

**Transcript of a recorded conversation between Ken Milroy and Dr Gillian Murray
(Aberdeen College, July 2019)**

Bio: Ken Milroy was employed as a community worker at Grampian Regional Council in 1984, being promoted to senior community worker and later assistant head of social strategy. In 1996 he took on the role of CEO at The Foyer, Aberdeen where he worked to build holistic approaches to youth homelessness in the city and Aberdeenshire. He retired from his role at The Foyer in 2018, but continues as Regional Chair of North East Scotland College and a Board member of Robert Gordon University.

Thank you very much for agreeing to do an interview with me today Ken. I would like to start off with how and when you got involved in social enterprise.

Before the term social enterprise was coined really. My background was primarily with the local authority, former Grampian Regional Council. I was a community worker and then became a senior community worker, and eventually ended up as the Council's assistant head of social strategy. You were talking a wee bit earlier about John Pearce, so similar background in terms of rooted in anti-poverty strategies -all be it a different context in terms of Grampian. So I worked on a range of different initiatives at that time. In the early '90s a senior education official brought to the attention of the social strategy unit- concerns about a former Urban Aid funded project -Central Youth Project- and the difficulties that the staff were encountering in dealing with the problems that were being presented. That conversation was the start of what eventually became The Foyer.

The conversation wasn't about social enterprise, it was about addressing social and economic issues of young people presented at a relatively small-scale youth project in the centre of Aberdeen. But that started the discussion about the plight of young people within the broader area and began to focus in on issues around homelessness and unemployment. At that time The Foyer movement was being promoted by Shelter. Shelter had established the Foyer Federation as a separate organisation to help take forward this particular model that would link accommodation with support and opportunities for education, training, and employment. That was the early '90s and interest grew from, 5 projects that were piloted, it seemed just to catch people's imaginations. So, soon those 5 pilot projects doubled, it grew like topsy -particularly in England, Wales, less so in Scotland. But we liked the idea of the model in Grampian and we took the ideas of The Foyer movement and applied them to the issues that had been presented at Central Youth Project and started to look at a new initiative to address issues of youth unemployment, homelessness through a Foyer model, that we would establish in Aberdeen and would become a network across Grampian region. So the starting point for The Foyer in Grampian was the local authority, that's where the impetus came from.

I guess, the aspect of what we planned that was different was the whole embracing of a business philosophy around how the organisation should run and the fact it should undertake commercial activities in its own right. That was against a backcloth of business ventures, some of which have been disasters and some of which have been relatively successful small scale. But, I guess, an ethos of trying to look for different ways of addressing social issues through some kind of economic model. The Foyer initiative had broad political support though there were issues. At that time, the Regional Councils didn't have housing under their remit, they sat with the District council. So there was tensions in the Foyer model between the two local authorities. The proposal was to set a new organisation up that would be independent of the partner organisations, but would have participation from those organisations. So the model predates some of the out sourcing and arms-length bodies that you have seen in local authorities and other public bodies in more recent years. So it was constituted initially as a Trust and then once I was appointed as the chief executive I reconstituted it as a charitable company with a trading subsidiary, so we adopted very early on what is now a tried and tested model. The term social enterprise didn't enter into it, it was actually 'mission-driven' that would be the phrase you would use now. It was about trying to tackle issues in a different way. It was my

then boss, who lead it in the early days when it was going through the Council and the business planning process. I was involved in aspects of that, primarily the funding elements and then obviously was appointed to take on the role of director and the rest is history.

Great. I would like to explore a little bit more of the contextual points that you mentioned. I mean. unlike other areas and regions of Scotland the popular perception of Aberdeen in the 1980s and '90s is that this is an economically strong region: farming, the oil industry, so what was driving poverty in Grampian at that time and what kind of people were falling through the gaps?

