From The Ground Up S1 E5 Health Justice Transcript

00:00:07:18 - 00:00:25:06

Katie

Welcome to From the Ground Up, a podcast by the UK Youth Climate Coalition. This is a podcast by and for young people who are passionate about climate justice and want to make a difference. In each episode we'll be talking to young activists, about a particular issue within the umbrella of climate justice they're passionate about, what it means to be an activist and what you can do to help.

00:00:26:13 - 00:00:28:06

Katie

In this episode, I'm Katie.

00:00:29:04 - 00:00:29:22

George

And I’m George

00:00:30:08 - 00:01:00:24

Katie

And we'll be your host today. We'll be talking to our special guest, Rhiannon Osborne, about global health and the climate justice. Just before we start this episode, I wanted to give a quick definition because although the main topic is health, we do talk about abolition a few times in the context of this conversation. We're talking about movements that seek to remove the current prison and criminal justice system, as they argue that the current system doesn't really tackle the root causes of crime and only causes more harm.

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Katie

To learn more about this topic, I can recommend the book The End of Policing by Alex S. Vitale, which mostly talks about the movement in America, but also talks about policing systems around the world.

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Katie

Hi George.

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George

Hi Katie, how are you doing?

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Katie

I'm good. Welcome to your first podcast episode. Are you excited?

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George

Thank you, I’m very excited, I'm nervous.

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Katie

Ah you’ll be fine. Yeah. So I guess. How are you doing this week? How are you feeling?

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George

Yeah, I'm feeling great. We had our UKYCC kind of quarterly team weekend in Edinburgh this weekend. And even though we've all come back a little bit cold and wintery from the snowy north, it was a very, very good planning session and I feel like we've got some really cool projects coming up over the next couple of months.

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George

Yeah. How are you?

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Katie

Snowing in Edinburgh.

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George

Yeah, it was cold though.

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Katie

Yeah. For those of you who aren't familiar with how UKYCC works because all of our volunteers are sort of spread across the country, we tend to like meet up a couple of times a year in a city or wherever. Yeah, just to do a bit of like in-person planning because we don't always have that time together.

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Katie

So yeah. So it's really fun when we get together. And yeah, I’m also buzzing from a nice weekend with all you guys. Yeah, I got to know some of the new people that joined this year. Yeah. And I'm excited for what everyone’s got planned for COP 27.

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George

Yeah. So I think this is getting towards a bit of a crunch point for a lot of activists at the moment heading up to this big U.N. conference in November. And I think there's a like it's the first time I'll be going to such a kind of, I guess, intimidating decision making space around climate change. And there's a kind of simultaneous excitement about being able to go and kind of thankfulness for the privilege of being able to get into that space and hopefully influence people.

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George

But I will say alongside that, a lot of I guess, kind of worry about whether we're going to do anything good or if things are going to be,people are going to be in the mood to make some good climate related decisions over the next couple of months or not. So I think when you're working on something like that, you always want a good outcome don’t you.

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Katie

Yeah.

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George

Yeah. It's hard to control everything.

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Katie

Yeah, yeah. So you’re in the COP working group, you’re going to COP, so, what your plans, what you guys going to be up to?

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George

Yeah. So we are going to be heading out to Egypt at different times over the next ,yeah, so this COP is going to be in Sharm el Sheikh and some of us are heading out for the first week. Some of us are heading out for the second week. And between now and then we're just planning all of our kind of meetings and demonstrations and events that we're going to be doing there. Each day is kind of a big mishmash of trying to talk to people, trying to work out what's happening in the decision making room.

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George

But I'll say kind of going to different activist events and meeting other activists that we do a lot of work with remotely, that we're actually sitting in person sometimes for the first time, which is amazing. And yeah, just trying to almost be everywhere, putting the youth voice forward, pushing the agenda, I guess.

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Katie

Nice. So I think, probably good to start talking about our theme for this week, which isn't related to COP but I thought because it's nearly COP let's chat about that for a bit. But we are talking about health this week and the link between climate change and health, which is a great topic for you because you are a medical student.

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George

I am indeed.

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Katie

What do you do about the links between climate justice and health?

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George

Yeah, I’m one of probably a handful I suppose of medical students in the UK that kind of wanted to go into medicine to consider the links between climate change and health. And I know that our guest today, Rhiannon, has done a lot of kind of a big motivation of growing into health care for her and for a lot of other people is I suppose to make the world a better place.

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George

And I guess now there's a new generation of people coming through for school. They're learning about climate change and thinking how can they apply that to their future career? So doctors are more and more becoming aware of climate change and its impacts on human health, but also the ways in which the health care sector contributes to climate change.

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George

And so it's kind of a twofold thing, I guess, in that respect.

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Katie

Yeah, yeah. I think I guess possibly for some people, becoming a doctor is a non obvious career choice for dealing with climate change. I think we often think about like, oh yeah, you can go build wind turbines or whatever. But yeah, that's an interesting one for some people might not have thought of medicine as being a career that can help with climate change.

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George

Mhm. Yeah, absolutely. And I think we've seen in the past medical students campaigning on a whole bunch of issues and also doctors campaigning on a whole bunch of issues, whether that be smoking. The big thing in the UK has been the activism against nuclear arms and trying to push for nuclear disarmament. That was a big thing that doctors got involved with.

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George

Yeah, just things around kind of just this in general as impossible, I think, to be a doctor without seeing the kind of inequalities that exist in society. When you see the people that come into your practices and hospitals every day are not always representative of the wider UK population or the population of whatever area. So I think it's, it's a natural step, I think for doctors to now be focusing on climate change as a justice related issue.

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Katie

Cool, I think this is a good point to bring in our guest, Rhiannon welcome to the podcast. Would you like to introduce yourself to our listeners? Yeah. I’m Rhiannon (She/her), I'm a final year medical student based in the UK and I’m an organiser on Health Justiceand as an extension of that.

Katie

Cool and how did you get into the sort of health and climate activism space?

