

Sinead McBrearty Podcast Episode 1

James Coleman: Hello, and welcome along to the very first TEMZ podcast. My name is James Coleman and we're here to give you the very latest in all things mentoring and bring your stories and advice from experts across our profession. Each week we'll have a different guest to share their experiences and expertise, as well as telling us a little bit about themselves along the way. This special episode is focusing on wellbeing and we'll be chatting to Education Support Chief Executive, Sinead McBrearty. Sinead gives us invaluable tips on how to manage anxiety and build positive relationships between mentors and mentees. So, welcome along to the very first, TEMZ Podcast.

Okay, so I'm delighted to say that I mentioned Sinead McBrearty who is the Chief Executive at Education Support. Good morning, Sinead.

Sinead McBrearty: Good morning, James. How you doing?

JC: Very well thank you, yeah, very good, thrilled to have you on the podcast. Do you mind just introducing yourself and telling us a little bit about your role at Education Support and what you all do at Education Support.

SMcB: With pleasure. So I've been the Chief Executive of the charity for almost 18 months now and the charity has been around since 1877. It was set up by teachers, for teachers and until I think, well, until our very recent history was part of the union movement and then separated out to become an independent charity was known as the Teacher Support Network having been the Teachers Benevolent Fund for some time. So our mission is quite straightforward, James, we exist to support and improve the mental health and wellbeing of anyone working in education across the UK. So that's what we are there to do and my role as Chief Executive is obviously to lead that. There are three levels across the education sector, which we work on. I'll just touch on these very briefly, we'll come back to it maybe at the end, but our core comes from our history, we help individuals with emotional and mental health as well as financial welfare through a counselling helpline, through online resources and through specific financial grants for people in need. We support education employers to listen to and understand their staff and we help them to provide appropriate emotional support to their staff. So access to face to face counselling, workplace surveys, that sort of thing. And then above that, because I guess at that level, we're helping individuals we're helping the workplace and that still leaves us dealing with the symptoms of mental health and wellbeing is using the sector. So it's been very important to us to develop our research and policy work. So we undertake research on the health of the education workforce, and we use the findings from that to advocate for improvements and to make policy recommendations. So, that's what we do.

JC: Great! And I guess at a time like now, never more important to have that support available to frontline staff.

SMcB: I think so. I think that, you know, it's important for us always to hold a perspective on the limits of what we do, you know, we can provide support and help for people but at a time like this, actually, I think one of the most important activities that we can do is to raise awareness among everybody in the sector about the importance of thinking about and caring for their own mental health, helping people to understand that anxiety in this situation is fairly normal, and being able to reference them to practical tools that can help people improve their own understanding, improve their own awareness, and when they're able to bring stuff into their awareness, usually people are

able to cope and come up with strategies to help themselves more easily, so that's a big part of our work during the whole pandemic and lockdown phase of the last few months.

JC: Absolutely. I think that's possibly one of the consequences of lockdown a negative side of that is potentially that inability to be able to talk to others if you are struggling with it. You don't necessarily have those social outlets that you'd normally have and we all know how important it is to communicate when you're finding things difficult. What sort of advice would you maybe give to anyone who is feeling, you know, potentially still fairly isolated or is worried about maybe expressing some of those anxieties or concerns that they might be feeling, what sort of outlets to those do those people have?

