**Conversations in Social Justice:**



**Social Action and the Radical Imagination**

**Podcast transcript**

Series 3. Episode 6.

*In this podcast, York St John University PhD student Jack Hunter talks to Sophia Parker, director of Emerging Futures at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). They discuss the relationship between the imagination and social action, whether we are experiencing a crisis of imagination, and discuss examples of inspiring activism that are trying to foster radical new ways of imagining the world.*

Hello, good evening and welcome to the latest conversations in social justice, the podcast series for the Institute for Social Justice.

My name is Jack Hunter.

I'm a first year PhD researcher and it's my pleasure today to talk to Sophia Parker, who is from the JRF,

Nice to be here.

Hi Sophia.

Sophia leads a major new program of work at JRF looking to imagine and grow radical new approaches to tackling poverty.

In collaboration with JRF Partners and people with lived experience of poverty before she worked at JRF, she was the CEO at London-based charity that works to tackle child poverty and before that sounds like you've think tanks and stuff was my summary as well.

Yeah, but now you live in York and and you're here today and we're gonna have a conversation about imagination, the role of imagination in social transformation and tackling poverty and all of that good stuff so.

Yeah, welcome.

Thank you, thank you, I'm looking forward to it.

Me too, so let's get started.

I suppose to start with it would be useful to talk about well, what is the imagination when we're talking about it in this context when we're talking about the imagination and the cost of living crisis and tackling poverty when we talk about an institution like JRF, which is a social change organization committed to tackling poverty.

Why are you, why are we here talking about the imagination?

Hmm, OK, well I think to.

Answer that question I'd like to cast our minds back a couple of years to May 2020. So at the time I was running a charity little village down in London, which was like a a food bank but for baby kids and I was standing that day in May in a community centre in Summerstown, which is a ward in sort of north London.

And where lots and lots of the big tech firms and now basing themselves so Facebook and Google.

So you've got these kind of incredible like huge buildings of you know, kind of bastions of you know tech and platform capitalism, the big boys and also these state after state of post war housing.

The real big boys.

And on that day, you know we were in in in the the kind of throes of the pandemic, and demand for support at little village, had pretty much doubled overnight.

And I was feeling completely overwhelmed.

You kind of look around you, the juxtaposition of these two worlds just made no sense at all.

And you were in one way had the situation where you know you've got these big companies big tech companies making millions in profit and just down the street, you've got families who are struggling to feed their children.

9595 thousand kids in London growing up below the breadline and charities like ours were working 24/7. Like you know, falling over ourselves to try and to provide support, but it just never felt enough and standing there that day I just had this feeling of total hopelessness that it just felt like poverty and inequality are kind of hardwired into our social and economic systems, and it, well, I mean, I went home and cried.

It just felt impossible to tackle it.

So that's kind of an important, I guess, bit of the story of why I think imagination matters because actually coming into the present day and into our work at Joseph Rowntree Foundation, we have our work cut out to do everything we can to tackle poverty.

6.5 million people are in deep poverty today. 1/3 of kids are growing up in poverty those numbers are rising.

And so the work we need to do with others in in, in the charity sector to kind of hold the government's feet to the fire about policy interventions that kind of stem that increase in poverty are so important things like campaigning to keep benefits in line with inflation and so on.

We're having to spend a lot of time holding on to these things that you kind of think of the absolute minimum, right?

So there is an awful lot of urgent work that we need to do, but the truth is.

As we sit here today, the ground is shifting beneath our feet. We've been through a financial crisis. In 2008 political crisis with Brexit, it's kind of public health and social crisis during COVID, we're seeing a climate crisis which is alarming.

We've got a decade at best to tackle that.

And and in all of that, you just think my God like these, the things we're doing to try and address poverty are just not sufficient.

And actually we need to take a leap of imagination, we need to think much more expensively about what it will take to build a future where people and planet can thrive.