The index of multiple deprivation applied in Grampian like it applies in the central belt, just the areas are smaller. So you still have poor people living in poor areas. And in some respects, its worse, because the distance between the haves and have-nots is really quite stark. Before I moved up here to work, I worked in Hamilton, and the first thing I kind of noticed when I moved up here, was the fancy cars that everybody drove. They were new, shiny cars -so wealth was very visible and therefore if you weren't part of that then you probably felt worse than people in the same circumstances in other parts of Scotland. So there was still areas of multi deprivation and there had been work that had gone on for a number of years, through the Urban Programme which was succeeded by the Great Northern Partnership which was an archipelago of neighbourhoods in Aberdeen, working within the policies of Scottish Government, or the Scottish Office. So those, were the same kind of drivers, all be it on a different scale. I think, there was also people drawn into Aberdeen because of the prospect of work, Aberdeen tended to draw people in. So despite the strong economy there was people here who were not in good circumstances. So the contributing factors were much the same, all be it in a much more affluent, general economy, but if you are poor in that economy then, maybe, you feel it more.

Certainly, a greater sense of inequality.

Absolutely, which is shocking despite the fact -despite the wealth- we hadn't made any inroads in to that and we kind'a still haven't. Those areas are still areas of multiple deprivation. We haven't cracked that one at all. And what we were attempting to do through The Foyer initiative was to offer some sort of route out of that. And that was very much linked to education, training, and work. All be it within The Foyer movement that focused on homelessness and the risk of homelessness there was accommodation in there as well.

So, trying to link all these factors together rather than just addressing one at a time.

Yes, and that was the experience of young people. They felt that they went from pillar to post, they had a housing issue, they were also unemployed, they were in poor health and maybe had an addiction issue, so there was no one place they could go to help address the whole person. It was all in slices. So their experience was that they went from pillar to post and it didn't resolve their issues. Our attempt to do that through a single door, hence the structure of the organisation, having the buy in from the key public bodies, having the buy in from business -because at the end of the day that's who you would want to employ the people- so that was also a driver behind what was set up.

You mentioned that there had been some kind of community business activity in Grampian previously were you part of that initiative?

Its social strategy unit was the sponsoring department, or partner, for the department and a lot of them were part- funded by Urban Aid, so we had a link with a lot of them, so I had some involvement with some of those, and some still exist.

Do you know which ones?

Seaton nursery -community nursery- is still going. I think, other things fell by the way side. There was also other initiatives like the credit union, so again, there is still St Machar credit union; it has continued.

Of those that fell by the way side what kind of things were they addressing do you remember?

I think there was an attempt to do a laundry. I guess they never got the business model right. There was a tea-room, or tea-rooms, various tea-rooms. I am not sure if they continued or not -that tended to be in the rural area. My former boss will be able to tell you more about the community business ventures.

What do you think the movement got wrong in its business model?

I think, they probably weren't businesses. They were trying to do social things, so the business model didn't work.

So was that something that you tried to address when you were putting The Foyer together?

We planned that we would set up businesses -commercial businesses- and that is what happened. We could draw on previous experience, some ventures were very successful and then weren't, some continued to be successful. But they were set up on a commercial basis, so weren't dependent on subsidy on an ongoing basis. And I think that would be the experience of a number of community businesses that didn't survive, because they were over dependent on subsidy.

So, what was the business areas that you went in to?

There was an aspiration in the business plan that we should do various businesses and that we had a space to house these ventures. In one of the two buildings that we initially took on, the refurbishment of Trinity Church included -on the ground floor- space for businesses, but the business plan didn't determine what the businesses were. There was notions of doing a café. There was suggestions of doing other things, so I reasonably quickly came to the conclusion we should one, and attempt to do it really well, and picked on us doing a restaurant. So we set about the detailed business planning to establish a fairly large-scale restaurant in the city centre -90 covers- and that opened in '99.

The period prior to that had really been about establishing the housing side of the Foyer, as well as some education/training opportunities, and links to employment, so two businesses were established in '99. The first was more fortuitous and opportunistic and that was a graphic design business. Foyer Graphics was established. There was no great plan around that, it was just responding to individual's aspiration to work with us, our need to have good graphics, and the individual prepared to take a risk and build up a business. So that's what happened, and it grew, it still continues to be a good-going business. It is never going to be a massive PR company, but in terms of doing a great graphic design business, it's done very well and I hope it continues to do so.