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Rhiannon

I'm yeah it's it's kind of a bit of a rogue, rogue journey, probably stimulated by quite a significant existential crisis in my second year of medicine and when I was kind of like, Hmm, we seem to just be kind of putting a bandage on open wounds and throwing people back into the fire when it comes to kind of how people's health was being impacted by poverty and pollution and inequality and exploitative work.

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Rhiannon

And I was like,mmm, I kind of feel like we're working at the wrong end of the spectrum here, and there's only so much we can do for people in terms of healing them when there are like systems very actively making them sick.

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Rhiannon

So yeah, stimulated by that existential crisis, I then started doing more work on health inequalities and from that started in particular looking at health systems and the role of pharma companies in global health inequalities when it comes to access to essential medicines. So I actually kind of started as an organizer and still am an organizer and researcher in the access to medicines space, which is basically the continued colonial denial of access to essential medicines for like, I want to say, the vast majority of people across the world because of patent systems and the power of pharmaceutical companies, um, and yeah, so I did quite a lot of international and national campaigning and research in

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Rhiannon

that area and the broad themes across the area which are going to sound fairly familiar are corporate impunity, neo-colonialism and profits being put over people's lives in white supremacist, patriarchal and class oppression dynamic. So yeah. And then you kind of realize that that's, oh gee, that's like a pattern across the entire economy. And yeah, you get quite quickly from corporate impunity and also patent actually you get quite quickly from patents to climate justice.

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Rhiannon

So yeah, so across those themes of yeah, neo colonialism, global trade patents, profit being part of people's lives, it was a relatively quick transition to working on climate justice. So yeah, so then really brilliant work was kind of already in the process of being set up by Maddocks in the UK around the public health case for a Green New Deal.

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Rhiannon

So I kind of got involved with that and I now organize mostly with the People's Health Movement, which is a global, global South led health justice movement. And I organize in their ecosystems and health circle at the international and national level.

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Katie

Yeah, it's quite amazing.

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George

It's such an interesting I mean I know you're one of the most active youth activists in the UK in some respects

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Rhiannon

No, I don't think that's true. I don't think that's true at all. But thank you

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George

Well, certainly a big big, almost like indefatigable presence when it comes to talking about the differences in climate and health justice. Obviously in UKYCC, we’re focused here on trying to talk about climate justice in different spaces. And one question that we wanted to ask you was a very kind of big question about what this climate justice mean to you.

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Rhiannon

Yeah, that's an excellent question. And I think I would probably caveat this question by my answer is very much not what it means to me, but what my understanding of climate justice is as having like absorbed, and read and and learned in the community with many, many, many people. And so I think, yeah, from the work that we do and I think, yeah, I'm just trying to think of a way to frame this answer in a way which makes sense.

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Rhiannon

So I think, okay, so I'm going to kind of go through in different aspects. So I think the first aspect of climate justice is ending harm, right? So like dismantling the fossil fuel industry, dismantling the military industrial complex, dismantling the industries which are doing active harm. And I think that the climate justice movement can learn a lot from abolitionist perspectives here of locating where is the harm coming from and in what world.

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Rhiannon

So, for example, in what world did prisons become a solution to a problem and how is that entire framing ridiculous? And so kind of yeah, like using that to locate the true causes of harm. And I think when you take that analysis, you then of course end up at quite a lot of number of bigger factors beyond just industry.

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Rhiannon

So I would I would start with ending harm. So yeah, ending the oil industry and then the military industrial complex and the various other factors and industries which are driving the climate crisis. But it's not enough to end harm. You have to repair harm as well. So then a big part of climate justice is reparations. So that can mean a whole number of different things, but you're looking at like kind of cash transfers, land back, technology transfer, migrant justice for people displaced by the climate crisis.

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Rhiannon

And I think we're not and are not able to avert a lot like horrific impacts from the climate crisis, which are already locked in. So how do we respond in a just way to that? But I think on a bigger picture, when we're looking at solutions, the kind of reason why we've arrived at the climate crisis is because we have an extractivist, colonial, capitalist economic model, which relies on extracting value from nature, extracting value from labour via exploitation, and kind of the aim of the economy is to accumulate capital and to accumulate wealth in the hands of corporations and rich elite, mostly based in the global north rather than yeah, like distribute resources

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Rhiannon

equitably and create a society in which everyone can thrive. So I think beyond kind of dealing with the industries which are causing the emissions and implementing reparations for that, you have to think about like entire system transformation basically. And there's so many different schools of thought, there's like eco socialism, donut economics, there’s de-growth which are offering really kind of visionary alternatives to an economic system based entirely on profit and growth of capital.

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Rhiannon

And I think this is really, really important when we analyze what is being proposed as solutions to the climate crisis. And I think, again, like, you can't solve a problem with the same systems that created it, right? So like, you're not going to solve the climate crisis with the same monopoly capitalist model of an energy system.

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Rhiannon

Right. Okay. We'll just change the input into this energy system from oil to lithium. Right. And then the energy system will still rely on displacement and violence towards communities at the sites of those at the sites of the resource. It will still mostly be geared towards excess consumption in the global north rather than like meeting everyone's energy needs.

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Rhiannon

So you can't just like, the solutions will not come from the same people, the same systems, the same ideologies which created them. And again, like, and you can see this across the industries which are causing the climate crisis. Like if we look at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and what they are proposing as the solutions to agriculture.

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Rhiannon

Right. So they're not that, but they're proposing solutions which, if anything, actually require the intensification of the practices which have caused the the harm caused by the industrial agriculture system. So yeah, so I think there's many, many different aspects of climate justice and I think yeah, it's very hard to kind of put it in, put it in one.

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Rhiannon

But one of the like theorists who I lean on a lot is Françoise Vergès, who talks about Yeah, and like building on the work of lots of Decolonial scholars, he talks about the politics of disposable life and how our economy is set up to use white supremacy, to use patriarchy, to use class oppression, to devalue some people's lives in the name of profit and in the name of capital accumulation and that is what the industries which are causing the climate crisis are based upon.