And to do that work, I think we have to think about imagination as kind of a set of practices that are at the epicentre of any work around social justice.

And so that's why we are talking a lot about it at Joseph Ranchie Foundation.

I think it often gets sort of seen as this sort of slightly abstract idea that you know it's a nice thing you do in your spare time, or when you're reading novels.

Actually, I think it needs to be right at the heart of our efforts to tackle poverty and inequality today.

Yeah, absolutely, so I mean, it sounds like it's a proper link to that idea of system change, right?

Of that that there's only so much we can do at the moment under those current paradigms under the current framework of of of business as usual, that that has those two worlds living next to each other.

The idea of imagination is one that's kind of people have lot there's been a lot of focus in it in academic literature.

There's been increasing focus of it in the policy world and what have you, and people are kind of talking about I suppose the imagination as as a thing in itself that we want to change right that we.

Want you know we we need to we need to shift our imagination and we need to shift what's sometimes called as like the kind of collective imagination and like I suppose when, when a lot of people think about it, it's the the kind of everyday understanding of imagination is is a is a singular thing, it's it's when I'm, you know almost detaching myself from reality and I'm imagining myself somewhere else on a sunny beach maybe somewhere it would be nice.

Sounds good.

Sounds good today when it's all cold outside in York, or perhaps something might be a figment of my imagination where you know my senses deceive me for a moment.

But in in in some way it's kind of like a removal from the real, but I suppose what we're kind of saying is.

There are ways in which the way you know that the ways that we imagine collectively as as as a society have very tangible and real impacts in in in the world and in particular this sense of the collective imagination is perhaps not something which is less understood or less talked about.

Certainly in in everyday usage.

Have you got a sense of what we mean by the kind of collective imagination?

Umm yeah, I think it's really good to make a distinction actually, between like imagination as a sort of individual practice and something that we might do together as a as a community.

And I mean, I guess the yeah, the collective bit of the collective imagination is as as important as the imagination piece and for me, the reason that matters is that we are starting to see some slightly worrying signals about the degree to which fatalism has taken hold, so the majority of people in the global now believe that their children will have a less good life than them.

And I also think that we're beginning to see or beginning to pick up a sense that there is a feeling that some things can't change that they are fixed, that there is no alternative and to some extent that's driven by political interests, I think.

I mean, that's obviously a point for discussion.

People have different views on that.

But he whatever you think I think there is a sense in which collectively we are beginning to kind of narrow our sense of what might be possible, and maybe that's because of, as I say, there's there's some kind of explicit political choices.

It is, I think, also a symptom of modern life where people are very busy.

There's a kind of a lot of overwork, people are often having to hold down to jobs to keep their heads above water and so on.

And so it's kind of squeezing out these spaces to imagine alternatives, and particularly to do that work together.

So we are really interested in what kind of practices you need to foster collective imagination.

And we also think there's some very important principles here around who gets to imagine the future.

So in lots of ways, you know the kind of money that the Tech Bros and Silicon Valley are putting into imagining alternative futures is astonishing.

You know this is, you know, kind of all the all the future stuff that's been done in tech you know huge amounts of money being invested.

What is the equivalent in our communities?

How are we investing in allowing everybody to imagine how they want the world to look?

And so some of the work that we're hoping to do and to seed over the next year or two at JRF is very much about what would happen if we were to resource that kind of work where we think very much about how communities can come together, and imagine what a shared alternative future might look like, and actually I guess the other thing too is that like it's not a singular future, we're not looking to create a vision or a blueprint or something that we then kind of paint by numbers to get towards.

There's a lovely Zapatista saying about a many worlds in a world.

I think it is.

I might have just misquoted.

But the principle being that there has to be space for kind of plurality in this, but that there might be some shared principles for what this future might look like.

Often when you do collective imagination work with communities, some very similar themes emerge around the increased desire for a recognition of our interdependence between us and between humans and non humans, our planet and increases our for solidarity for justice for valuing care like these kind of themes come through again and again when you do collective work and I think we really just need to put more time and effort.

