

CoramBAAF Conversations | Meet Charmaine Orchard transcript

00:00:04 Emma Fincham

Hello, Charmaine. Welcome to this conversation that you and I are gonna have, which is part of celebrating foster care fortnight. And so I want you to introduce yourself in a minute. I'll just briefly introduce myself. I'm Emma, Emma Finch. I'm fostering consultant in the Policy Research and development team at Coram, Bath.

00:00:24 Emma Fincham

So do you want to introduce yourself?

00:00:27 Charmaine Orchard

Yeah. Hi, Emma. Thank you. My name is Charmaine Orchard. I am care experienced. And over the years I've been involved with lots of different projects to do with working with children in care and improving their overall care experience. And I run a Community interest company called connected, which carries out cultural competence training for social care.

00:00:48 Emma Fincham

Brilliant. Thank you. And the reason that we've asked you Charmaine to have this conversation, chat with me today is because you have recently been elected as our chair of our Fostering Advisory Committee, which we are absolutely delighted about. So I we just wanted to have a kind of a conversation just kind of.

00:01:10 Emma Fincham

To reflect a bit on your experience of of being part of the Corumba Fostering Advisory Committee, and I suppose what? What made you keen to put yourself forward to?

00:01:23 Emma Fincham

To be one of the chairs of the committee, the chair.

00:01:26 Emma Fincham

I should say.

00:01:27 Charmaine Orchard

Yeah, sure. OK. So what was interesting for me is that I've done a little bit of research on Corrin birth and and came across what it is that they do. And when I was introduced to the idea of the the committee, I initially got involved because I thought it would be great to really see how much of.

00:01:45 Charmaine Orchard

How much I could contribute towards the steering of that group? What? What sort of impact we can have and the the sort of work that we can engage with and whether it's like local authorities on a smaller scale or something that's on a on a bigger scale because of the various work that I've been involved with, looking at education attainment, as I said, cultural competency.

00:02:06 Charmaine Orchard

And and identity and belonging for looked after children. That's something I thought that I could bring to the panel, too, from a care experience point of view too. So yeah, I I think that that was my that was my reason for wanting to get involved and the experience chairing it has been great. It's.

00:02:21 Charmaine Orchard

Been great to see the various people from.

00:02:23 Charmaine Orchard

Different backgrounds, different disciplines and and professional groups all coming together with the aim of looking at improving the care experience of young people, and it's inspiring that that to see so many people that are dedicated to doing that and what it is they've done so far to sort of, it just shows there's just a wealth of knowledge within the.

00:02:43 Charmaine Orchard

The group that we can really put together and and make some changes moving.

00:02:48 Emma Fincham

Thank you for that, Tommy. You just mentioned cultural competence, which is an area that is, I know a passion and a a particular kind of you have expertise in that around delivering training. So I suppose.

00:03:00 Emma Fincham

If we're thinking about.

00:03:01 Emma Fincham

Fostering communities and cultural competence, what comes to mind for you? What? What? What do you think when we talk?

00:03:08 Emma Fincham

About that.

00:03:09 Charmaine Orchard

OK. So it's really for me. It's all of the different people involved in in the, the, the young person's life, whether that's sort of directly and it's the foster care or whether it's the social worker or in a way, even if it's when I when.

00:03:22 Charmaine Orchard

I'm thinking about cultural.

00:03:24 Charmaine Orchard

The people involved in designing and delivering that is all with the same aim, essentially of improving that experience. And when you're looking at the overall community and the care experience community, I I guess and when you think about fostering communities, it's it's everybody involved, everybody trying to sort of work towards that, that same aim of just sort of improving that.

00:03:45 Charmaine Orchard

Experience. But then fostering communities for me can be I've been involved with lots of different in lots of different settings with researchers. So, you know, carrying out research within the care experience.

00:03:56 Charmaine Orchard

Relation to look at education attainment. I'm obviously involved in this committee. I sat on various fostering panels before I've I've worked directly with students and young people. So these are all different routes that you wouldn't necessarily think of initially that that actually kind of contribute toward that.

00:04:17 Charmaine Orchard

And actually are a part of that community as well. So yeah, that's what that's what springs to.

00:04:22 Emma Fincham

Thank you. Because I think there's there's something about some fostering communities naturally kind of are created or naturally exist, I should say. Yeah. And then there's, I think there's, as you were saying, there's also something around we within the sector have a responsibility and and the luxury in some ways to be able to create some communities.