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Rhiannon

They rely on the devaluation of life, both through causing the climate crisis, but actually just all the way through that industry. So if you look at like the fossil fuel industry, they rely and have always relied on devaluing the lives of people near oil, right through violence, through pollution, through militarization. They rely on devaluing the lives of mostly black and brown communities in places like London who are facing the worst air pollution.

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Rhiannon

They rely on devaluing the lives of people whose like right to energy is not met because the profits of energy companies up above whether people will freeze to death in their homes. So the entire economy is based on a politics of disposable life, right? So then climate justice and global justice has to mean the opposite of that, right?

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Rhiannon

It has to mean like wealth redistribution. It has to mean like dismantling white supremacy. It has to mean reparations. It has to mean the end of colonialism and it has to mean things like what is kind of proposed under eco socialism, under donut economics, under degrowth, which is meeting everyone's needs, which is completely possible by designing an economy deliberately to meet everyone's needs.

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Rhiannon

So not just designing an economy for markets and hoping that somehow that meets everyone's needs, even though everybody knows that that's not happening and doing that within planetary boundaries. So yeah, so that was quite long and definitely have missed out thousands of things.

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Katie

I feel like that was loads though, I was like, now that's a good point. Oh, that's another good point. Like when you bring in the kind of talking about abolition and stuff, I think that was I had already kind of had that in the back of my mind when you were talking about kind of not not coming, sorry, like as the medical profession, not treating the causes of ill health, I feel like that's the same kind of argument with the abolition stuff is that like prison doesn't solve the root causes of crime, it just is like, yeah, see what I mean?

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Rhiannon

Yeah. And it's like also looking at yeah. And again, I'm not like an expert on abolition and I'm very much like leaning on abolitionists in training. I hope. Well, no, I'm definitely abolitionist. And then like, yeah, I'm always anything like the work of people like race and health and Cradle community in the UK in particular is really essential for linking the climate crisis to prison and police abolition.

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Rhiannon

And I think there's so many different angles to that. There's like the there's the very kind of practical angle of that, which is that like police and prisons are very much like used against the same communities who are most impacted by the climate crisis. Because the climate crisis is rooted in racism, racism, police and prisons are like designed as instruments of racism.

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Rhiannon

And they are they are used to protect like the police, prisons and military are used to protect the interests of fossil fuel companies. They are used to punish the same communities who are mostly impacted by the climate crisis and by the causes of the climate crisis. But then abolitionist perspectives offers so much like so much in terms of radical imagination and in terms of thinking about not only identifying and dismantling the root causes of harm and going beyond reform, but then also building alternatives.

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Rhiannon

So building alternatives built on justice, built on care. And I think that's something that I've learned a lot from the abolitionist organizers is, yeah, identifying the root causes of harm in the systems which are, which are implementing that harm and also very deliberately building alternatives. Yeah. So yeah, again, like very much abolitionist in training and learning. Yeah, I find it very, very beautiful in terms of how that analysis can help us work on climate justice.

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Katie

Yeah, and that's a good point as well about imagination and being able to imagine a better future? Yeah. George, do you want to comment on something there.

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George

Yeah, I was going to say, Katie, on your point about imagination is something that that I think when people ask about what the youth have to bring to the topic of activism, I suppose in general it is like it is just comes basically down to the ability to radically imagine a different future having come into the world and being told the way that things are.

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George

But also at school being taught values of fairness and equity and all of these things. And then you emerge into the world and suddenly you see that none of the power structures in place speak to those values. And it's kind of amazing to hear like the level of thinking that can go on, you know, within activist groups within the UK and just globally about like what is this like the best alternative in the future?

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George

And I think when it comes to health, I suppose a question I had for you around was that whole the UK health institution as a whole kind of layer cake of power and organization that is often a bit slow to change. And I really wanted to hear your experience of engaging with health care management institutions in the UK and to ask you

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George

To what extent do you think that they are taking the climate crisis seriously?

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Rhiannon

Yeah, that's an excellent, excellent question.

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Rhiannon

I think there is a big difference between taking the climate crisis seriously and like in the academic sense and like acting like you take it seriously and doing the things which would be required to implement climate justice. And I think that actually this I think this question kind of deserves a bit of a zoom out in terms of how we see health in general under neoliberalism and well under colonial capitalism.

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Rhiannon

And I think, yeah, there are a number of aspects to kind of the lies we are told about health under colonial capitalism. I think the first one is that like health is an individual phenomenon, right? So like health is something which is the result of your behaviours, but it's because you don't exercise enough or because you smoke or.

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Rhiannon

It's a result of kind of particular biological flaws within you. And that's not to say that those things might not be like factors, but the idea that the idea that health is individual is something which you're responsible for at the individual level, is very deliberate to hide the fact that colonial capitalism, neoliberals, demand policies which harm your health, demand the power and the impunity of industries which harm your health.

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Rhiannon

Right? So like if you can say, okay, well like actually your heart disease is your fault because you don't exercise enough. That's very convenient for the car industry who are polluting the street where you live on and contributing to your heart disease. It's very convenient for the fast food industry and industrial agriculture who are refusing to meet your nutritional needs.

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Rhiannon

It's very convenient for your employer who is exploiting you at work, putting your body and your mind under horrendous levels of stress. So the location of health as an individual phenomenon is very deliberate In order to hide a society which is designed to harm. And then the second aspect of it is health as separate to the health of ecosystems. And this is something which indigenous peoples across the world have like.

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Rhiannon

Yeah. Talked about, yeah. For literally hundreds, hundreds of hundreds of years that the health of ecosystems is our health, right? There is no kind of and this comes from like kind of enlightenment ideology that nature is there to be exploited to serve the well-being of humans rather than humans as one part of ecosystems and interdependent with all other aspects of ecosystems.