SMcB: I think in terms of outlets, there are safe places to have conversations. So ideally, people would feel secure enough in their workplace relationships and they're familiar with friendship circles to be able to discuss how they're feeling. But of course, that's not always the case for everybody and in that case, I would encourage everyone to share widely the fact that our helpline exists and is staffed by counsellors who are trained and listening to and having conversations with people. And you don't have to be in severe crisis to use our helpline service, actually just wanting to have a conversation with someone is a good enough reason to pick up the phone and dial 08000 562 561 and there will be someone there you can speak to 24/7 every day of the year, so nobody has to ever be on their own or feel completely isolated. And you know, that's why we exist is to provide that service. But as I say, I think I think we would encourage people to reach out and speak to the people they have relationships with and that might be across the school staff team of course, that's not always helpful. And sometimes people don't have positive relationships in their workplace. Most people will have a friend or a family member, or part of a community or a club, or some part of their life where there are relationships in which they could reach out and maybe they're not used to talking about how they feel because after all, we are very British James! We don't like to talk about how we feel but actually, I think what I would say to those people is at a time like this, the responses that you're having are completely normal you know. There are people up and down the country who are feeling isolated, who are feeling, you know, might be getting depressed, might be feeling anxious, might be feeling overwhelmed, might be just feeling sad, have a lack of motivation, might be struggling to focus and concentrate. There'll be other people who wish that they could feel isolated, you know, they will feel posture phobic because they're in the same four walls with the same people, day in day out and they would, you know, love nothing more than to be as on their own and of course, a lot of people are taking advantage of the fine weather to just have a little bit of personal space but I suppose what I would say to people is wherever you sit on that spectrum, you don't need to feel ashamed or embarrassed or like you're in any way odd or weird. This is a wholly normal response to the situation a really reasonable response to a very strange situation.

JC: You mentioned the importance of relationships and obviously the podcast we're doing today's is for the TEMZ and so you know, a lot of our focuses on mentoring and we know how important that relationship between the mentor and mentee whether that's in school or in any environment really is absolutely vital. For mentors returning to school in September when you know there's so much change anyway, you're conscious of the fact that your role might look very different to what you're used to it being. Anyone who's anxious around that September period, what can people do beyond exactly as you've already outlined speaking to people? What sort of strategies can people put in place to support them with their anxiety around September with so much change coming up?

SMcB: Well, I think again, at the end of this I can, I know we'll touch on where people can find out more information but I think there are some really kind of, well researched strategies for managing anxiety this to some of us might feel a little bit uncomfortable and a little bit contrived, because it's

not how we normally do things, but I think there's good evidence to show that if you use these strategies, it will help to dampen down anxiety that you might be feeling and will help you to move out of that state of anxiety. So from that base I would say to even people who cringe slightly when they hear these strategies to not dismiss them on that basis. And so, you know, the first thing is around managing worry, and it's very easy for worries to become bigger and bigger inside our heads and inside our chests and inside our stomachs when we get butterflies and we feel you know, all the feelings about it. And actually, if you can try and take some action to boundary those worries, that's a very powerful thing. So that might be writing them down doing pro you know, what's the evidence, what's the evidence to support this particular worry, what's for and against it. Let me just look at that and do some kind of analysis based on whatever data I've got, and try and allocate some specific time so you think, Okay, I'm going to worry about it in this window and then I'm going to close that off and I'm going to hold the discipline of not thinking about it again. So there's some tactics and tools to try and manage worry and to evaluate it based on data rather than based on our feelings and responses to it. A second strategy is about managing information. So at the moment, you know, I joined Twitter at the start of lockdown having been aggressively anti-social media. And I'm mocked mercilessly both by my younger sisters for my fuddy duddy relationship to the you know, to the modern world. And, and I joined it because I found very disconnected from the education sector from colleagues and other organisations and I wanted to know what was going on and it seemed a way to connect. But very quickly, of course, it becomes, you know, quite addictive, and it's very easy to suddenly turn to your phone to find you know, in any moment of downtime, let me see what's on Twitter, let me see what's in the newspapers, you know, I routinely scan old major newspapers to see what the different points of view are and, there's some value in that and that's partly relevant to my job but actually, if I do that too much, it's overwhelming and it's too much. And I can make myself really anxious when I read about this that and the other that's happening in other countries and I think about where we are here, and it's not and it really, I suppose, it can increase my anxiety. So, you know, apart from trying to manage the worries, I think managing information and making sure that the sources of information really are credible, and not based on opinion, but based on some kind of a route. Authority is a relative thing. And, you know, we could have a long philosophical debate about what is truth, but it is, um, you know, undoubtedly, there are sources on the internet that are less reliable, less based on a well-researched evidence base than others and so it's important to be conscious about where you're getting your information and to assess for yourself, you know, what you think is reliable. So managing that's important communication with family and friends, actually making the time to talk to people, we don't always have to Zoom you know! It's become Zoom is like, you know, the new black and it's impossible to have a phone conversation now anymore, everything is automatically Zoom and actually, that can be too much. So, you know, take your phone and your headphones and chat to somebody while you're going for a walk in the sun and you don't have to sit with your face glued to the computer, but communicating with family and friends remains a really, really important strategy. And it's, you know, being allowing yourself to talk about how you feel is a really legitimate thing to do. You don't need to be embarrassed or ashamed about it. If the people that you're talking to find difficult to hear about your feelings, then find some other people to speak with. And if it's a fact, you know, if part of the issue is that your thoughts and feelings are really very strong and very sad or negative, then you know, at that point think about using resources like the helpline we talked about because the people on the other end of the phone really are trained to listen and they will be able to have a good conversation with you about how you're feeling and to give you a sense of, you know, you're okay, it's a valid response or to signpost you to further help if you need it. So, communication very important, perspective is important. Sometimes it can be very easy to think about the worst possible outcome and I have days of this, you know, my, my family is in in Ireland. So, my own kids here we