Into those practices that give communities those chances to imagine the future as well as just those in kind of well resourced sectors of technology.

Yeah, absolutely yeah.

Fab, I mean I, in in my in my work I find the kind of sense of a the idea of a collective imagination.

It's kind of a little akin to what some people talk about in terms of paradigms.

So like you've, you know, like in terms of like a whole set and structure of all of those unspoken norms, and what constitutes what constitutes reality almost what constitutes what's normal.

What does political action look like who's a legitimate political actor.

You know you.

You know what's good and what's bad.

And all of these things together constitute quite an unspoken set of of assumptions that that are taken for granted, and that kind of the background, and that help structure what happens on the ground right in terms of like, well, you know this what project or you know what?

What action is going to have validity?

Which one's going to get the money?

And all of that kind of stuff I suppose.

Yeah, the idea of a kind of.

Yeah, I suppose like a paradigm as a way of thinking about it.

But it also what you're saying is quite interesting is that you know that underneath that, it's because I think some of the thinking when you talk about paradigms and all of these big things, it all sounds quite top down, and it sounds quite totalizing.

Whereas what's quite nice about some of the stuff around imagination is that first of all, like you know, we have to be imagining it's not a top down thing.

There's always, even in your locality, in your community.

If you're sitting there and thinking there is no alternative to, you, know to this that's you know that that's happening in the in the in the everyday, and so it's an imaginative act that there are.

That also means that there are alternatives, right?

And that perhaps there are alternatives ways of/alternative paradigms that are bubbling up under the surface that are already.

Umm, that are already happening in some of the communities that that that that might seek change.

I wondered if you could speak a little bit more around, yeah?

Yes, some of those alternatives and how the.

If we're interested in imagination and social action, well, you know.

Presumably it's not enough just to imagine it.

How do we ensure that turns into a kind of real movement for social transformation?

Yeah, well, so I think you what you've just been saying, sparks two thoughts for me.

I mean one is that.

One of the things I find myself saying a lot is that it is those who benefit least from the status quo, who are most able to imagine alternatives.

When you're benefiting from something.

It's kind of hard to see or hard to you know at some level you might not want it to change, but for those who are being really badly served by the way things are now.

They're already having to engage in daily acts of imagination to believe, to keep going, to believe that then you know it might get better and so.

And we're really, really interested in how do you kind of amplify the voices of those who benefit least from the status quo?

How do you support them to imagine alternatives?

And often you know these are communities that have been, you know, marginalized or, you know, through a number of different sort of systemic injustices.

And so actually to do that work it's also about creating space for healing from that harm that people have experienced.

So I think the way in which where we put our attention when we're talking about imagination is really important and being very interested and very alive to the voices of those who've benefited, least from the status quo seems very, very important.

And the other thing, as you were talking, I was just thinking about so one of the metaphors we use a lot for imagination is about soil.

So next year we're going to be funding a whole bunch of organisations who we think are doing an amazing job of actively building alternative futures through their organizations, and lots of them have been engaged in this work for a number of years, and they're building things that people can go and go and see and feel and like kind of get their heads around.

And they are building those new things in the context of the old.

So it's a constant battle not to get pulled back into the way things are now, but in lots of ways.

They've had to exercise a lot of imagination and I kind of see those as the saplings, and in some cases the trees that have grown out of the soil.

And for me, imagination work has to be about that soil that that healthy soil it feels like soil, the soil of our community has been impoverished through, you know, a decade of austerity and many other things.

And that actually the task for or at least some of the work is about how do you nourish that soil?

How do you actually enable things to emerge?

That things that might be new.

And often that work is quite intangible, and that is a challenge, particularly, you know, I now sit in a funding organization.

Funders love things that you can measure, and things that have been proven and what we're saying here is, well, actually, like the impact of this imagination might be quite diffuse.