The restaurant was a different kettle of fish. So that had to be done on sound commercial basis, because it was a major financial risk for the organisation so you are probably talking a turnover in excess of a million pounds. So at the time, it was new for Aberdeen, so it was very modern -bright colours- it served also as a gallery space -what you might expect now-a-days or of a good restaurant, so we did that in the late 90's and it was profitable for quite a number of years. Then the market began to change in Aberdeen, so we did various things. We branched out and ran another restaurant under contract with His Majesty's Theatre. We ran Foyer at HMT, but in hindsight it split our customer base. We also went in to other catering, we did a

site canteen -we did a works canteen- so were just trying to diversify a bit, but it wasn't working commercially, we weren't making money. So we got to the point, where we were losing money and it wasn't our core purpose, so we eventually had to take the difficult decision to close the restaurant. We probably should have done it 2 years before we actually closed it- but there was a great affection for The Foyer restaurant and the board were not minded to take my recommendation, which was to close it.

Over the years did young people from the other areas of Foyer did they get work experience?

Absolutely, and other businesses, the way the restaurant was set up; it required a staff team that weren't 'our clients' -as it were- so we got it established, then we were able to provide work experience, some people eventually got jobs, but it was done on merit. It wasn't done on the basis that they were part of the social enterprise. It was done on the basis that they needed a job filled and someone could fill it. But there was always that commitment, I guess, to work experience and trade using the restaurant, that worked effectively, I think, I think we got the balance of that right.

We did another one, not a restaurant, it was a Ben and Jerry's scoop-a-shop. It was a franchise from Ben and Jerry's and it was run on the same expectations as any franchise, in terms of quality and service and products, but they would waive some of their franchise fees on the basis you were employing people who were previously unemployed. And so, we took a space at the Bon Accord Centre. It cost quite a lot of money -the service charge is quite a lot of money- and we opened in November. And we had to sell a lot of ice cream in the middle of the winter, but we ran it successfully for a number of years. We got sponsorship from a number of companies, but it was dependant on the subsidy to be honest and it was clear it was never going to work fully commercially. So, it so happened, Union Square was being developed -and the Bon Accord Centre knew it had to refurbish, to compete, so it needed the space that we were in. So they offered a sum of money to leave, and I said 'no'. They offered us a bigger sum of money, I said 'no'. They offered us an even bigger sum of money and I said 'no', so eventually they just bought the whole lease out. So actually we ended that venture in profit.

So, I guess, there was some key commercial decisions that drove the organisation and that continues to this day. There are business ventures that the Foyer is involved in, that have seen a downturn through the oil and gas sector. Roadwise Driver Training, The Foyer bought this as a business when there was a lot of commercial work, but that got hit with the downturn, in terms of training activities. So they are slowly building that back up. So, The Foyer has had to face a number of challenging commercial decisions.

How has the landscape changed for the other part of the work of the Foyer developed in terms of addressing homelessness and providing to safe space?

It grew like topsy. So initially we allowed for 20 places, for accommodation in Aberdeen, and for that 20 we had 200 applications; a third of them were from Aberdeenshire -from out with Aberdeen. So that spurred us on to be much more pushy in terms of expanding the model -as it were- and growing it in both in Aberdeen and in Aberdeenshire. And that was welcomed. I guess, at our peak, when the service model was going great guns, when we had developed quite a significant education training portfolio, and through the likes of the New Deal activities, and all the commercial activities were working well, you were probably looking at an organisation with about £4.5 million turnover and 150 employees.

So at one point everything was in balance. But in terms of the social mission of the Foyer, that changed significantly in terms of the policy framework we operated within. So, the advent of the Scottish Parliament -good thing- but the whole thrust towards outsourcing and contracting made things much more competitive. We're relatively small player in the big scheme of things and that continues to this day. So initially we secured contracts in our own right, when they were procuring through DWP at a local level -local being

Aberdeen- so we had good relationships with local staff and that developed into contractual opportunities for us. When that went up to a larger scale, then we became sub-contractors, so that kind of bats against the local social enterprise model really, where big is beautiful, because you can cut your costs and it becomes a race to the bottom. So, and, I think, that is still to this day the case that the contracting arrangements for public authorities -public bodies- don't really favour the smaller organisations. But, we were able to build it up successfully through good relationships with partner organisations and delivering what they wanted. So real focus on service. We were prepared to do the extra to make things work effectively. I think you would still see that in the organisation, so there is a passion and commitment across the workforce in terms of delivering something to the best of our abilities, so the whole quality thing is really important.

Do you think other providers work on a similar basis to the Foyer that you address not just housing but education?