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Rhiannon

So that's kind of like the starting point from, from, from which yeah. From where we start basically when it comes to talking about health and then kind of more specifically to look into how that manifests in health institutions, that means that our understanding of health is limited to a hospital, it's limited to health care, is limited to you get sick and then you enter hospital and then we help you feel better.

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Rhiannon

And then we put you outside the hospital. And then whatever happens there is none of our business. And it also is part of health being apolitical right. So there is a really, really big problem with health institutions and doctors and health professionals definitely not as a general rule. There are incredible organizers in the health community that are like incredible institutions like Nurses United, who are doing really, really incredible work, organizing people within the health profession.

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Rhiannon

But there is this like kind of thing which you kind of have to drag people out of that health professionals should be apolitical, which is ridiculous because health is political. Everything which determines our ability to do our job from the funding of the NHS to whether we're like dealing with, which is basically what I'm being trained to deal with is mostly dealing with the consequences of society, which doesn't give a -

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Rhiannon

Okay, sorry, can I swear?.

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Katie

Yeah probably not

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Rhiannon

But dealing with the health impacts of poverty, right. Dealing with the health impacts of the climate crisis. Dealing with the health impacts of racism. And then yeah. And then you're like confronted with a completely underfunded NHS which is unable to meet those needs. So the idea that health institutions should be apolitical is something which I struggle to drag people out of sometimes.

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Rhiannon

But at the same time, one of the areas which I think is like most promising is like union based health worker organizing or membership based health worker organizing because it is such a huge number of people in a very well-organized profession. And I think there's different aspects. There's like organizing within the profession itself for a Green New Deal, but then there's also like worker solidarity.

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Rhiannon

And I think there yeah, there's a lot of hierarchies within medicine. And again, that's kind of like a symptom of the wider problems with how we view health. Is that like health is not your embodied experience of what it means to live in this world. Health is the remit and the expertize of doctors only and gatekeeping by doctors.

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Rhiannon

Um, yeah. So I think there's a lot of different aspects. And then maybe the other thing I would add to that, which is I don't want to I don't say unpopular, it's uncomfortable to say within lots of health institutions, but it's very well established. Is that medicine is increasingly and has been a weapon of state violence. it has not always been do no harm.

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Rhiannon

And I think we can see that from kind of the colonial origins of global health, for example, which were very much focused on keeping colonial soldiers well and keeping kind of infectious diseases from the global south out of Europe. And yet we see the like in how the COVID pandemic was managed, for example. So we see that in the colonial origins of global health.

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Rhiannon

We see that in the way that prisons and policing have shaped the way we approach mental health, where carcerality is a really big part of how we approach mental health. And we see that increasingly with the and this is kind of an area which is, I guess, slightly less controversial because a lot of the time it's forced is the collaboration of health workers with the Home Office and with the police, which is increasing under the nationality and borders bill.

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Rhiannon

Under the policing bill, where, yeah, health workers are increasingly required to report and investigate undocumented patients, for example, which is, yeah, completely unacceptable and a violation of the right to health. So yeah, I'm not really sure if that answers. I guess I'm just I think that answers your question in terms of what it is like to try and organize within health institutions.

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Rhiannon

There's a lot of challenges, but I think also a lot of potential. But I think in order to reach that potential, we have to dismantle a lot of lies about health and the role of health professionals.

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Katie

Yeh, that's really interesting. You've touched on some interesting points that I think that point on so many points to pick up on. But yeah, a pretty larger point about the individualization of health. Yeah, I feel like there's a lot of people who maybe feel, you know, if you're unwell, you're made to feel guilty because this is your fault or whatever and it's not.

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Katie

And that shouldn't be the case. And yeh I think you're right that we need to kind of rethink how we look at healthcare and how we look at. Yeah, so I, I've trailed off a bit that I'm kind of a bit of a rambling that.

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Rhiannon

Yeah. And I think that guilt, that guilt is a really big, it's a really big factor in the UK because like 12 years of austerity means that people do feel guilty about using NHS, like taking time from them. I just feel like using up NHS resources and that kind of feeds into this wider scarcity myth which has its roots in capitalism, that there isn't enough resources to go around rather than yes, there are resources are being stolen from you and from the planet by corporations and by regulates that if that wasn't happening, there's more than enough resources.

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Rhiannon

And yeah, we really see the scarcity narrative play out in the NHS where like I regularly see people who are very, very seriously ill apologizing for coming to hospital. Yeah. And that's really sad. Yeah, really, really sad.

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George

And yeah, yeah, for sure. It's something that I've seen in my very short time as a medical student is just the number of people that have kind of people are very thankful for having the service there for sure, but they do feel like they’re almost a burden in some respects on the system, which is really not the way it should be in such a you know, healthcare free at the point of access in the UK is a wonderful thing, but it is a problem that people consider it something that they need to kind of within their own kind of life decide when they have a right to it and when when they

00:30:41:10 - 00:31:04:08

George

don't and not kind of place a burden on the system. And that's a narrative that you see throughout the press all the time with people, you know, people saying GP appointment numbers, shoot up because there's this perception that people are wasting time, which is just absolutely not the case. I think just trying to touch on, you know, us as medical students.

00:31:04:22 - 00:31:14:01

George

I wanted to ask the question of whether you think that climate change is an issue that got sufficient attention in the teaching that you receive as a medical student.

00:31:16:08 - 00:31:49:06

Rhiannon

I think health inequalities and health as political is an issue which is almost completely ignored in our medical training. I actually think that like Cambridge, we have some decent sustainability people who like integrating issues like that more into the course. But as a general rule, no, and I think something which I like a little bit wary of is that there is a big there is a lot of momentum and a lot of talk in healthcare community about sustainable health care, which is fine.

00:31:49:22 - 00:32:18:09

Rhiannon

Like healthcare like can be quite a large contributor to resource use and emissions. The NHS is the first health care system to like commit to net zero blah blah blah. So there's definitely like work to be done there. And I'm not denying the importance of that, but I think it's an incredibly narrow lens to approach the intersection of climate and health from in terms of how we make health care more sustainable, which again, like, yeah, important question.