It might take a really long time for anything to emerge from it.

But actually, if we want more of these trees and saplings that are, you know these exemplars of what an alternative future might look like if we don't really look after that soil and pay attention to it and think about what we might need to put into that soil to enable these alternatives to emerge, then we're going to be in trouble because there won't be enough momentum.

And in the kind of work of alternative future building.

For him well.

As a keen gardener, I'm very, very much on board with that.

I'm very proud of my compost heap at the moment so.

The alternative is there.

Yeah, I'm all I'm all for more compost of ideas and imagination that sounds great, so you've mentioned where you kind of touched on a little bit.

This idea of almost like a crisis of imagination or some kind of sense that maybe we.

I don't know who this we is that we're Speaking of.

But maybe that's for a another, something else to think about, but the idea of a crisis of imagination are we.

Is that something that we are experiencing?

Do you think?

Or if it is, what do we mean by a crisis of imagination.

Yeah, well, I mean, it's certainly something that Jeff Morgan has talked about in his recent book, which is a big recommend for me.

By the way, ‘Another world is possible’, it’s called, it’s very good and I think I agree with his thesis.

I mean, we talked a little bit about the kind of increase in fatalism that we've seen, and I definitely think that our kind of as individuals, our ability to exercise our imagination muscle is kind of going down.

We need to get it back to the gym, and that's partly, you know, generated through our education systems.

And as I say, the kind of business of modern life, and so on.

But I do think there is a kind of crisis that is showing up in institutional form as well, so you know the world I used to work in think tanks and that kind of world.

The policy world you know you see now that that has been captured in a way by the news cycle.

It's very much kind of guided by what you can get the money for in terms of projects you can do.

And so you it feels like that that kind of thinking has narrowed.

And actually in universities like the ones when we sit in now you know, I think you see social science departments where it's kind of calcified a little bit that that sense of it's very much about analysis and comment.

Rather than seeing social sciences as the kind of world building practice or a world building discipline.

And I think I think Jeff argues that very in a very compelling way in his book.

So you know, I think you can see that there is a there is something going on where we are losing the spaces that perhaps have existed in the past to think about alternatives, and I suppose you know t here are some people who have argued that it's kind of like maybe slightly darker than that.

That this hasn't just happened by accident.

And so Henry Jiru has done a lot of study of the American political system and has shown in quite a lot of detail about the way in which politicians have manipulated media to kind of close down that sense of alternatives being possible.

And actually, you know, Naomi Klein talking about shock doctrine and Rebecca Solnit.

These are all people who talked about the idea that perhaps those in power who are benefiting from the status quo, it's in their interests to suggest there is no alternative as a well known former Prime Minister, Raz once said so.

So I think I think you know, I guess it's a point of discussion about the degree to which this is a deliberate move versus something that is just beginning to emerge.

Either way you look at it.

I do think there is a crisis in imagination and that that crisis in imagination is not just in the mind.

It has material consequences, it constrains our ability to think about how we might need to reimagine the way we live, the way we work, the way we care in the context of these huge changes around climate and aging population technology.

We just feel very ill equipped to meet the scale of those challenges.

Yeah, absolutely.

I mean, I think I think that's undeniable.

I think what's in my head I suppose is.

Do you think this is a new phenomenon?

Is this a new phenomenon or is it something perhaps that's always been the case.

Is it always hard to birth new ideas?

Has there always been a status quo that protects its own interests and that you know doesn't want to hear a radical new imaginary about you know how we can live differently?

Or is there something particular about this moment now and as if so, what's changed is.

Yeah, I mean I don't know if I'm qualified to answer that.

I mean, I guess what I would say is that the need for imagination has become more urgent now because we have an awareness about climate crisis that you know, we just haven't really engaged with and time is limited.