live in London. My own children are desperate to see their grandparents and aunts and uncles in Ireland and it's hard to say, you know, it's going to be a long time until we do. And it's very easy for me to become very negative about that and feel really dreadful. So it's also important to be active in, in, in catching yourself in those negative spirals, and choosing to shift your perspective a bit. And a really easy way to do that is, again, this is one of those things that will make people cringe, but you know, what it actually works is to decide, okay, what am I going to be grateful about today? Today, specifically, what can I, you know, what can I really feel gratitude for? And there's always something and if you can't find something, you probably haven't looked hard enough? Because if not, you know, it doesn't have to be that you won the lottery. It can just be that there is an amazing cacophony of birds outside your window making sounds that we haven't heard in big cities for decades. So, you know, I think that shifting perspectives important. Three more strategies that are important around anxiety, one is establishing a routine and again this is relevant to the isolation we talked about earlier, James. And routine doesn't mean rigidity. You don't have to be military in how you execute this. And you can be flexible and do things differently. But it is helpful for us as humans to have some kind of routine so that we don't end up staying in bed all day and you know, on the weekend, it'd be very easy to kind of try and recover from a tough demanding week at work by just not shifting but actually that's not very restorative. So trying to find some routines that keep us in good habits and healthy habits is really important. Relationships and managing relationships, recognising particularly for people who are in shared you know whether you're sharing your living space with your nearest and dearest or whether you living with in a flat share or house share of some description, there will be conflict, in homes when everybody is spending most of their time there. And here we are. Many people are working, you know, working from home, many people are furloughed. So even if you're in and out of school, the atmosphere in your home can be very different. I think it's important to realise that conflict will happen, and to not try and shy away from it but to try and engage constructively in the tensions that arise through people spending, you know, sometimes too much time together. And be proactive in managing that.

JC: For lots of people as well they'll be, I know a teacher friend of mine who is in a house share in London with a landlord but the landlord usually works away a lot of the time because he travels a lot for work, whereas in the lockdown, the situation is completely changed. He's now spending 24 hours a day with this person who he doesn't necessarily know particularly well was never planning on living with for that period of time, but with the scenario that's cropped up because of COVID. They are now in an uncomfortable situation, one that neither of them would have wanted to be in and, and acknowledging that has been quite a difficult thing for him in terms of not trying to change that situation but just acknowledge that actually, maybe it isn't ideal, but that's okay because we can still manage that and we can still be happy and we still can live a life that we're both happy with in that environment.

SMcB: Yeah, that's exactly the kind of situation. So the two things that stand in that is one, you know, being willing to acknowledge to yourself that this isn't ideal, and then accepting that and trying to make the most reasonable accommodation that you can with the situation that you have, that's a really smart thing to do. Because you know, some of the alternatives are to get really frustrated, probably with very limited choices about what to do differently. To really dwell on the things that are difficult again, that's that can lead to distress, unhappiness, depression, so really smart choice on your friends part to just be honest about it, recognise it and acknowledge it, but also try and find the way to live with it and make the accommodation.