They don't procure services in that way. It's only a Foyer because we make it a Foyer. We try and join up services. So public bodies are notoriously bad at joining up service contracts. They do not look at the whole person, they simply look at drug addiction, or mental health, or homelessness, or unemployment, so the siloing of issues. It gets worse as you go up through government, so if you look at Scottish Government -and how its departmentalised- it gets easier as you get down to authority level, but it is still there, and they don't commission across those different bits, and -goodness me- they don't commission between different bodies in the public sector! So, that kind of vision, of third sector organisations, having a key role in service activity is stifled because of that procurement. I think, it is a lot better than it was, but it won't go away.

Your mentioned as well as working in Aberdeen you also started to work out in the Shire what kind of different types of needs -was there any difference in need there- or what drove where you set up in the Shire?

Partly opportunistic, no, not partly -very opportunistic- and that was probably just due to some well targeted conversations with senior officials within the council, but it got us a foot in the door, really. And being able to lever in some money to make things happen, rather than just wait to be commissioned. So we were pretty adept at match funding things -that was the sweetener- I guess, for getting on-board with us. Being able to join things up in the way that made sense and made it cost effective. I guess, generally, we were drawn to those areas where there was long-standing multiple deprivation -so Fraserburgh, Peterhead- but we also had the ambition was to have some kind of Foyer facility in every location or area across Aberdeenshire. So administratively Aberdeenshire Council split into 6 areas and the intention had been to try and have something in all of them. So we got as far as having facilities in 4 of the 6, but that's been curtailed -and again, it is just contract arrangements- so partly opportunistic, partly rational and need. In terms of presenting difficulties, in terms of the young folk, I think, there was less choice in Aberdeenshire, so I think maybe some of the young people that we ended up with were because there was nothing else. So we had always envisaged for our accommodation that it would be low to medium needs rather than high needs. We got a lot of high-needs kids, and that's just because there was few alternatives. In terms of some of the other service areas, it was much the same in terms of unemployed type services -probably less focused on just young people- and because we had a facility for learning opening that up to the wider community. So maybe the community connections became more important rather than rather than being more narrowly defined by age group.

Some of the community business models were very much based on that community development and understanding a community as a kind of geographic way, rather than a community of interest. Would you say what kind of relationship does the Foyer build up with the community does it have a community development ethos or is it about addressing?

I think that has been more apparent in Aberdeenshire, particularly North Aberdeenshire; Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Banff, Macduff to some extent -but probably Peterhead and Fraserburgh in the main- so there was more of a community focus and a community development approach; rather than more of an age group, or issue approach. So, yeah, I think, it was easier to do that and more of an expectation to do that, actually, so more of, a place-based approach as you would say now.

Was that growing out of any tradition of community action in those areas do you think?

Absolutely, aye. Expectation that is –that’s how you do your business- so I mean both Fraserburgh and Peterhead where Foyer established and continues to have a range of different services and activities, they’ve got strong, strong community voice and expectations, so, yeah, definitely.

Does that voice come from tenant associations or what kind of groups are visible?

There would be other third sector organisations. There would be, in Fraserburgh, the Development Trust, so organisations with a long-standing foothold on the community. And, I guess, a long-standing tradition of volunteering in those communities around arts, around children’s activities, youth activities, so a lot to build on, really. Probably a good strength in these communities and probably built up through the traditional industries that are there.

Fishing communities?

Yeah, I think close links with the fishing communities is really important.

So does not really translate into this kind of city context of Aberdeen, do you not see the same visibility of community action?

I guess, when we were looking at establishing the Foyer, we went for a more neutral territory in terms of city centre locations. And, in part of that was, so that people could escape their own neighbourhood, or didn’t want to go back into their neighbourhood. So it is more difficult in the larger city context. Maybe, it is a wee bit more neutral in the city centre and you could also do something a bit bigger scale in terms of the buildings and services.

I am quite interested in how devolution and subsequent policy around social enterprise has affected the development of the third sector in Scotland. Did you see a decisive impact following devolution on the kind of work you were doing?