So when I first joined JRF, I used to talk about the urgent work of kind of ameliorating the worst impacts of poverty now and the deep work, which sort of engages more in these sort of paradigm questions.

But actually I've changed that now I talk about the urgent work and the urgent deep work because the deep work is just as urgent.

I mean, I guess what I would say.

I mean, I take quite a lot of inspiration from the early 20th century as a time where it felt like imagination was rich and flourishing.

So if you go back to actually the time that Joseph Rowntree our founder was alive and working.

This was a time when there were kind of new maps of poverty beginning to emerge.

It was just showing the scale and depth of poverty in UK cities, including here in York and actually there were a kind of there was a generation of social reformers including Joseph Rowntree.

Also some amazing women, Octavia Hillmore, Pember Reeves, Beatrice Webb, who instead of retrenching into the way things are, were then, set about this work of building a new world, recognizing that the kind of old world as it was, was no longer making a sense, but the new world hadn't yet emerged.

And I think if you look at that period between 1900 and 1940, it was this kind of incredible period of experiments in kind of pensions and insurance and child benefit and free milk.

And all these things that that weren't being tried for the first time, and I think all those experiments and things like laid the ground for what then became a very radical act of imagination in the beverage report and the and the kind of post war welfare settlement.

I don't think that would have happened without that 40 year period of experimentation and imagination.

Our challenge today is we don't have 40 years.

So the question is like how can we like?

Can we speed this up?

Can we like?

Is it possible to move at the rate we now need to move given yeah, how little time?

We have

Yeah, yeah, so I suppose on that you've talked about the imagination as a muscle, something that presumably needs exercise and needs constant work.

Could you explain a little bit more about that?

Yeah, sure, and so one of the things we've been doing over the last year is we've been working with.

Well, actually we've been funding a group called Mya, the Myer, the Myer Group to support this sort of nascent field of collective imagination and the practitioners that are kind of, I guess, experimenting with what does it mean to grow collective imagination.

A lot of those practitioners have a kind of creative and cultural background.

Some of them come from community development.

What they all share is a kind of interest in this question of how do you move people out the kind of day-to-day existence and into a space where, together they're imagining alternatives that feel real and possible, but also different to the way things are now.

And I mean, there's an awful lot of insight, I think from the work that's already happened about.

How to grow that it is something we want to bring some more rigor to over the next couple of years.

So one of things we're going to carry on doing is working with this kind of group of collective imagination practitioners to learn about the methodologies that work, kind of how you not only move people into that space, but then sustain the work that comes out of it.

I mean, I guess one thing I would say that's like really, really clear already, what we know, this isn't a kind of this isn't about having a kind of cosy workshop with some wacky post it notes and everyone goes home going, oh yeah, we had a really good imagination session today.

This is long deep work that takes kind of sustained engagement over time and it also requires a degree of sort of institutional and civic buy in, in order that it doesn't just become a set of nice conversations, that kind of get left in the room where they happened.

Yeah, I can see that.

Maybe if you know some people listen in or you know people who might engage with the idea of you know might hear that the JDRF is funding, imagination, work.

And I can, I can see, someone coming it to it and saying like hang on, we're talking about poverty here.

We're talking about deep problems and you're over here talking about, imagine, you know, imagination stuff.

And you know, are you know are we are we saying that if you close your eyes and wish it hard enough, you can imagine poverty away or you know are we or I suppose?

Yeah, the kind of why focus on this and not the urgent work getting people to, you know getting people to meet their material needs.

And I think you wanted a bit of at the start in terms of this, this distinction between you know the meeting, the material needs and then, but also the need for wider system change.

But I mean under are those kind of conversations that you've had.

I mean, I'm very familiar with them.

Yeah, it's very like in in my world, like I think it's a very understandable response that Oh my God, like the crisis is up against us and you're saying we need to think about collective imagination like what planet are you on?

I think my response to that is, well, we need to create some space for this, otherwise we're just going to keep on trying to find that sticking plaster and shoving it over again and again and again.