JC: A lot of what a lot of what you spoke about Sinead, there's, there's uncomfortable choices to be made for people there, if you're if you feel like something, you know, either externally or internally

doesn't feel quite right, it's uncomfortable to challenge that, you know, the easier option is to just allow that to continue and to think that it'll be okay and it may well end up okay., but it's the harder choice to start having you know, a diary where you're writing down grateful things every single day, it's the harder choice to not go on Twitter for two hours, it's the harder choice to, you know, go make sure that you do that exercise every single day, if that's not what you're used to doing, if you're having to change and challenge some of your habits and some of those routines that you've gotten into.

SMcB: Absolutely, I mean, I was laughing this morning. I was out for a run this morning with my older son, my nine year old and we ran into two teachers from his primary school who were out having a walk, and they were, you know, very impressed by our fitness which of course is hilarious because I'm one of the least fit people you'd ever meet in your life. But I was saying to them at the start of lockdown, you know, I spent a lot of my time talking to people about how they ought to handle difficult circumstances and anxiety and so on. So, it was a real case of practice what you preach and so I decided with my family we would run every morning and or every morning that my old knees will accept me running. Four mornings a week we're up and out and we do our run! And, and the number of times that I the alarm goes off, and I just desperately want to roll over and not get up. I mean, it's pretty much a daily event. And every day I have to dig deep and find the discipline and to get myself up and get myself out but I know I might have the evidence that if I do, genuinely, I genuinely feel better even at the beginning when I could you know, ended up walking most of the four kilometres that we run every day and I felt significantly better for being up and out. And so I have to just sort of suspend how I feel about the action and just carry out the plan that I made and commit to it and then not really keep the discipline and I think you're right, it can be a very hard choice. But the return is very positive. Just one off on the anxiety point, one last very important strategy around managing anxiety that's the last of them. It's just about accepting uncertainty. You know, I think it is. Now more than ever, this is, these are really, really uncertain times. I mean, life is always uncertain and we as humans like to have a sense of control, which we sort of artificially create. But, you know, we can all say this is all a pretty uncertain time. And I think in accepting that it's letting yourself know that it's really okay to feel sad about it. It's okay to feel sad about the fact that you won't have your usual summer holiday or restoration in the way that you normally would. It's really fine for me to feel sad that I'm not going to see my family in Ireland for I don't know how long and that's okay, those feelings are normal and if I accept that, then I'm not dealing with the feelings and also dealing with some sense that I'm bad or wrong for having them, you know. So I think accepting uncertainty is really important when it comes to anxiety.

JC: I think well, that's a unique challenge as well or perhaps slightly tougher for teachers because I think inherently teachers, and I'm speaking from experience here, but you want control most of the time, especially within class and you know, you're responsible for such a lot of things that that control element is something that could be quite hard to let go at times. And so when we're relating it to work and people thinking about September, I think for teachers, especially, that that is definitely something that a lot of people are struggling with at the moment, that lack of control over their scenario. They've got a different class, they're in a different classroom. They've got this set of children one day or the next set children, children are coming in at different times. They might not be turning up at the same time, all those elements that we'd normally rely on for the children's benefit because the children benefit from that sort of structure and ourselves, all those things are up in the air at the moment, and that can make it very difficult.

SMcB: I think that's right. I think the other thing I'd say to teachers, particularly around this is it's also okay, you know, I've talked a lot about feeling sad or blah, blah, blah, but actually, it's okay to

feel angry, you know, as well. And I, when I talk to teachers, I think, you know, mostly people who have gone into the teaching profession, they're not carrying great amounts of aggression routinely, you know, they're in a very social environment, and most people are kind of have a temperament that means that they kind of enjoy that. And so it can be very unfamiliar, particularly to be feeling anger. So I would just say as well as all that routine and all that normality and all the shifting and, you know, shifting chopping, and changing goes on, then if you find yourself getting angry, that's okay, too.

JC: Absolutely. I must ask, have you have you stayed on Twitter? Have you made it through lockdown on Twitter still?

SMcB: I am still on Twitter with some better discipline, my partner likes to occasionally cough in a sort of you appear to still be on your phone way. I continue to find that the sense of connection with other people in the sector matters to me and so I'm not I'm not a great, I'm not a great one for tweeting, I sort of forget that occasionally, I might contribute something. But I find it very helpful to hear what people are experiencing and what the conversation is. And then I have to manage myself and get off it again. So yes, I'm still there, but hopefully, in a slightly more managed way.

