

Episode 4 - Compassion in Action Transcript



[00:00:02] - Samantha

Welcome to Calder Navigation, the podcast that embarks on a transformative journey through the lives and stories of the incredible people of Calderdale. I'm your host, Samantha McCormick, Artistic director and founder of Curious Motion, and I'm thrilled to have you join me on this adventure. Calder Navigation invites you to open your hearts and minds to the tapestry of everyday moments and significant events that shape our lives. Through authentic and relaxed conversations, we'll delve into the complexities of what it means to be human, celebrating the diversity and resilience of our community. This podcast is not just a collection of stories. Each episode is a unique exploration, a tribute to the rich tapestry of our shared experiences. So come and join us on this journey and let's celebrate the remarkable individuals who call the Calder Valley home and let's uncover the depth and beauty of the human experience together.

[00:00:59] - Samantha

Today we have a little bit of a different episode for you as we're going to hear four different people talk about compassion. This is to explore a little bit our event that we did back in June in Elland for Refugee Week. Refugee Week is the world's largest arts and culture festival, celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

[00:01:24] - Samantha

And we organized a very special gathering in June of this year. It was called Compassion in Action. And as far as we're aware, it's the very first Refugee Week celebration in the local community. And it really was a testament to the unity and empathy that can be found when people come together with open hearts and minds. And during the event, we had lots and lots of different people from across the community join us. And we all embarked on a diverse range of creative endeavours aimed at exploring and sharing thoughts on compassion. So we created a magnificent compassion tree, which symbolized the interconnectedness of humanity and the nurturing power of empathy. We also had the most uplifting rhythms of African djembe drums filling the air for most of the afternoon, and a special visual representation of compassion emerged as the event unfolded.

[00:02:20] - Samantha

One of the highlights was also a special performance by our children's group, which really radiated hope and achievement and just celebrates the amazing potential for kindness that young hearts possess. So in this episode, we're turning our focus to the significance of compassion, delving into its complexities and exploring how it can be translated into action.

[00:02:44] - Samantha

Instead of hearing from me, you will hear from four of the artists who are involved in the event Alex Abel, Isla Hurst, Mussarat Rahman and Sandile Duma. They'll share their thoughts on compassion, the impact of this on individuals and communities, and what we can take forward for the future to really put compassion into action. So please join us as we take time to reflect and explore the power of compassion and how we can foster a world where everyone is welcomed and valued.

[00:03:17] - Samantha

Welcome to this very special episode of Calder Navigation, where compassion takes center stage. Let's begin.

[00:03:36] - Alex

Hiya. My name's Alex. I'm an illustrator and artist and I do a lot of artwork locally around Calderdale, so I work with a lot of charities, arts organisations. I've been working in the arts since about 1993 and I quite enjoy doing a lot of public sector work and work with sort of groups because I enjoy community art and seeing things that people have created in public spaces.

[00:04:00] - Alex

So today I've been running, it's called a graphics arts board. So we've been sort of coming into the area, looking at what's going on and then encouraging people to get involved in what we're doing and to give us their ideas about what they like. Recommendations, but to do it visually so that we have something to take away from the event, put online, share with people and grow from. What I've done today is I've turned up with a template bit of artwork so people don't start with a blank page and then they're encouraged to draw, have conversations with me, with each other. Add lots of colour, there's lots of pens and pencils to have a go at. And just get families to talk to each other and contribute, go away, come back, see what's in the other rooms.

[00:04:39] - Alex

And then this gets turned into something that is an ongoing board that reflects what's happened today basically. There was a couple that actually happened really quickly on the day, so when people were-, because compassion is quite a big word for young people, so there was quite a lot of conversations around what that meant as well. And then immediately young children were putting down kindness and helping other people, which is a really nice response, that was sort of almost immediate. And then when people sat and spoke about things, it encouraged people to decide what they thought was kind.

[00:05:11] - Alex

So we had people saying things like sharing food, which we were also doing at the event, and just being nice to each other. So it sets up quite a few nice conversations that led into contributions to the artwork. Compassion to me is quite a few things and when you look at compassion, it's a hard one. Personally, I feel like it's having empathy for other people, so being able to put yourself even slightly into their position or think about things the way they do. So not just sympathy, sympathy can be part of it, but being able to see things from other people's point of view and being a good role model for people.