We became, and I, personally, became, involved in a lot of discussions and working groups -and what have you- and the Scottish Government set up around homelessness. I chaired a group around supported accommodation that, I think, is still influencing some of the thinking around supported accommodation for young people. So there is quite a lot of activity around homelessness. There was more, certainly -a lot of activity- around the education, training, and employment agenda. So in the days of New Deal, Scotland had the pre- New Deal. It was a separate Scottish fund -the name escapes me- but we were involved in that and did some interesting work, that continues to this day, around training opportunities for people with addiction issues. And we managed to main stream it as part of the wider drug and alcohol strategies. And the college continues to part fund it, so a lot of, I think, we needed to be on the front foot on a lot of policy areas, so that was certainly an area that we were very involved in. And I sat on the Gateway To Work -one of the advisory groups- around New Deal, as well, that the Scottish Government set up and there was a lot of that was, in

part, about getting known, but also helping shape thinking -and making sure the North East was represented- and that thinking wasn't just driven by the central-belt.

Do you feel that you were listened to in that process?

Yes, I think we had something to provide, and we became known -made sure our local MP's and MSP's knew what we did, how we did it- we were, and in many respects still are, a regular stopping point in summer vacations. Make sure that the politicians know what you are up to. So we did that on a regular basis, making sure senior officers when they came to the local authority, invite them on a visit and say 'here's what we do', so again a lot of it was around personal contact and just building up our profile, just positioning the organisation in such a way that it was known.

You mentioned, right at the beginning, that you didn't necessarily begin the Foyer with the notion of, 'I want to set up a social enterprise' but when did that you know term social enterprise become currency within your organisation?

Probably early on, actually. So I always liked it as a term, it was helpful in describing us. So, I mean, the social bit -in terms of that impact that we wanted to have- but whether you used the term enterprise, or business, I think, in terms of who we wanted appeal to -in terms of employers- I think, it was helpful to have that tag. It implied, 'this is not a something for nothing organisation', so we were paid to deliver services. So there was a deal between us and the funder. There was a deal between us and the client, so there was expectations on both sides. So, I think, that was a useful term. I think, people got confused. I think, people talked about social enterprise in just the business, but actually that is not the case. So The Foyer is the social enterprise, it has commercial activities, but the whole thing that is the social enterprise -often people think it is just the business bit- but that's not how I would view it. I did an article for the Chamber of Commerce to try and say that it was our 21st year, so that is probably still around somewhere if that helpful to have that.

Definitely. So I am thinking in terms of the development of social enterprise in Scotland the Foyer is probably one of the first organisation to really position themselves as a social enterprise within the landscape and you must of witnessed a lot of people joining that sector since the late 1990's. Do you see it as something that is growing or has it reached a ceiling -how do you see that development?

I think others are making that link between social and economic goals -so ethical business- it is still a business but trying to do things ethically. So, I think, the philosophy is still evolving. I think, that is still growing. I mean, if you back to, I guess, what I would see some of the early attempts around social enterprise on an individual basis -so it was the Big Issue seller on the street. So there was 50p or a pound, but there was an exchange going on. And now its embraced in a whole number of organisations, in the way that they do business and how they describe themselves, as distinct from a charity. So I do think there's a difference in how things are perceived between a charity that the Foyer was and a social enterprise so there is a mind-set difference, I think.

Have you ever come across any tensions with the more voluntary sector or the public sector in Grampian? I have you come across various organisations some of which didn't have great relationships with the council and with other voluntary organisations and some had been viewed with suspicion because of this kind of enterprise aspect to their work -have you?

I think early on it was probably viewed in those terms. And, I think, it was perceived as 'stealing' their money, which may well have been the case. But, I think, we were viewed in that way. Now-a-days, I think, there are different camps around social enterprise now; in relation to a more community-based approach, as opposed to a broader philosophy. I would tend not to try and limit it -both are equally valid- but, yeah, that

is the kind of tension that there is now –at a sector level. We’ve been lucky in that respect that we have had a supportive government. So in, I think, Scotland has done well in relation to social enterprise. We have had some strong voices advocated for it within government, so yeah, I think that’s been helpful.

As well as devolution in the late 1990s you also had the restructuring of local authorities from the regional/district model into a unitary local authority -how did that effect relationships you had with people on different...