JC: I think I think it's also about managing, like using that tool for the right things, thinking about who you follow, thinking about whether or not you need to follow that person. If you constantly get a reaction that's negative from that person that tweets or the person on Instagram, that may be considered whether or not you need to follow that person because you don't want to be doing anything that that's provoking a negative reaction inside you.

SMcB: Indeed, I mean, that's there's enough going on without adding unnecessary fractiousness and agitation into your life, through the number of characters in a tweet!

JC: And slightly away from the COVID scenario that we're in at the moment. We've mentioned a little bit actually in relation to anxiety and those sorts of things around how to manage challenging situations, challenging scenarios. As a mentor for mentors perspective, one of the one of the certainly my own experience, one of the things I found most difficult with was having very honest and open, difficult conversations, challenging conversations with my mentee, at times in the year when inevitably, I'd need to challenge something that was perhaps uncomfortable. And that was something I had to really work with and seek support from my senior leadership team to be able to deal with better. Would you have any advice for mentors who know that they need to have a difficult conversation with their mentee? How, how best to approach that?

SMcB: So I've kind of two main principles that matter to me on this. And then I might share a model if I'm able to explain it in a way that comes across healthfully. And I'm, you know, I'm no expert in this but based on my work and my own learning and sort of what we know about effective communication at Education Support, I think there were two things that matter to me in this space. One is in when you're dealing with a difficult or challenging conversation, one is around basing your feedback or basing your evaluation of the issues even before you get to feedback on data. Making sure that you're not, you know, basing it on assumption or belief or, or biases, or the fact that somebody is operating in a way that just isn't in line with your own preference, but actually might be totally fine. It's just that it's not the way you would do it. And so I think that point about basing your kind of response to this one data is really, really important. And so that's the first point for me. And the second point is around is just to be empathic. And I, I say that as somebody in my, in the early parts of my career, you know, I started working in a global firm, I was in the city, and it's a very fast paced, demanding environment and I was, you know, was a very young Manager but I was all about

efficiency. You know, I didn't make any time for anything extra. I was interested in getting the most amount of stuff done in the shortest amount of time, end of! And, you know, it's a very short term perspective, and with many years under my belt, I feel like become a little wiser on this and you know, efficiency can be very helpful comment, but it's it really doesn't get you through to the long run, I think. And so thinking about investing in those relationships, I think is where the emphases and much better approach for long term gain. And so asking how are you doing is very powerful question for example, and not sort of empathic before we dive into something very difficult, creating a strong footing for a relationship. Creating the space for really collaborative inquiry about the issue at hand, rather than I'm now going to tell you how rubbish you are or you know, another mindset that is a lot more punitive. Trying to get into a space of collaborative inquiry. I think is much better. I mean, there are times when that's not possible there are situations when performance is extremely poor, or somebody's done something that is just unequivocally problematic and wrong and especially if the individual is unaware of that, or disputes that and that you have no evidence and data to the contrary, then that's a sort of slightly different issue, and you probably wouldn't, and you'd be probably trying to deal with it in a way where maybe empathy isn't at the forefront of your mind, there's some urgency in sorting out whatever's happened. And but for most issues, where it's a kind of performance thing, and there's time to resolve the issues and improve and I think looking for an empathic footing is a really important approach. And, and to that the So, Mark Rowland, who is the Chief Executive of Mental Health Foundation, I was having a conversation with him about a difficult situation I had to handle and he introduced me to a model by Ken Scott, called 'Radical Candour.' And, and the radical candour model I found tremendously helpful to me personally in dealing with challenging conversations. And what Scott does in her work is sets out, I suppose two axes on which we can think about how we interact with people when we're having, giving them feedback or having difficult conversations. One axis is the extent to which you care personally, and actually how visible that is. And on the other axis is the extent to which you challenge directly. And so to illustrate this, if we let's say that we have somebody who's a trainee, and actually our evaluation, we've got some data we've, we've talked to other people, we validated our point of view, but it's, you know, routinely, they are over ambitious for all of their lessons. So they got it, they set a really high bar for what they want to accomplish, and they almost never accomplish it. So, you know, at the end of lessons, nobody's terribly satisfied and that's the issue that you wanted to address. Both thinking about it through this kind of 'Radical Candour' lens if you're not going to challenge very directly, and if you're not really visibly caring about it, and actually, you just don't care very much about it, you're probably basically what she describes as 'manipulative of insincerity.' But your main objective is to get out of that conversation quickly. So, you know, I might say, 'James, yeah, listen, you know, it's, you might, you might try a few different things, but basically, it's fine, you know, carry on' and which is going to create no change at all, and ultimately establish mis-trust, because the feedback will eventually catch up more directly with the individual. If you then you know, want to make the fact that you care more visible, but you're still not going to be very direct and the challenge you make, you might, you know, up the ante there on demonstrating care into the model calls 'Ruinous Empathy.' So, effectively, I come to you and say, 'James, you're doing a great job, really, you're great man. I love your ambition. You design these lesson plans, and they're under, you know, there's just such reach and scope in them, it's amazing.' And I'm not challenging you directly at all on the point that is problematic. So you know, you're holy ignorant now of the fact that we have a problem, and there's not going to be any change. And on the other side of this access, if we did if we demonstrate a low level of care, but we challenge directly, then we slip into what Scott calls 'Obnoxious Aggression.' So 'James, what's wrong with you? For God's sake, you know, just work out how much time you have and figure out how much material you're going to deliver. This isn't difficult. Well, this is like what you're training to do right.' And which is going to going to achieve little more than