The vast majority of social justice funding in the UK goes gets poured into ameliorative work.

That is important essential work we would be abdicating our responsibility if we were not also playing in that space and playing our part.

But to say we have to put everything into that.

I don't buy it, I think you have to create some space for this more speculative work for this more imaginative work, because otherwise we're just going to keep doing what we've been doing.

And the truth is poverty is going up, not down.

Whatever the anti-poverty sector has done over the last 30 years, however brilliant, the efforts have been, however, tirelessly organisations like my old organization at work poverty's going up.

So like we have to kind of ask ourselves some hard questions here, and I suppose what we're trying to do at JRF is, say yes, this work, the ameliorative work and the kind of work on the urgent stuff is absolutely essential, but we can afford in you know UK foundations.

You know a lot of philanthropic money there we can afford to put some of that aside to invest in this more speculative exploratory space.

So yeah, I mean, would you mind telling us a little bit more?

Maybe some examples of some of the best work, or the things that really give you hope and that really inspire you in this space.

Yeah, sure, so I mean, I think this, I mean there's some amazing examples all around the country.

And so, thinking about imagination practice, if listeners are interested specifically in that, I really recommend that you go and check out the new constellations website.

It's an absolute delight to get lost in, so make a cup of tea, sit down and like, say, goodbye to the next two hours because it's got some really wonderful materials on there.

They have done some really interesting work in place actually, so they we we're funding them to do some work in Sheffield, but before that they run a process in Barrow, which is regularly known as one of the most popular places to live in.

Wow.

Sorry people of Barrow.

I know, well, I think I think it's one of those horrible lists, isn't it? It just makes people that live there feel properly rubbish but so new constellations worked with the Council there and various other local actors to create a process for 16 Barovian's to go on a journey and.

And new constellations voyage in their language where they did reimagine a an alternative future for Barrow.

You know, and because you had some of those institutional actors involved, the kind of work that was generated, the principals that emerged from that journey, which was, you know, a beautiful, diverse group of people that that worked together, then began to shape, you know the Council's own planning work and kind of the way this town centre looked. And so I think that's a really great example of a kind of place based imagination project.

I mean other examples.

There's which perhaps have centered less about kind of the practice of collective imagination, but are rooted in a kind of group of people saying hang on it doesn't have to be this way.

There's a wonderful project, or an organization called ‘we can make’ down in Bristol who are basically looking to completely reshape the affordable housing sector.

And in doing so are generating local jobs, thinking about sustainable materials.

I mean, it's just a very compelling project that brings in kind of art and creativity to you know, kind of very concrete set of issues around living standards and decent homes as well.

So yeah, those two I get constant inspiration from.

But the truth is you know, I mean, we're about to come into 2 organisations in the next couple of months and every single one of them I think our, I sort of see them as our lifeboats to the future, with the work that they're doing.

Fab, no, I think that's really interesting.

Those two examples because it almost draws out a distinction in in my head and you kind of alluded it to it there because I think there's some of that work which is very deliberative, intentional imagination work, and it sounds like you know, bringing together groups of people within their communities to say, let's think about the future of our community.

What is our place in it?

How can we?

How can we reimagine?

How can we see the way that we relate to each other in a different way?

And then I suppose in in that way you're kind of.

You've got a vision for where you might want to go.

You're also kind of creating a new kind of agency.

I suppose you're creating a new ‘we’ where maybe that didn't exist or it didn't existed in a slightly different form before and in that way you're, I suppose it's the very early stages of social change and social transformation as a as a shift from where we are to where we want to be.

So I suppose that's one and then, but then what you're saying in is your second example, is almost like.

This is a this is this is a way of imagining how we how we operate now in the everyday and it and the different kind of values and the different.

Yeah.

The different practices that are already there and in in my work I'm I think that's really interested there.