[00:05:46] - Alex

So there's a lot around self compassion about knowing what your boundaries are and how to look after yourself, because people look at you and decide how they want to behave based on whether they're impressed by you or not. So I thought over the years, I've seen quite a lot of relationships with people, making yourself present, listening to people in the moment, being reliable and just being kind and celebrating finding out what's same about you, what's different, and then celebrating both those things because we're not all exactly the same.

[00:06:32] - Mussarat

Hi folks. My name is Mussarat Rahman. I'm a visual artist and installation artist based in Bradford. Not only am I an artist, but I also work with a refugee community called Biasan, which I've been with for the last 15 years. And I also run a small grassroots festival that runs in October half term called Intercultural Festival.

[00:06:51] - Mussarat

I work with Biasan and Biasan is a multitude of volunteers and everybody contributes something different. We've got the storage unit, we've got the social groups, we've got the drop in and a women's club. We run food, social space activities in the back for mums and kids. We've got the drop in where we have-, everybody comes into the drop in. We do English classes, food, socialising, and we plan out lots of trips and mostly it is volunteers. But we do get people coming in now and then that offer us some projects as well. And again, I get people helping me out on the festival. We do lots of different things. We platform asylum seekers, refugees and migrant communities and also marginalised communities for the festival. But I think we're trying to and also give credit to the volunteers that help us out with putting the festival together, fundraising and helping to support it in general as well.

[00:07:41] - Mussarat

Creative arts and working with different types of arts mediums. And one of the activities we've been working with is called the Tree of Compassion. So it's literally based around making a flat tree, but on the tree we've actually made 3D flowers and getting people to add things to the tree. Not just about-, we tried to do positive messages, how people felt about nature, garden, being alive in the world, how we are

together as a community. So literally it was combined creative arts with making pictures and embellishments.

[00:08:15] - Mussarat

We had loads of different people, to be honest. There was lots of-, some of the settler families that either arrived from the refugee communities, I think there was Syrian, Kurdish, Iranian, Iraqi and then we also had people who have been born and bred in the UK. So there was white people, mixed race communities and different other nationalities, some Black, some Asian. So it was really nice to see the different elements of the community coming out, different people, because end of day, they don't see any differences really, do they? They just think, oh well, we're all people together and we're all doing something and there was something there for everybody to join in with to be honest.

[00:08:54] - Mussarat

I think where we are in the world right now, compassion, people have forgotten what compassion means, I think, to be honest. I think we're in a world where we're just rushing now, rushing too fast and we're forgetting the little things. We're forgetting to sit in the garden, forgetting to smell the flowers, we're forgetting that regardless of where we are and where we've come from, that we're all people together in the world.

[00:09:22] - Mussarat

And it is a lot to do with the stereotypes of the media. Not just the media, but also the hostile environment that's being perpetuated by the government. They're teaching us to see us and them. What is us and them, really? If you really check us as a people and as a nation, people were coming into this country before borders were invented and then suddenly we've been given borders. So what does that mean actually? I don't think there's anything really relevant into borders. I think people have forgotten, listen to the negative stereotypes that are perpetuated all the time. People have forgotten that we're just people at the end of the day. And if we really check our DNA, how do you know you've not got a bit of Black in you or you've got a different nationality in there?

[00:10:10] - Mussarat

Now more people are discovering through these DNA tests that actually, oh, I'm a bit of Sweden in there, a bit of German in there, oh, I've got a bit of Black in there. So that's what people are forgetting. You know, little things like that and forgotten the nature of being human. And being human comes hand in hand with being compassionate. And then I think because we're just in this rat race now, we're in the rat race to be better than everybody else. But what does that mean as well?

[00:10:35] - Mussarat

End of day, all I can see is that poverty is getting-, the divide between the rich and poor is bigger. Nobody's really balanced now in society. All the things that we used to take for granted have gone. We shouldn't have to worry about food banks, we shouldn't have to worry about who our neighbors are, end of day day. We should really be embracing that we are in a multifaith, multiethnic community and environments. But I feel like the powers that be, or let's just say on a different level, that the government has perpetuated the rise of racism. Truthfully. And I think it's not just about the big things that people can do.