creating defensiveness in the mentee. And maybe a little bit of change, but not very much. And so we're she advises us, we want to be in the segment that is 'Radical Candour.' Right where we are visibly demonstrating care and we do care and we're demonstrating that and we're challenging directly at the same time. So I can say to you, 'James, you know, the ambition for your lessons is fantastic. The fact that that's what you're trying to get to is really excellent. And you very often, what I do think is that you're not able to execute the full plan and that's an area we need to work on because it's, I suspect, not terribly satisfying for you. And I know it's not satisfying for the pupils in the class routinely to not feel like they can get to the conclusion of where this work is meant to take them. So we're going to need to have a conversation about it, and, and work out upon them. I really want to help you get there because I can see that somebody with your, you know, way of thinking is going to you know, make an excellent teacher. So let's work together and figure out how to improve this.' So in that sort of, I'm being very direct, I'm being explicit that I care and that's really, you know, in in Scotts model that's more likely to lead us to a place growth where you get sort of profound change really around the issue. And because you're being explicit and being direct, you're not messing around, you're not going around the houses, but you're also operating from quite an empathic place.

JC: And I think just listening to those examples, you know, as teachers, we know that the children we teach, they want to know that you're in control, they want to know that they feel safe, they want to know that there are boundaries, they want to know that they have an environment that they know the rules are in place to support them and keep them in the area they need to be listening to that as a mentor, you would want the same thing from your mentee. Listening to that last example, the thing that really came into my mind then was, this person is in control of the situation. Now you've identified that there's a problem, they've identified that I'm doing lots of things really, really well, but they're reassuring me that we're going to fix that issue. It's not that that issue doesn't exist, or that we can just pretend that everything's okay. We're addressing it and we're challenging it head on, but I'm not doing it by myself. I've got someone who's in control of this scenario. to really support me through that.

SMcB: Yep. I think the I think it's a very difficult thing to do. It's really, you know, in the abstract, it sort of makes absolute sense. I think it can be very difficult for us when we're the person wanting to give the feedback to really be able to step into the place where we can challenge directly and, you know, my own floor for so many years. I'm not bothered challenging directly. And I'm not aggressive about it but I don't often, you know, it's not my instincts to demonstrate empathy, because I'm so focused on we have a problem that my body language and my messaging is quite stark, not aggressive, but really not warm. And so I've had to work really hard to learn to approach this differently. And it does make a difference in how the person you're working with responds to the situation. And it creates much more of a sense of we're going we're in this together and we're going to work it out.