00:32:19:06 - 00:32:48:00

Rhiannon

But like the full expansiveness of climate health is how do we completely redesign an economy so that it’s designed to meet people's health needs without destroying the planet, which is again is perfectly possible. And yeah, so I'm like a little bit concerned about like the, the very, the focus on sustainable healthcare as the true intersection of this question.

00:32:48:08 - 00:33:09:14

Rhiannon

And then again, like climate justice doesn't necessarily come into that right when it comes to sustainable health care. Right. So like a sustainable like a net zero NHS which charges an asylum seeker £100,000 for emergency care for a stroke is not a health care system which is in line with climate justice. Right. So I think that like and that did happen.

00:33:09:21 - 00:33:39:00

Rhiannon

Look up the Justice for Simba campaign in Sheffield. So yeah. So I think it is increasingly being discussed, but it is being discussed through a lens which I think is insufficient basically. And it's about how do we make health care more sustainable. And again, if you don't take that wider lens of scarcity, of understanding that scarcity is a fake problem, that conversation kind of can quickly go down the road of rationing health care, which is really not necessarily doesn't always go down that road.

00:33:39:14 - 00:34:04:01

Rhiannon

But if you're like, oh, health care is a big contributor to emissions, we need to reduce emissions. How do we make health care more sustainable and maybe cut back on the aspects of care which are yeah, which are too high emitting or whatever. Whereas if we take kind of a full health and climate, climate justice lens, it's like, no, we need to massively expand people's access to health care, people's access to social care and the ability not only for like professionals to care for people, but to care for each other.

00:34:04:06 - 00:34:24:17

Rhiannon

Right? Like more free time, higher wages, lower working hours and yeah, like community infrastructure, which allows us to care for each other as we kind of face the climate crisis. And that is kind of that's where I see like the exciting part of sustainable healthcare is how do we how do we create societies based on care where care is

00:34:25:08 - 00:34:43:03

Rhiannon

Yeah. What carries embedded in every aspect of our lives and work is enabled rather than care is either exploited or destroyed. Yeah. So I would say we are being taught increasingly, but the scope with which are being taught is potentially a bit limited.

00:34:43:03 - 00:34:48:22

Katie

How are you finding it, George? I know it's all new to you

00:34:48:22 - 00:35:24:10

George

Yeah, I agree with everything that Rhiannon said for sure. And coming from working in sustainability before and we've got more of an environmental policy lens where people think about climate change from the perspective of not only what is the impact on things like the energy industry which is a very technocratic debate, but also what is the impact on climate of climate change, on broader environmental issues, be it biodiversity, indigenous people homes and rights in different parts of the world.

00:35:24:10 - 00:36:08:02

George

And also kind of looking at things from the perspective of how do you how do you get kind of solutions that are going to help bring the people that are most impacted by the climate crisis up towards living in a meaningful way? That is not just increasing kind of, I guess the lives further making more sustainable the lives of people that consume a huge amount already coming from that kind of that kind of area that looks at things in such a interdisciplinary way over towards medicine where things are often thought about in a very binary sense of how can we as an industry kind of continue to operate in the way

00:36:08:02 - 00:36:29:09

George

that we do, but just in a slightly kind of greener sense, I almost feel like the health care industry gets given a green card for many, it’s almost insulated from many wider social changes in some respects around the world, because health care is seen as a normative good and people who work within health care are seen as normatively good themselves so.

00:36:29:09 - 00:36:58:02

George

I think I think some of that critical reflection that Rhiannon you’ve talked about of how can health care have caused harm in the past then is that still ongoing? And why do we, why does health care as an industry kind of give doctors the ability to not talk about this stuff by saying it's political and therefore not allowed to talk about it when the very fact that it is political means that it kind of should be talked about in some ways.

00:36:59:01 - 00:37:32:13

Rhiannon

Yeah. And I think like in terms of like where medicine has done harm in the past is like definitely under analyzed area and it's important because it's still relevant. So like for example, the medical profession has a long history engaging in eugenics, in particular the sterilization of black women or disabled people, for example, and science and medicine is always a political product of its time.

00:37:32:22 - 00:38:13:16

Rhiannon

Right. And and again, there's this, like, enlightenment idea of like the purity of science, which we know is like rubbish, because science., yeah. Has been abused in the past to justify things like eugenics. And I think having that critical lens of the like of the political history of science medicine is really important because then you see things start to pop again, like again with like overpopulation arguments, for example, which are of course a load of rubbish because yeah, it's very much based on like I don't know if you saw the EU person this year, this week describing Europe as a garden and the rest of a world

00:38:13:17 - 00:38:30:07

Rhiannon

of the world as a jungle which can accommodate modern. Yeah, I would, I mean, I don't know if I would recommend going and watching that or not recommend going and watching that and then and then also saying that Europe needs to intervene more in the jungle in order to keep the jungle at bay. Yeah, and it was just.

00:38:30:07 - 00:39:04:02

Rhiannon

It's just white supremacy. Yeah. Um, yeah. And then you. Because then, yeah. You see, the, the, like, history of things like sterilization and eugenics, the very white supremacist history of those movements popping up again with overpopulation arguments about about climate change. So I think having that understanding like a political analysis, understanding of the history of medicine and science is not only critical for like history and documenting and justice, but also critical for being able to analyze when things when those things pop up again.

00:39:04:02 - 00:39:04:14

Rhiannon

So yeah.

00:39:06:02 - 00:39:39:18

George

Yeah. It's so interesting. I think it's almost like in the past, medicine had a bit more of an institutional tradition of things like medical anthropology and medics as being really embedded in trying to understand the communities in which they're in. And I kind of feel like over the past hundred years or so, as medical medicine has become so much more technology based, those that work in it have been taken away from trying to really understand the communities in which they work and the kind of almost the art of medicine has been taken away in some respects

00:39:39:18 - 00:39:55:14

George

There's such a kind of limited, critical reflection requirement, even though there is as you’ve shown Rhiannon like an incredible capacity for people to be able to do that if they kind of devote their own time towards it.