It kind of stymied things, to be honest for a while, and there was a lot of risk around that. So ‘96 was when the new unitary authorities kicked in. They probably took a couple of years to get their bearings. But we had very difficult initial period in terms of a relationship with the local authorities. And it was partly where we had come from; so, ‘who owned us now?’ ‘Who was our sponsor?’ Because there was still monies going in from the Council. We also became a bit of an easy target for budget cuts. So, one year our whole education grant was cut. So yeah, we were an easy target. It made things, in one respect, easier -as there was only one body that you were dealing with- but it was still divided into departments with powerful heads of service and directors. So you still had to be known across the Council. What we did secure early on was good political support, so making sure that was cross party, making sure that was not just the administration -just keeping those relationships going. I am not a fan of small, local authorities. Having worked for a large local authority I think that is the way they should have gone. So if there ever a move to go back to larger scale authorities, I would be in support. I think, you get things of scale and, I think, that is helpful in terms of the governance arrangement with terms of councillors and focus on strategy rather than nitty, gritty stuff. But, I can’t see that happening any time soon. I think the other thing is closeness to a Parliament. So on various occasions we have been able to present evidence, when committees were calling for evidence around particular things and, I guess, that has been helpful around subject areas of homelessness, but also just in terms of social enterprise on the agenda for a committee to consider, so that presented to one of the committees around that.

So what personally drove you to make that move from a public sector role in to the third sector?

I was at a level in the local authority that my job was disappearing, so I was having to apply for jobs across Scotland basically, in local authorities. The Foyer job was coming up so, I applied for it -and I also applied for other jobs as well. On the morning, I was being interviewed for two jobs; the morning was The Foyer, and the afternoon it was the head of community development in Aberdeenshire. I had the interview in the morning and was offered the job and withdrew from the other one, which is probably the best decision I made.

So you don’t regret making that transition?

No, it was an amazing job. To start with nothing and create this organisation that is doing so much, fantastic. And what I was able to gather around me was some fantastic talent, in terms of making it happen. I could do the hunter-gatherer kind of thing, but it needed folk back at the ranch to make it work. I was lucky in that respect, in terms of colleagues that were equally as passionate about it. I still see it as operating in public service, perhaps it’s kind of an old- fashioned term. But it’s, kind of, what would go back to my roots in terms of my upbringing, in terms of where I have ended up, so I didn’t really lose that, I think, I just got more effective at it.

And where, if you had not taken The Foyer job and you had went for that other interview in the afternoon what do you think your role would have been in that job you know where would you have to try to work and develop?

I presented a proposal to the shadow director of education. That the role should be primarily one of community development and, therefore, should sit more with the chief execs department and the area management structure they were putting in place. So it was about engagement of communities rather than an adult education service. So it was the community development bit I was interested in. So I might have had more clout if that had happened! So yeah, I would of split it up to put the resource alongside the area committees, strengthened that side.

Has things like that happened how has the community development gone in the local authorities?

The community education service in this area has been devastated. Those budgets have just been raided, cut and slashed, so I have little or no sense of what goes on in the City. I have some sense of it in the Shire, but in terms of what I joined in the '80s with Grampian Regional Council, it's a very different beast now. So, I think, some the policies of the local authorities now are less compartmentalised -so that some of the stuff around, that we were doing within the social strategy unit is more broadly based- and community development approach through the community planning process, I think, is much more inventive in that respect.

One thing we haven't touched on so much is the role of the private sector in the Foyer journey you did mention I think earlier on that you did have to have some buy in from businesses in the area were they easy to engage and to bring on board or did they have skepticism from a different angle?

There was some early work done through the Chamber of Commerce in terms of engaging with business in the planning process, which was helpful, but in terms of raising expectations with business was probably too soon. It was years after things started to actually happen. The Trust Committee that I inherited was enormous. It was like a council committee, so I had 21-plus folk on it and that wasn't an effective way to run the organisation, so that might have been helpful in terms of establishing a partnership and getting everybody going in the same direction. But in terms of running an organisation that wasn't the best way of doing it, so I set about reconstructing the Board in a way that wouldn't make people unhappy, because they would lose a place. So carefully choosing my time as to when we would downsize. So at local government elections -so that nobody felt they were losing out- so it went down probably to half the size. Because of charitable law, I shifted the public bodies that used to appoint -their right to appoint- I shifted that to an invite to appoint, so that they weren't there by right. So we shifted the membership of the organisation. Originally the members of the organisation were the local authorities, were the health board, the career service, and we changed the nature, so that the directors that were appointed were also the members.