[00:11:12] - Mussarat

I know we see the news and we see all these tragedies that are involved in on the seas all the time, but there's little things as well. Like a lady just contacted me recently to offer me some free envelopes of money that she wants me to give out to three families in particular. So I've agreed to that, no problem. Because I know more than three families actually will benefit. So I'm going to do the best that I can with that. So there's a lot of things like that happen, but then there's also a lot of things like about sitting with your neighbours and having a cup of tea with them, just forgetting the plight of the world and just go check in on your neighbours and your friends to make sure they're okay. I know there's a lot of people that are on their own. They're isolated, but little things count as well as the big things. We can all go and do the big things because I know we're all worrying about the state of the world and the state of society, but sometimes you have to stop, check and think actually, let me just appreciate all the people that are helping me and all the people that are doing the things for me and just sit down and stop running. And fighting the-, running with the tide is the right word.

[00:12:18] - Mussarat

Sometimes we have to give a bit of compassion to ourselves as well because we're tied up in this very busy world and very busy society where sometimes people value monetary gains more than actually, I've got really good friends who support me and are going to still be there, even though sometimes I talk rubbish, you know what I mean? We all go through moments that we talk rubbish, but I think it's because I feel like the world we're living in now is running too fast.

[00:12:44] - Mussarat

So we have to give ourselves some compassion and sit down and say, actually, it's okay for you to sit down, have a cup of tea, switch off. I started going back to the gym, actually, because I like the gym. I don't overdo it. I take my time. I go in the morning because I know it's not going to be completely busy. So I could take that time and I just do a bit of cardio, do some weight training and then I start trying to do a bit of toning. So I'm trying to give myself that little bit of time out and then sometimes I just go off to my neighbours and sit down and have a cup of tea with her to be honest.

[00:13:16] - Mussarat

I think I'd like to get in about yeah, I know that I work a lot with asylum seeker refugees and migrants, but we do have people who've come in from different countries, from Pakistan and Syria and India who've stayed and ended up becoming volunteers with us as well. So we have a really good mixed community that we work with and they've all got different things that they contribute to the group and help out in the group. I just thought I'd mention that as well. It's also with the festival that I work with, but also with the refugee community that I work with as well.

[00:13:57] - Isla

My name is Isla Hurst. I'm a freelance contemporary dance artist and I work a lot with Sam and Curious Motion. I do some behind the scenes stuff on social media and I also teach the children's class, Stories of Motion at Elland Library. And I've been doing the children's workshop dance stuff here. Yeah, it's been so lovely just to-, apart from sort of trying to run anything and organize anything, just to sort of absorb the atmosphere and have a really good time.

[00:14:30] - Isla

And I feel like I met loads of people that I hadn't before. And it was lovely to see the children that we have at the Stories of Motion class come in and try out all these different activities that were going on. And then they did their performance, which obviously was a big highlight for me because we'd been working on that for a while.

[00:14:51] - Isla

And it was all sort of their ideas of compassion and teamwork, and they all had lovely sort of creative, expression based movement that we put together into a little dance. And they had some lovely ribbons and some sashes and things. And it was a really lovely moment where they just because it takes a lot of courage, I think, and bravery for children, especially small children, to do something in front of a group. And I'm really proud of them and I think they should be proud of themselves. I think it was a lovely little highlight for everyone to sort of sit down and watch that performance.

[00:15:32] - Isla

Compassion is a very broad thing to try and describe, isn't it? But I think it means making space for other people and acknowledging that there will be differences between you and other people and that there is space for that, and that there is time for that, and listening to one another, I think is really important within compassion.

[00:15:58] - Isla

And when you are trying to sort of hold a space for compassion between you and another person, never trying to assume what the other person needs or what the room needs or even what you need sometimes

and just sort of letting that be and listening and learning together. I think that's true compassion, and I think we touched on it really well today.

[00:16:24] - Isla

I think there were some lovely ways that people came together and shared experiences and thoughts and art, and even if sometimes we weren't explicitly talking about it, that there's ways that you can kind of feel it in a room when people come together and they sort of literally make space for each other and budge up. And when we had the kids performance, everyone was sort of like squeezing in, sharing chairs and things, making sure that everyone could come and see, so many people that we didn't think were going to come, or people were like, can I bring my friend? And be like, yeah, of course, which has been so lovely.