I think I really think there's a lot to be to be drawn out of well, and where are the margin where at the margins are some of these alternative practices and the kind of what some people have kind of talked about in terms of like a micro utopia like already out there.

There are projects which are embodying some of the values that we want to see you know and values of solidarity and care and community and I suppose then it's just, the project is the or the focus is slightly different.

It's about how to grow and sustain those movements rather than acting as the catalyst or the spark.

I think probably the distinction that somewhere melts down because you could, you know you could do some of you could do work across both of those, but I just think it's quite interesting to think in terms of like new projects is that we're not just talking about let's imagine a whole new future for everyone.

It's also about finding the those utopias and those visions of new futures that are already there.

Yeah, I think I think that's right, and I think I think one of the things that's very striking about the work we're looking to fund through our emerging futures programme at JRF is that a lot of the organisations we're talking about start from a different place.

So they start from a place which is around solidarity, interconnectedness, liberation.

These are the sort of frames of reference they have.

They start from a place of recognising that the current economic paradigm is rooted in exploitative and extractive practices that they want to move away from.

And that's a kind of very explicit part of their story, I think there's another thing as well that makes them distinctive, and that's that they have a they really think about the knowledge that they value, so they value kind of lived, learned and practice knowledge.

We talk about it like that that they recognize that insight comes in many forms and not just in data or the sorts of stuff that policy wants like and that that is kind of wired into their work.

And I think the third thing that's very striking about this is that they do harness creativity and culture.

So they might be in the community sector, but they understand the power of art in the broadest sense, to inspire people to open up new possibilities and so these are some of the things we're looking for when we're kind of thinking.

How are we going to find these utopias in the present?

The kind of these exemplars that the kind of the people who are showing in the micro what we might need more of in the macro.

So, and I think we are, so we've got a kind of initial list of the kind of characteristics that might define this sort of work.

I'm pretty sure that will evolve over the next couple of years, but some of the things I've mentioned are our starting point I guess.

Fab yeah.

And so in terms of what JRF is doing now.

As you've mentioned, you've got that there are these projects already that you're funding.

Would you mind telling us a little bit more about what you're doing, and I suppose any reflections on what you hope to achieve by funding these organizations, and by critically appraising what your you know what your what your mission is in with relation to imagination.

Sure, so I mean, I guess the very fact that Joseph Ramsey Foundation now has an emerging futures program is a reflection of the fact.

We recognise the importance of our kind of historical work around research, policy, work, campaigning, work.

That's all essential.

But we also want to kind of create this new space for building alternatives.

In order to contribute to our mission, which is to speed up and support the transition to a world where people and planet thrive.

So it's that kind of much more active building of these alternatives, which is important for the emerging futures program.

We're going to do that, and we're doing that.

We've just created a new fund called the Transitions Fund.

We are basically ring fencing a significant proportion of our endowment to go into that fund over the next 10 years.

And through that fund we want to we want to move money to a mixture of organizations.

Some of them are the kind of pathfinders we call them.

So the exemplars that you know like we can make what I was just talking about is one of them.

These organizations who are building the new in the context of the old, who are showing us what alternative futures might look like.

We also have a track which is around imagination and so really wanting to resource, perhaps that work that's less tangible, but in the soil still feels very important.

And we are also through the fund, wanting to create a kind of, we're calling it the visionaries programme.

We recognize a lot of what we're thinking about is kind of practice, in in the broadest sense of the word.

We also recognize the importance of ideas, and so through the visionaries fund, we want to fund individuals who, through their work, are drawing us away from the status quo who are helping us to see what alternatives might be and what they might look like.

So those are the kind of main areas that we're funding through the Transitions Fund.

The there's one last bit, which is really important, and I think very essential part of the work which is and we are also keeping some money aside for work that is about reimagining and reshaping philanthropy itself.

We are part of the system.

Yeah, we also need to reimagine whose money ist his that we have?

How do we have it?