So that took some time to do, but I had a plan as to how I would do that that -maybe took 10 years to actually implement fully. But part of that was also about making sure that we had businesses involved. So I signaled that when we opened the Marywell Centre and I wanted there to be a business representative who spoke at the formal opening of that, so my then chair -prominent Labour Councillor- I explained to her what I wanted and she came up with a well-respected businessman, who she had actually stood against in a parliamentary election, I think -anyway- I approached him and spent an afternoon with him telling what we did and he agreed to speak at the opening from a business view point and also then agreed to come on to the Board. So he was the first. I think, because I got somebody of his stature, that helped get a message out to the business community about our seriousness about engaging with business. So it continued, so the restructuring of the board and making sure that we had a good representation from the business sector and that continues to this day. It was in part about doing skills audits -in terms of what you need round the board table- and opening it up to nomination applications, so a more open and transparent process, as well. The other thing is, that we had a separate Board for the business activities and essentially they were all business representatives, we wanted those heads round board table- but it is funny because they were the ones who

didn't bite the bullet in terms of closing the restaurant when I thought they should. I think it was about having the right skills round the table.

So that engagement seems to have come about quite naturally and productively?

The other thing I did -and there weren't many folk doing it at the time- is that I was very actively involved at events that the Chamber of Commerce were running. I joined the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, so I was rubbing shoulders with senior business leaders through those activities. So I got known. I would also speak at Rotary Clubs, Probis Clubs, WRI -just whatever- to promote the message so, and a lot of Rotary Clubs are predominately from a business point of view, so yeah, I was eager to engage with business.

What about a social enterprise networking North East, has that been something you feel you have been part of?

I tended to use my network at a national level, so built up a good rapport with Kibble. Obvious a different scale but we had a good rapport, got on well -and still do- with Their CEO. I got involved with Senscot. So, again, just there was opportunities for rubbing shoulders with folk through Senscot. There was the Social Enterprise Academy. I am still a director of the Board there, though I have indicated I will step down, as I am no longer actively involved in that sector -I think they should get some fresh eyes. So yeah, at national level it has been helpful I guess. In the North East has been more informal. So the last couple of years there has been a group of chief execs of different local, not social enterprises, but they have got that same philosophy. So they been meeting informally and I got involved in other things as well on social enterprise. So I was founding director of Transition Extreme, and chaired that for a while, and I did chair Aberdeen Council Voluntary Organisations for a while -I did have fingers in a few pies.

Sounds very busy.

I didn't do it all at once, but yeah, I was busy.

You retired from The Foyer last year and what was your sense of how you left the organisation is it just reflecting on where you had got to versus where you started. Did you leave the organisation where you thought you would end up when you started?

No not at all. I guess, I didn't have a Scooby. In terms of the business plan was implemented within 3 years and, I guess, that was the vision that I had. So it was a relatively small project really, rather than what it became. The last few years of work I found challenging, because of this treadmill of funding and, I felt, 'I have been here before', so I left the organisation intact, in a better place than it had been the previous year. There was some opportunities that were emerging that were exciting, so opportunities for a new chief executive to get their teeth into. So the world was changing and I thought, 'this is a good time to step back', so the policy agenda was significantly changing around homelessness. The stuff around employment and training seems to change every couple of years -still lots of opportunities- but yeah, I was personally ready to step back. But I did it at a point where I'd steadied the ship -as it were- we had to make some difficult decisions over the past few years. I had to restructure or help point it in the direction of a restructure which has been seen through, so yeah, no regrets.

I don't have any more questions Ken, but do you think I have missed along the way that you would like to comment on?

I suppose one of the important things for me personally was an international experience. So through CEiS there was 20 of us did a trip in '99 to the States. So that was the first of these trips that was organised. It was folk on that from Government, from funder organisations, from social enterprise. And that was good to be part of that and to see what they had done in LA and San Francisco. So the Ben and Jerry's initiative was something I saw in action in San Francisco, though we had been interested in it before- and my then depute got involved -she is on your list to interview. She went on to become the CEO of Cornerstone. The other person, I don't know if I put on the list, my successor, she will tell you the truth about how I left [*Laughter*].

Brilliant if you are happy I will stop the recording there.