JC: And I think as a mentor/mentee relationship, I think that that's really amazing. There's that that shared buy into something, you're both, you're both working towards the same goal, not just, I've got all the experience, I know exactly what I'm doing and you're having to follow my lead. It's a case of you and I are sharing this journey together and supporting each other to get to that end goal.

SMcB: Absolutely.

JC: We normally at this point, when we've done other podcasts, I would ask, we've got a list of, we call them our big five are kind of five questions around silly things like your favourite book. In a true

COVID non organised way I've managed to lose my questions, and I can think about two of them off the top of my head. So I'm going to ask you the two that I can think of. Would you mind that Sinead, is that alright?

SMcB: That's completely fine, I'm feeling immediately anxious I'm just thinking oh my god, will I be able to answer James' questions?

JC: Well, everyone does and it's my favourite part for that reason alone. But it that is very straightforward. The first one is your favourite book and it doesn't have to be education based. It could be any book, your favourite book?

SMcB: So my favourite book, I find almost impossible. I'm a voracious reader and I read everything from every genre I can get my hands on but I will say that the book that I have found most profound over the last 12 months is 'The Overstory' by Richard Powers, and it's a long book, I found it, it went on a little bit at the end. So the last quarter of it wasn't, it wasn't as compelling as the rest of it. But the first half of that book had me completely well it profoundly changed how I looked at the world, and that doesn't happen every time you pick a book up so yeah, I'd say 'The Overstory.'

JC: I think that that quote might be on the front cover after this podcast. Is a glowing a reference you can get! The only other question sadly of our top five I can remember is if you were hosting a dinner party, you can have anyone from history to the modern day. Who would be your first person on the list of let's say you had five people that could come, who would be your first person that you would have at your dinner party? If you could have anyone throughout history up to the modern day?

SMcB: My first person would be Nelson Mandela, personal hero. You know, just think the man was unbelievable. And an extraordinary individual and to have the opportunity to have a conversation with him would be mind blowing.

JC: Yeah, absolutely brilliant choice doing anyone could argue with that. Right, we're nearly we're nearly wrapping up. So the last thing really that I kind of wanted to ask you was, how can mentors specifically really, but anyone who you know, listening to this within education, we've touched on it already, but it's really important to know exactly how people can seek support from Education Support, and what are the some of the services that you offer, and I know we've touched them already, but I think it's really valuable for people to be reminded that those services are there for them.

SMcB: Course. So probably the best way to access our services is to go directly to the website because the links to everything around there. And that's www.educationsupport.org.uk. And from there you can access information and guidance, we've got a series of digital resources. So you know the stuff we talked about anxiety we've got a short video on there from one of our and consultancies, a psychotherapist talking through that material around anxiety. We have stuff about bereavement, how to support staff, how to think about bereavement in a school setting through COVID. There's a video coming next week on secondary trauma, which has become a bit of a buzzword in the sector but what's the impact of dealing with some of these issues on the grownups on the frontline and how do we support them. The website will give you access to all the guidance material and there's document resources and templates for stuff as well. You can also, through the website, find out how to apply for a grant if you're in financial distress, anyone who has worked in education who's in financial distress is welcome to apply for a grant. We have a process and there are criteria, but if we can't help, we will. And during the pandemic, we have, of course had a huge increase in demand, in particular from supply teachers who were left in financial difficulty, but not

just supply teachers, term time contractors, and this isn't just teachers, it's anyone working in education. So you can find out about the Grant Programme and apply through the website. There's also our helpline, which as I said earlier, is open 24/7, all year round and that telephone number is 08000 562 561 and again, the information about the helpline and the number is all on our website. So the best way to get hold of us is www.educationsupport.org.uk. And from there you can be signposted to tools and stuff that we do, including the research work that we have, you know, we run the study every year on the health of the workforce and we use that to, to go back and talk to Government about policy, and how can we make the policy environment better to create a healthier environment for teachers and ultimately for students? And so yeah, heading to the website is the best place to go, James.

JC: Brilliant, thank you Sinead. A huge thank you for your time and being on the podcast with us today. It was a fascinating chat and hopefully really useful for any teachers or mentors who are tuning in. A huge thank you.

SMcB: My pleasure, thanks a million for having me.