Where is it being invested?

In what ways are we sort of sustaining perpetuating these kind of systems that we're seeking to on unpick?

So yeah, we are also looking to fund work which is about reshaping philanthropy to be an investment, so it's kind of quite a broad mix of things.

I suppose in all of them they have this kind of building alternative futures at the heart of them.

That's what we're looking to resource, and I suppose the other thing to say is that through this work, we don't really want to set ourselves up as a sort of traditional grant maker who, you know, has a series of bilateral relationships with lots of individual organisations.

I think instead you have to think about this work in building alternatives as more of a kind of a bit of a potentious word, but like an ecology.

It's a group of organizations who are collectively engaged in this work of imagining alternative futures, and it's that that we want to really give some profile to and some resources to through this work, so yeah, that's what we're doing.

In terms of where we want to take it, I mean, I guess.

The tricky thing about all of this is you know no one knows what it takes to speed up a transition to a fairer world like we're all feeling our way a bit.

This is our best bet, so I think there's a lot we need to do around learning and like sharing that learning openly like what are we learning about the sorts of values characteristics we might need more of in the future?

So I think there's a lot of learning we need to do.

I think we also need to grow the amount of funding available for this kind of work.

As I said earlier, the vast majority of UK philanthropic money goes into ameliorative work.

That is really important.

I think we need a little more into some of this work that's willing to engage in these deeper questions around economic paradigms.

So one of my kind of key measures of success.

Certainly in the next two years is can we expand the amount of funding available for this kind of work.

And how optimistic are you feeling?

I mean, do you have, I imagine some of those fun some of your some other funding organizations, there might be a certain reluctance to talk about these kind of stuff.

I mean, in in some ways you're talking about funding some quite radical alternatives and with a with an aim to essentially, overturn some of the you know existing systems that are sustaining many organizations and the status quo that as we kind of know it, do you feel like there is a momentum, among other funders towards this kind of work is it?

Is it sufficient?

What do you think?

Well, I mean, it's really interesting.

So earlier this year we hosted a big conference called New Frontiers in for philanthropy Investment.

We had 900 people there online and in person and the energy in the room was astonishing. I think the philanthropy UK philanthropy world is waking up to the roots of our wealth, the problems with those roots, and the need to think quite differently about our role in the future.

So I think that's very exciting that there's this sort of sense of an opening there, and we very much want to play in that space, and a, you know, that's kind of what the emerging Futures Fund is about.

I think there's some brilliant other funders out there who are really thinking hard about this.

As well, so like Kelly Chase is thinking about spending down their endowment and 30 Percy that you know there's a number of other foundations.

We're certainly not alone in doing this work.

So I mean, yeah, hope is an interesting concept, isn't it?

I mean I have a quote from Rebecca Solnit pinned up above my desk at home and ‘hope for me is about believing that change might be possible’.

Not being sure that it will happen, but believing it might be possible, and I think if you believe it might be possible, why on Earth wouldn't you act?

Why wouldn't on Earth, wouldn't you try and do this work?

So that's the kind of space I spend most of my time occupying a sort of like I don't know if this is going to work out, but like we've got to try and I couldn't look my children in their eyes if I didn't feel we were doing everything we could, with the knowledge that we have to try and kind of move us towards a world where actually well the kids have got any kind of future really.

OK fab.

Is there anything that you anything else you wanted to mention or talk about?

So I think I think there's just one quote that I would love.

To leave listeners with, which is from one of my favourite second wave feminists, Gloria Steinem, who says ‘imagination is a form of planning’.

And I just really think if we could all hold on to that.

Like everything we do starts in our imaginations.

So like let's tend to them.

Let's look after them.

Let's get planning.

Fab, thanks so much Sophia for taking the time and for what I hope you all agree has been a brilliant conversation thanks to the team here at the ISFJ to Lily and Harriett and Jonathan.

I hope you found it stimulating.