00:39:56:01 - 00:40:24:23

Rhiannon

MM Yeah. And there is like that is really, really exciting work to be done within medicine and within like meeting people's right to health care. And I think, yeah, because they're like, super interesting. Like, I guess I kind of like two sides of a coin where I'm like quite critical of institutional medicine and healthcare today. But also like the other area I do the most work on is access to healthcare and access to medicines and access to medicines as a fundamental human right.

00:40:25:20 - 00:40:54:15

Rhiannon

And those two things are not like they're not in conflict with each other, because what we need is both the transformation of health systems, the transformation of how we understand health, and an expansion of people's ability to access those health systems. And yeah, I would yeah. Just going to plug the work of Healing Justice London, who have an incredible reimagining health and care program, recognizing that for the communities that they work with, which is mostly people of color.

00:40:54:15 - 00:41:14:04

Rhiannon

In London, health care has not served their needs, right? So it's not safe to go to see a psychiatrist because they are very much more likely than white counterparts to section you and see you to go down the causality rate of mental mental health or services are so underfunded that you can't get the support you need as a domestic violence survivor, for example.

00:41:15:16 - 00:41:40:15

Rhiannon

And yet what they're kind of building with this like program of work, which really recommend your listeners go and look at, is re-imagining and designing like health care by and for the community. And I think reclaiming healthcare as something run by and for communities is going to be yeah, well I would like that to be a really key tenant of transforming our health care systems as we expand access to them as well.

00:41:40:15 - 00:42:01:24

Katie

You're talking bit before about like building a culture of care and stuff and that's something that like that you care what you say is quite important to us to sort of do that within the movement because like, you know, I think you often see like activists kind of throwing everything they have at their activism but not taking the time to like care for themselves on each other.

00:42:01:24 - 00:42:11:09

Katie

And it leads to burnout. So I guess a question I have is how do you look after yourself as an activist and how can we look after each other better as well?

00:42:11:10 - 00:42:29:19

Rhiannon

Yeah. And I think, to be honest, the second part of your question is, is the key part, because nobody looks after themselves like we look after each other and I think like the. Yeah, and I think that's the real beautiful part of your question is how do we build movements where we are constantly resourcing each other rather than draining each other?

00:42:30:21 - 00:43:02:09

Rhiannon

And I think like for me, I think being part of social movements has like, like for example, with the People's Health Hearing where we're like working directly with communities that are facing like the most violent end of the fossil fuel industry and the mining industry. It exposes you and, and you become like deeply embedded with knowing how bad things are and how much violence and how much violence there is.

00:43:02:09 - 00:43:50:11

Rhiannon

And that can be that can be really hard and yeah, and of course it's yeah, I'm, I'm saying that as someone who does not experience militarization by a fossil fuel company. So yes, even harder for people who are experiencing that directly obviously. But I think also being like living your life in struggle, in solidarity, in community also is a way to access so much more joy and connection and love than if you lived your life like pretending that these things didn't exist or like not joining with people to resist them together.

00:43:50:11 - 00:44:33:17

Rhiannon

And so I think that is there's so much love and beauty and connection in organizing. But yeah, as you said, like it can be really draining, it can be really tiring. And I think my answer to your question is kind of the second part of your question is that like, so for example, in lots of the organizations, I work with, we have like care and justice policies and we and I really kind of think about and lean on the work of Adrienne Marie Brown in particular, her work in emergent strategy about moving at the pace of trust and moving through your organizing with the means is the end, right?

00:44:33:17 - 00:44:55:19

Rhiannon

That is, there's no end. There's like and I think this is particularly important for people organizing for the climate crisis. This issue is not going to go away in our lifetimes. And I think that thinking of there is no end to this.

00:44:55:19 - 00:45:15:04

Rhiannon

We only have the means. You know, we have to organize in a way which is aligned with the world we want to see. We have to organize in a way which centers love, which centers relationships, which centers connection, and not in a way which emulates the system of oppression, which, of course, the things that we want to organize against.

00:45:15:04 - 00:45:44:20

Rhiannon

So not in a way which emulates like patriarchal ideas of leadership and dominance, not in a way which says, you know, okay, we're like, you know, whatever with your help, if we have to run this event, we have to run this, you know? So I think I lean a lot on the work of Adrienne Marie Brown. Yeah, when it comes to think about how I do organizing, how I show up in spaces, how we implement anti oppressive organizing, like it's no yeah, it's no use to be like, yeah, like the climate crisis is racist.

00:45:44:20 - 00:46:05:19

Rhiannon

Like, yeah, we're all decolonial and then not have a very serious strategy and reflection about like how you implement anti-racism, how you prevent decolonization in the work, in the work that you're doing itself within your team and within the way that you organize, not just the content of which not, not just the content that you organize around. Yeah.

00:46:05:19 - 00:46:28:19

Rhiannon

So I think, yeah, centering, centering love, centering relationships, moving at the speed of trust and just yeah. Like there is not going to be an end to this work in our lifetimes and I'm okay with that. And like for many people that has been the case. You know, and I think in particular in particular as like like I'm white in the organizing the space, it's very easy to be like as an existential crisis.

00:46:28:19 - 00:46:54:00

Rhiannon

Like we have to like do X-Y-Z right now, which is true. We have to do so much right now. But like this is not the first existential crisis. Like as Mary Annaïse Heglar writes, like, like, yeah, like black communities face many, many existential crises. Indigenous communities face many, many existential crises. And the idea of giving up is like a super, like, very white, very privileged idea

00:46:54:00 - 00:47:13:12

Rhiannon

Like it’s too hard. We're going to give up. It's too it's you know and so I think yeah. Bringing all of that together that there's no end to this work. We kind of yeah, we only have the means and I'm pretty sure that's a quote from I think that's a quote from somewhere. I really I'm sorry I really can't remember.

