Heather Stobie

Heather first met Jane at the Sauchie Resource Centre during a One Stop Shop showcasing services for parents and children. Heather had recently experienced a significant drop in income alongside increased rent and council tax and had decided to go along partly to express her frustrations and partly in search of support.

Jane noticed her, thought she was interesting and struck up a conversation. She invited Heather to learn more about What Matters 2 You (WM2U) and its focus on showing how developing community voice can build connections and reduce isolation.

> *"I was surprised when Jane said, 'You sound interesting' and I thought, great I love it that somebody finds me interesting."*

She agreed to meet Jane again to find out more about the Make it Happen Fund (MIHF) which was being set up to support community based activity and soon began attending sessions.

Years earlier, Heather had worked as a social worker in children and families. Wanting a change, she looked into enhanced foster care when Stirling Council introduced the model as a way of bringing young people housed in residential care in other local authorities back to the area. She became the first enhanced foster carer in the council, finding that her background enabled her to navigate professional systems well. She was able to contact professionals she knew from past work ensuring she received strong support early on.

Her first foster placement, an 11-year-old boy with additional support for learning needs, went very well. However, the scheme did not work as well for others, often due to poor planning, matching, and lack of support. Heather saw colleagues struggle through chaotic placements, and experiences that resembled firefighting more than fostering. She felt she was the only one for whom the enhanced model had truly functioned as intended.

Things continued to go well until her foster son turned eighteen, when her fostering allowance dropped substantially at only two weeks' notice. Heather had to rely on savings, while she filed a complaint about the way decisions had been handled.

Her foster son has remained with her into adulthood and thrived despite the many challenges he has encountered. Over nine years, he achieved Nat 5s and Highers at School, completed fire cadets, learned to drive, and is just finishing an HND in sound production

> *"He blows me away every day. Watching him take things on the chin has given me the courage to do things I'd never have done before."*

Through Jane, Heather became involved in the MIHF panel, helping design the application criteria, assess the proposals, and award grants of up to £500. She loved the sense of ownership and the collaborative spirit the group embodied.

> *"It felt like it was ours... we really had ownership. You get that chance to bond. We had banter, we could challenge each other... it was different from more formal groups."*

Through the group, she developed relationships, confidence, and a sense of belonging that she had not expected. She also threw herself in at the deep end accepting Jane's invitation to present awards at the celebration event.

At the same time, she heard about the Sauchie Hall Community Asset Transfer and joined the group that is overseeing it. They had good initial support from Clacks TSI but have lacked ongoing support which left gaps the group has had to manage themselves. Fortunately, one of the trustees had professional experience working on community asset transfers in Glasgow, helping them to navigate the process. The legal aspects are taking a while but the group hope to have everything in place by April. Although Heather enjoys being actively involved in the process, she prefers more hands-on, people-focused roles.

The confidence Heather gained from being on the MIHF panel gave her the courage to accept Jane's invitation to take part in the Transformation Space, a much larger council-run participatory funding programme, and ultimately the Oversight Board. She joined the panel looking at ways of addressing homelessness and was struck by how valuable quieter voices could be - particularly those with lived experience.

At first, she felt uncertain about where she fitted in. Parts of the process felt confusing and she sometimes doubted herself, wondering what she could really bring.

> *"Sitting alongside all the bigwigs felt intimidating, and at times I felt unsure and a bit out of place. I remember thinking: what am I bringing to this? How is that going to be a benefit? Parts of the process felt confusing and compared with the Make it Happen Fund it did not always feel as clear or accessible."*

Heather chose to speak honestly about how she felt. Her feedback was never about criticising for the sake of it. It came from frustration, hope and lived experience, and from wanting the process to work better for people like her: people with ideas, questions and something valuable to contribute.

What mattered most was that the Transformation Space listened. Heather began to feel relieved and encouraged when she saw that her comments were being taken seriously. Conversations opened up, feedback was sought, and changes were made to make the process broader, clearer and more inclusive. As she understood more about the panel, the oversight board and ratification process, what had once felt distant began to make sense.

> *"That built my confidence. I started to see that my questions, honesty and way of thinking were not a problem; they were part of what I was there to bring. I was*

pleased that my feedback could help others understand how the process worked and was developing, especially people who might be new to community decision-making or unsure about speaking up."

"I can see that it is a learning journey for us all. We are learning as we go along, by listening carefully, trying things out, reflecting on what we notice."

For her, the important thing is that people are beginning to understand the process better, feel more able to use their voice, and see that feedback can lead to real change. Over time, she believes this will help everyone involved become bolder: more willing to trust community judgement, try different approaches, and move towards more imaginative and courageous ways of working.

She decided that the year would be one of saying 'yes' to opportunities and seeing where they led. Alongside her volunteering and panel work, Heather completed mental health first aid and empowerment courses through Positive Moves and found them energising. One facilitator, Grant, made a lasting impact and his style and compassion helped her believe she could do similar work.

This belief led her to Angela at Resonate, where Heather enrolled on an entrepreneurs course. She did so well that Angela soon invited Heather to deliver wellbeing workshops. Although taking up a facilitator role felt risky and far outside Heather's comfort zone, she discovered she loved it and was able to 'meet people where they are' and is continuing to grow in confidence and capability.

"I'm facilitating wellbeing groups... it feels amazing. I never thought I'd be able to stand in front of people and do that. It's about meeting a person where they are... not your own agenda."

"Grant made me believe I could do this ... Angela trusted me... and that made it feel safer to try."

And she wasn't finished there.

The idea for The Wee Steamie began with a conversation that fed Heather's growing belief that women in her community needed a place that felt practical, welcoming and safe. Through the Chandelier Project, she reconnected with Marion, who had supported women fleeing domestic violence and still kept in touch with women who needed friendship and encouragement. Heather could see the possibility immediately.

"I thought maybe we could get together and look at what Marion was doing and how we could expand that. We were excited but also felt a bit vulnerable. We had no resources to set something up, so when Julie from CLD offered space, café use and storage at the Bowmar Centre we were so grateful."

From there the idea gathered pace, and they applied for funding from the Make it Happen Fund to buy the equipment they needed.

The vision for The Wee Steamie is both simple and ambitious: meet together to recycle and upcycle clothes, share sewing skills, reduce isolation, and improve women's mental health. She knows they need to begin gently:

> "We don't want to go in there and go, oh, all these people with domestic violence come here. No, it's not just about that. It's about everybody."

Over time she can imagine school groups, skills workshops, a café, and eventually premises where women could come at any time.

> *"Our first meeting is on 6 July, with me, Marion and around ten women."*

Heather said she had already drafted a constitution, safeguarding paperwork, risk assessments and evaluation forms, admitting*, "I don't really know what constitutions are and what all this is, but we'll figure that out."*

She is learning as she goes along, supported by people around her and by confidence built through earlier opportunities*: "I wouldn't have thought I'd be even setting up a group if I hadn't done all the other things first."*

At its heart, The Wee Steamie is another outcome of Heather's year of saying yes: to community, to women's skills, to healing, to practical support, and to not waiting until everything is perfect.

Heather's story highlights the power of being genuinely heard, encouraged and resourced, the importance of community-led approaches, and the confidence that grows when people are supported to contribute meaningfully. Her experiences, from fostering to shaping the MIHF and later the Transformation Space, show that harnessing the knowledge and experience of local community members around issues that matter to them strengthens decision-making and belonging. Ultimately, her willingness to say 'yes' to new opportunities, including training and facilitation roles, reflects how lived experience and encouragement can enable people not just to participate, but to thrive.