00:04:44 Emma Fincham

Way and some of that is around creating communities.

00:04:47 Emma Fincham

Of some shared and common values around, as you've said, trying to improve experiences for our children and young people, and that might be thinking about their identity needs that might be thinking about the area that they live and what's available to them. It might be about equipping foster carers with feeling.

00:05:06 Emma Fincham

Confident around either around meeting identity needs or around ensuring that they, the child young person they're caring for has enough time with their family members so they spend enough time with family it it it, it can be many, many things, can't it? But I think that community, my experience of working with foster carers is they are absolutely amazing.

00:05:25 Emma Fincham

Thing at at connecting with one another and supporting one another around trying to do whatever's best for the children, young person or children. Young people that are being cared for and the foster care is around them. But sometimes I think foster carers might need some additional support, steer resources, time, space to do that.

00:05:46 Emma Fincham

As chair of the Fostering Advisory Committee, I think you and I will continue to have conversations along with the vice chair around the kind of areas that we would like to think about, reflect on and and essentially influence with with what, how whichever ways.

00:06:01 Emma Fincham

We can through.

00:06:02 Emma Fincham

Committee. So I suppose I was just thinking what's come up for you, particularly that kind of you feel passionate about?

00:06:08 Emma Fincham

Or or resonates in the couple of meetings that we've had so far. And if we're looking ahead, what do you think is will be areas that we will focus on, think about looking ahead.

00:06:18 Charmaine Orchard

OK, so some of the important areas for me are around the protected characteristic.

00:06:23 Charmaine Orchard

Some real changes in my life were sort of education attainment something and and the work that I've done looking at education attainment as being something that's made me realise just.

00:06:34 Charmaine Orchard

How well, how important that is? Anyway, we know that, don't we? But I think there needs to be more push to encourage young people and children in care to to go beyond whatever the expectations might be. And I know that that's something that does come up quite often in in some of the stigma related training that I've carried out sort of expectations of young people in care and things like that. So.

00:06:55 Charmaine Orchard

That's one thing. As I said, the protected characteristic and things around identity and now I don't necessarily mean just identity when it comes to ethnicity. I think the identity which is linking it with the protected characteristic of the overall care experienced community, I think.

00:07:10 Charmaine Orchard

That there are lots of issues around stigma and misconceptions. Preconceptions that we need to work on. And I think if we were to embed that protected characteristic, then that might mean that companies, schools have an obligation to educate young people in, in schools and companies, their employees on this group of of people.

00:07:30 Charmaine Orchard

And as a result, I hope over time we'll sort of reduce stigma. So I wondered if there was something that we can sort of steer towards within the the group.

00:07:41 Charmaine Orchard

Focusing around that and pushing education. But there are other things that have come up that I think are really important that we do need.

00:07:49 Charmaine Orchard

To sort of like, you know, focus on too.

00:07:52 Emma Fincham

Thank you. They feel like really good starting points, don't they? There's something listening to you talking about us needing to always strive to be ambitious, really, really ambitious for our children and young people in care and never to assume like you were saying, never to have preconceptions, not to have, make assumptions that would not lead to.

00:08:14 Emma Fincham

The taller young person that we're thinking.

00:08:16 Emma Fincham

Well, should be hopefully equipped, enabled, supported to every opportunity that's available to all of their peers. And however that looks, yeah, so there is something around that. And I think those are if they're key aims for us to kind of get the the committee to focus on over the next 6 to 12 months, that's a brilliant starting point.

00:08:36 Emma Fincham

Yes, I would say I think there's there's plenty there isn't there for us to be us to be doing.

00:08:41 Emma Fincham

Yeah. Thank you very much for doing this conversation with us as we start as we embark on foster care, Fortnite, and I think the great thing about foster care for Fortnite is it brings it, brings fostering in because it it, it allows us opportunity to do this, to have conversations, to celebrate, to reflect, hopefully raise awareness hopefully will encourage.

00:09:01 Emma Fincham

More people who might be wondering about fostering to to approach their local agencies, local authorities, to kind of to have the conversation.

00:09:12 Emma Fincham

But I think as well we know because we're in this world that this is what we're doing all the time. We're we're always celebrating. We're always raising awareness and we're always trying to improve services for our children and young people, so.

00:09:22 Emma Fincham

Yeah, yeah. Brilliant.

00:09:23 Charmaine Orchard

Exactly thanks.

00:09:25 Emma Fincham

Thank you, Jermaine. Thanks.