[00:17:01] - Isla

I tried Arabic coffee for the first time and it was all wonderful. I can't believe I've gone this long without having tried it. Yeah, that and a little date. I was like, oh, I can see this being a regular occurrence because I live in Leeds, I need to try and find somewhere to go and get some in Leeds because I liked that Arabic coffee.

[00:17:27] - Isla

And that's another thing, I think, with this opportunity just to sharing things, know, sharing culture and sharing ideas, is that everybody gets to have these new experiences and kind of enrich their life in that way. So, yeah, I definitely would recommend trying Arabic coffee if people haven't.

[00:17:49] - Isla

One thing that did sort of strike me, I guess, is that you listen on the news about migrants and refugee crisis, et cetera, and one thing that always strikes me about news coverage on it is it always feels so detached. It always makes it seem as though there are people who are in the UK and then there are migrants, and that they are two separate groups of people and very far away from each other. I can't remember who said it to me once, but someone said that distance breeds apathy to me one time. And I think that kind of strikes me as if I don't think you can-, I think compassion is inherently within us, all of us.

[00:18:35] - Isla

And I think, actually, a lot of the time when people lack compassion, it's because they haven't come across people different from them and that there's that distance or that implied distance. Whereas if you're literally sat having a conversation with someone who has had this completely different experience to you, I don't think you can help but have that compassion, because it's right there, it's in your life, you're in their life, even if it's only for a moment. And I think that's why events like that are so important, because it's very natural for compassion to come out of it, because you're spending time with each other.

[00:19:25] - Sandile

My name is Sandile. I'm originally from South Africa in a small village in Deben, but under a big Zulu tribe. Today, I've had an opportunity to be invited by Curious Motion to come and run drumming, African drumming workshops using special djembe drums. And it's been absolutely fantastic for the rest of the day today, it's just been fantastic.

[00:19:52] - Sandile

The workshop was good. I think the participation made the workshop more interesting. We had different age groups from age three, we had up to adult parents, they're also joining in. And most importantly, it was very diverse. So we had people from different cultures and backgrounds all joining in together, different languages, but still we were still able to communicate through drumming, we were still able to understand each other and still create sounds and beat and move with the emotions of the drum. So that was brilliant. I took that from the whole session, that even though we come from different backgrounds, we can still be able to come together and play the rhythms without really having to have interpretation in the middle of that. The communication from the drums and the sound alone, it kind of brings us all together.

[00:20:54] - Sandile

So that was fantastic. So for me, that was really like the highlight. So just to see young people engaging with adults mixing together, or everybody in one room just playing the drums, that was fantastic. I think without spaces like this, we haven't got-, basically, we will be losing the community cohesion and that community spirit.

[00:21:16] - Sandile

At the moment, Elland and Halifax is kind of bringing these spaces, bringing different cultures together and the way it's doing it is doing it in the most diverse ways possible. And I think we need spaces like this, we need more spaces like this, we need more activities and projects that brings people together like this. And I think if we get more people involved in it, we can grow it even more, it can grow even more and the community will even grow and bond together even more. I think it's absolutely fantastic.

[00:21:51] - Sandile

I think we need to keep going, basically we need to keep going and we need organizations like Curious Motion to be-, to continue to engage people and bring people together and draw them together to kind of as one community engaging in one project, even if we bring different project into one space.

[00:22:16] - Sandile

But at the same time, if we are all engaging together, I just think it's good. I think culture difference, I think culture and community, the community cohesion form, it brings everybody together because as you can see, like in Halifax, we've got different diverse people, but if they are still in their homes, we are still different. But if we are a community in one space, we are then together. I think we have now seen a community cohesion within Elland. We've seen that now. So I'll say community cohesion.

[00:22:56] - Sandile

Compassion, to me it means I'm able to engage and able to adjust myself to other people and able to support and kind of bring myself to the level of, I can support and also I can receive support from other people, do you know what I mean? At the moment, I came here as well to kind of support and show my compassion around the community and also engage and give time and give my knowledge and give my experience. And I think that alone teaches me how to receive diverse information from other people in other cultures as well. I think from what you've already demonstrated, I think if you keep going the way you're going, if you keep drawing the attention of different cultures and different backgrounds, I think you're ready heading towards the right way, do you know what I mean?