00:47:13:12 - 00:47:15:16

Katie

You can look it up right now.

00:47:15:16 - 00:47:29:17

Rhiannon

Oh, it's us. It's Ursula K. Le Guin. Building on learning from this I love science fiction now. But yeah, everyone should read Octavia Butler.

00:47:30:15 - 00:47:49:08

Katie

Yeah, yeah. I've been getting into Sci-Fi recently, I read a really good one it’s got like a utopian future called Woman on the Edge of Time. I really recommend that, I’m constantly recommending this book to people, it’s got like gender equality, living in harmony with nature and time travel, it's really good.

00:47:49:08 - 00:48:02:10

Rhiannon

Cool. Yeah. So that quote is Ursula la Guin from the Lathe of Heaven. And the full quote is The end justifies the mean,. But what if there never is an end and all we have is the means? So that is how I would answer your question basically

00:48:07:09 - 00:48:39:01

George

Yeah, it's such a I think I'd never really thought about the idea that as you say around and like there's a there's been a whole bunch of communities in the past that have had no choice but to push through.. And obviously through human history, examples of kind of struggled to survive. But it isn't something that I guess Europeans and Americans have really experienced in a sense of existentialism, certainly in any of our lifetimes.

00:48:40:08 - 00:48:48:21

George

So, yeah, my mind is blown.

00:48:48:21 - 00:48:53:20

Katie

So yeah, my final question, which is the one that I always like to end with, is what gives you hope?

00:48:54:09 - 00:49:18:06

Rhiannon

Yeah, I'm going to be annoying and reframe your question. I don't think hope is a thing that you have or do not have. Like hope. Hope. Hope is a practice, right? And hope like so yeah. I'd throw out another quote. There's like a beautiful Rebecca Solnit quote, which is like, hope is not something that you like sit with in an armchair and hope for a better future.

00:49:18:06 - 00:49:41:04

Rhiannon

Hope is an act with which you break down doors. And that's, that's, yeah, that's a really great. And that's how I conceptualize hope. Like the, the like energy and strength in doing this work comes from like very, very deep conviction that we could, we could have it all, you know, we could have like a beautiful, socially just ecological world.

00:49:42:06 - 00:50:00:17

Rhiannon

And the fact that we don't have that is ridiculous. And completely unnecessary. And I think that yeah. So for me, hope is a practice. It's and you have to, you have to actively cultivate it. Like actually this week I'm feeling super unhopeful, right? And so like I've had to be like, okay, what, how do I bring myself energy?

00:50:00:17 - 00:50:27:03

Rhiannon

And again, a lot of that is related to how we care for each other and how we relate to each other, because it's very easy to lack hope by yourself. It's quite hard to lack hope in community and I think for me a lot of my hopeful practice comes with like community work and Cambridge and like very much connecting, connecting with people and focusing on community relationships and the possibilities which are possible even at a very local level.

00:50:27:15 - 00:50:54:23

Rhiannon

I'm sorry, the possibilities which are possible, but silly phrase, I would say hope. Hope is hope is a hope as a practice. And I try and practice it through connecting with people and connecting with communities and being in relation with people. And I have now, thanks to Adreinne Marie Brown and Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin discovered, sci fi as a very useful source of hope and imagination.

00:50:55:21 - 00:50:59:04

Rhiannon

And that is, yeah, one of the things which I do when I'm feeling not very hopeful is read a sci- fi book which is new in the last six months of my like.

00:51:02:19 - 00:51:20:18

Katie

Nice, yeah,. Good answer. And I love that quote about banging down the door with the axe. That's really good. Yeah, I like it to thank you so much for your time, man. And do you have anything else you wanted to, like, plug or say what you hear?

00:51:21:10 - 00:51:23:07

Rhiannon

Lots of things. So many things.

00:51:24:15 - 00:51:25:01

Katie

Yeah.

00:51:25:01 - 00:51:48:09

Rhiannon

I'm like, yeah, would definitely like re plug the abolitionist work of people like Cradle Community, Healing Justice London, Race and Health and also plug the work of We the people in Nigeria who are a community group in the Niger Delta, who we work with, who do incredible work documenting the harms of Shell, and also envisioning what reparations would look like and how they would be implemented in that community.

00:51:50:08 - 00:51:52:17

Rhiannon

And oh my goodness, there's so many different things to plug

00:51:54:20 - 00:52:15:18

Rhiannon

and I would plug reading Emergent Strategy by Adrienne Marie Brown. I would say, like for anyone interested in organizing, it's a beautiful, beautiful book. And yeah, I use it to guide my work. And it has quite radically changed the way that I organize reading that book. So I would recommend that and for all things health and climate justice, there are many, many different things.

00:52:15:18 - 00:52:24:08

Rhiannon

But I would recommend reading Inflamed by Rupa Murya and Raj Patel for an introduction into health, justice and colonial capitalism and how it intersects with our health.

00:52:27:02 - 00:52:27:15

George

Amazing.

00:52:28:04 - 00:52:31:11

Katie

Thank you so much.

Rhiannon

You're so welcome. Thanks for having me.

00:52:32:16 - 00:52:47:11

George

It's great to speak to you.

00:52:51:15 - 00:52:53:14

Katie

How did you find that conversation with Rihanna?

00:52:55:01 - 00:53:35:20

George

Wowl, I was such a, I feel like my mind is full going through all of the big concepts that we talked about. But It's such an example of how everything that we talk about in youth activism and around climate change is about so many of the same things. And I guess it all comes back to the same underlying structures at the end of the day, which is kind of in some respects terrifying, but it also balance the problem, I guess we all kind of are fighting for the same thing, there’s a kind of solidarity, I guess that people talk about in activism.

00:53:37:06 - 00:53:38:08

George

Yeah. How did you find it?

