrington

Because it has now been a couple of years. And I think, yeah, to really bring the team together and do that again would just be amazing.

I think for me, you know, like, I've like I've said today. I think people, people making monetary donations is absolutely fundamental for us to be able to deliver what we want to deliver.

I think people can also think outside the box and give more than that. And I think if people you know like NorthEdge like yourselves, if there are other companies that think actually we could do that, you know we could, we could provide that level of support for a charity like Moda have provided, you know our marketing and PR resources here. You know, we couldn't have done what we're doing without them. I think that is also incredibly valuable.

But I think you know, my call to action, my call to action for everybody is, I think if you if you can give something that makes a child's life that little bit brighter then give it to us. Because what I can promise you is that 100% of those donations that we receive go directly to the children that we support. And that was something I felt really strongly about when establishing the charity that people are good enough to give us their money. We should be good enough to tell them where it goes.

And you know, don't underestimate the difference of what it means to put a coat on a child or to provide a pair of shoes so that they can get to school. You know, these are things that don't cost huge amounts of money and are within the means of lots of people who will be listening to this podcast.

We've just launched something called Light A Star, so, I don't know why - Why Lucie, why did I say I'd do it? – But on the 21st of September we are organising a huge fundraising event with the view that we want to try and raise £1,000,000 in one night. That we are asking, you know, the good and great of Yorkshire to get behind us in the lead up to that and to donate money to Light A Star, which is to donate money to provide essential items for children going into winter and those memorable days out that I've talked about as well.

So yeah, my call to action I guess is just to give what you can and never underestimate the difference that it makes to families when they are at the lowest ebb. Yeah, never underestimate what it means to put a smile on one of our children's faces. Don't underestimate what it means to a child to receive a coat and for them to write their name in it, not have to cross somebody else's name out, just to write their name in it for the first time and for them to be given something which belongs to them. You know, that's a huge, a huge part of their childhood.



Lucie Mills

Yeah. Well, thank you. Thank you for doing this. But thank you more on behalf of the County of Yorkshire. I guess, I'm sure, and children everywhere.

Charlotte Farrington

No, not at all.

Lucie Mills

You know, it's super important that I think we all we're talking about this before, we don't lose perspective and we realise that very small things can make a very big difference. So, we will put all of Yorkshire Children's charities information in the description box on our website and we will be encouraging our community to your point, to give what they can. Thank you.

Charlotte Farrington

No, no, that's amazing. And thank you to you guys. And also just to, I'm sure that there will be people in our network of supporters that that listen to this podcast and just yeah, an opportunity for me to say thank you to everybody who has believed in us from day one and for the level of support that we have received.

We never, ever, ever I can assure you take it for granted how lucky we are to have amazing people around us. And you know I always say if there's one thing that I've taken from my career is that if you just surround yourself with good people, if you share your vision and your passion, that is 50% of the battle.

So yeah. So thank you. Thank you to you. And thank you to everybody who has got behind us and helped us.

Lucie Mills

Fab, thank you.