[00:23:59] - Sandile

And I think at the moment it's working very well. It's just a matter of just getting more people to come in, do you know what I mean? So if anybody who can help or anybody who wishes to come in and join in and find out about the organisation, definitely, they should because the organization is bringing something different. Even myself, I've been around Huddersfield for about 18 years and Elland is one of those villages that's been very small and quiet. It's kind of quiet in terms of culture, but now Curious Motion is bringing that out. So it's coming alive now.

[00:24:40] - Sandile

So we need to have everybody more coming in. And I think if you continue the way you're continuing now, I think we are heading the right way. And I think two, three years from now, we will have, in fact, the whole of Halifax and Huddersfield together joining in and also probably being behind as well, you know what I mean? So I think you're doing very well at the moment. Yeah, thank you. I think-, what I can say is thank you for the invite. I think for me today it's been very good. I go to different organisations, different groups, doing running sessions, drum sessions, but most of them are so organised in a way that they specifically choose one specific group.

[00:25:26] - Sandile

But today, in one room, I've had a variety of age groups and culture differences from the age of three to the age of God knows. But everybody has been involved, everybody's taken part. And I've had a good time. I've had an absolutely fantastic time. And I'll definitely continue to be a part of the project, you know what I mean? Even if it's any project that is there, do you know what I mean? I would love to be part of it

because I think it's growing to educate more and it's also involving the community in the most positive way possible. And I think from here onwards, it's just a matter of let's grow it more, let's just support so the organisation can grow more and we can see more of this project.

[00:26:32] - Samantha

A huge thank you to Sandile, Massarat, Alex and Isla for sharing their thoughts. There's a lot there to think about, isn't there? And a lot that we could continue unpacking and exploring and it really is a never ending journey of what these things mean for our world and what it means really to look after each other.

[00:26:52] - Samantha

So we'd really love to hear your thoughts and compassion too. What does compassion mean to you? Have you got a story of compassion that you'd like to share? Drop us an email on hello@curiousmotion.org.uk and we might feature some of your responses in a future episode.

[00:27:10] - Samantha

We have another event in Elland coming up very soon too, Welland, this is taking place on Saturday, the 29th of July, and Welland is an annual celebration that intertwines the realms of arts and well being in Elland. Newly reimagined form this year, it's the first year that we're offering it in its current format and it's very much something new that we're developing to become an annual event, hopefully for the long term. So please do join us.

[00:27:40] - Samantha

There's free taster workshops for all ages and very excitingly, we'll also be sharing three beautiful short films and a live dance performance for the first time. These have all been made with and feature people from the local area, so it's really not to be missed. Please do join us. The full program is on Curious Motion's website at curiousmotion.org.uk/welland.

[00:28:08] - Samantha

And if you're listening to this later on and you didn't make it to Welland, the films will be on our website and YouTube channel and there's lots of other things you can get involved in, so do take a look.

[00:28:17] - Samantha

And finally, a reminder that self compassion is just as important as compassion for others. When we turn compassion inward, we're more likely to feel happier, more resilient and able to cope with life's challenges. So do remember to be kind to yourself too.

[00:28:37] - Samantha

And that brings us to the end of another captivating episode of Calder Navigation. Thank you for joining us on this voyage through the stories that shape Calderdale. We hope that these conversations have touched your heart, inspired your mind and reminded you of the power of human connection. As we navigate life together, let's carry these stories with us, cherishing the lessons they teach us and the bonds they strengthen.

[00:29:00] - Samantha

Remember, Calder Navigation is just one part of the Welland Activator Project, a collective effort to combat loneliness and isolation in our community. We encourage you to explore the various classes, workshops and walks offered through the programme and join us at our special showcase event, Welland, where we can come together and celebrate the magic of Elland and Calderdale. You can find out more about the project at curiousmotion.org.uk.

[00:29:26] - Samantha

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Calderdale Council, Reaching Communities from the National Lottery Community Fund and Arts Council England for their invaluable support in making this podcast and the Welland Activator possible. Thanks to Untold Creative for production support. If you haven't already, be sure to subscribe to called Navigation on your preferred podcast platform so you never miss an episode.

[00:29:49] - Samantha

And please help us spread the word by sharing the podcast with your friends, family and anyone who might find solace, inspiration or a sense of belonging in these stories. As we conclude this chapter, we invite you to keep exploring, keep connecting, and keep navigating the currents of life with curiosity and compassion. Remember, the journey continues and together we can make a difference. Until next time, fair winds and warm hearts.