00:53:39:15 - 00:53:54:03

Katie

Yeah. I feel like the whole time she was talking, my brain was making connections between different things, like when she was saying like, oh, we don't, we don't kind of get to the root causes of health problems, we just treat them in hospitals. And I was like, that sounds like what I've been reading about abolition. And then she brought up abolition.

00:53:54:03 - 00:54:19:15

Katie

I was like, Oh yeah, they were connected. And then, yeah, just making so many connections to different systemic things. And like even when you were talking about like I think you mentioned like health care getting a bit of a free pass for like green stuff because of, you know, the priority is like looking after patients rather than dealing with climate change.

00:54:19:24 - 00:54:38:14

Katie

And that's something that I've noticed because I yeah, at the beginning I was like, I don't know anything about healthcare I actually have in my day job. I'm an engineer and I do work a little bit in health care context. I've done a bit of like product development for like medical devices, and now I'm working more on this sort of infrastructure industry.

00:54:38:14 - 00:55:06:18

Katie

So looking at building new hospitals and stuff and yeah, particularly in that medical device development, there is this like sudden awareness that wasn't there a few years ago that suddenly like, Oh, we should actually be making our products that the aren't environmentally harmful, which is a bit at odds with some of the sort of trends for putting smart devices in everything because that's a whole bunch of electronic waste that we're going to be creating.

00:55:08:08 - 00:55:34:24

Katie

Yeah, but then that particularly within sort of product development, it's those conversations are happening outside of the context of the like wider systemic how do we build a society that's not making people sick because we're just looking at how to solve the problem from the like the problem's already happened point but yeah that the systemic analysis is something that's also lacking in engineering from a healthcare context.

00:55:36:03 - 00:55:58:21

George

Yeah, I’m sure. And I think this, this chat that we've just had is such a testament to the idea that big thinking young people with imaginations for a better future is kind of, in some respects, the most powerful the most powerful thing to say to people that have been involved in industries like healthcare, kind of stuck in these big, big healthcare decision making institutions throughout their career.

00:55:59:11 - 00:56:30:21

George

but they may have seen very limited change on kind of the reduction of inequality within the richest and the poorest and in any society that there can be a different world. And that if people are really committed to changing structural issues and bringing the politics and see healthcare the way that it's always been, then there is such a great kind of future opportunity for everyone to be basically just live healthier and happier lives.

00:56:31:08 - 00:56:33:21

George

I do it in a kind of sustainable world.

00:56:35:06 - 00:56:40:17

Katie

Yeah, I want to live in that world.

00:56:40:23 - 00:57:12:23

George

Yeah, Take me to it. I think another thing, I don't know if you felt this as well, but I felt like Rhiannon is an activist, so connected across so many different movements and organizations. And I know that in UKYCC, a lot of our activists work with different organizations as well but there is just such a clear benefit to that kind of connected working of just bringing movements together and especially when people are talking about similar stuff.

00:57:12:23 - 00:57:32:03

Katie

Yeah. And even sort of even like engaging in sort of different contexts. She's, you know, she's working with people who are looking at the higher levels of like health care policy in the UK. And she's also looking at solving problems in her local community. And then she's also working with activists in the Global South on kind of envisioning a fair future for them.

00:57:32:11 - 00:57:54:07

Katie

So yeah, there's all those different, different things that are linked but bring separate perspectives that all work together to solve a problem, which as you say, is sort of like how say UKYCC engages at the sort of international level and then on national campaigns and then also with our community team at the local level for sure. Yeah. Yeah.

00:57:54:08 - 00:58:11:03

Katie

And I do think what she said about like community engagement, I find that quite valuable. Like because, because UKYCC, as I was saying at the start of the podcast we’re sort of spread across the country. I find it really valuable when I get to go to something in my local community and engage with people who are physically with me as well.

00:58:11:14 - 00:58:20:09

Katie

Yeah, and yeah, COVID has made us better at working online, but it is just so nice to come together in person, isn't it?

00:58:20:09 - 00:58:28:10

George

There's nothing quite like having a proper conversation with your neighbour outside.

00:58:28:10 - 00:58:36:09

Katie

Ah, I don't quite know how to wrap this up. Any final thoughts?

00:58:36:09 - 00:58:58:08

George

Yeah, I think I really liked the final thing that we ended on when we were speaking to Rhiannon about the idea of hope as a process and working on hope because I think people yeah, I definitely feel like everybody this is like, oh, where's my optimism gone? This seems like a hopeless situation. And then the next day it comes right back around again.

00:59:02:07 - 00:59:28:20

Katie

Yeah, that's something that Christiana Figueres, who, if you're not familiar, is the woman who basically made the Paris agreement happen. In her book, she talks about that as kind of like, yeah, we have to choose to be optimistic because there's not another option. Yeah, the other option is that we don't do it. So we have to choose to be optimistic and believe that it's worth doing the work to make a better future.

00:59:29:21 - 00:59:42:00

George

Yeah. Yeah. She has a great podcast, Outrage and Optimism. And hopefully if we shout her our show, she’ll shout us out as well.

00:59:42:00 - 00:59:46:19

Katie

Aim high George, aim high. Right, thank you for joining me on this podcast. It's been great to have you and your expertize for this episode.

00:59:47:12 - 00:59:53:16

George

Thank you, Katie, and thanks for making it so fun to be on my first ever podcast. Have a good week.

00:59:54:03 - 01:00:20:13

Katie

Thanks for listening to From the Ground Up, a podcast by the UK Youth Climate Coalition. Our guest today was Rhiannon Osborne, your hosts were Katie and George and our music is by Nick Battle. To learn more about our work, follow us on social media or go to UKYCC.com. To learn more about Rihanna's work on global justice, health and climate.

01:00:20:13 - 01:00:37:23

Katie

You can follow her on Twitter @Rihannon\_Osborn or on Instagram @osborne\_rhiannon. We've also got a list in the show notes of organizations you can follow and books you can read to learn more about this topic.