

CAROLINE 00:13

Hello and welcome to Mind Your P's, The Purposeful Leaders Guide we believe in all the p's, people, purpose, planet even pizza and processeco. In this episode we are talking to Fanchea Kelly the CEO of Blackwood Homes which provides accessible housing and care services for people with disabilities. With over fifteen hundred houses in Scotland what with the setting the new standard for assisted living using technology and innovation to provide next level care to their customers. Fanchea it's an absolute pleasure to have you on the show.

FANCHEA 00:42

Thank you Caroline and delighted to be here.

CAROLINE 00:46

Listen tell us a bit about you about Blackwood, you know fifteen hundred houses wow that's amazing, is this under your leadership for a long time?

FANCHEA 00:59

Gosh well it's easier to talk about Blackwood than me Caroline so let's go there. No Blackwood's one of about a hundred and sixty housing associations in Scotland, they vary a lot you've got some really big ones, you've got kind of medium sized ones like ours and then you have some very small ones that often are community based. Ours is a specialist association and as you said, you know, our purpose is to help people live independently. So mainly we look after people with physical disability and often older people with mobility needs so with that clear purpose off we're here to make sure that people can live independently is what then drives you know, what we do next. But on top of that the way we've set it out is that we want to help people live life to the full, so we could fulfill our purpose by being fairly functional by delivering good houses, good repairs, good care and all those things are important. But actually for people living life to the full it brings us to the next level and brings us to remain aware of what's important to people's quality of life. Why it's worth living and what other kinds of aspirations and goals some might have in their life when I find that's really important as we are trying to kind of keep our commitment and energy and enthusiasm for what we do.

CAROLINE 02:33

And how long have you been the chief exec Fanchea?

FANCHEA 02:38

I've been chief exec for seven years now.

CAROLINE 02:42

and how many staff do you have?

FANCHEA 02:47

At the moment is over six hundred and fifty stuff, most of them in care services because there's a lot of like personal care delivery that requires lots of people, but also professional staff in housing and in asset management and finance, the back room staff as well as the housing and care frontline staff as well so quite a mix but but a lot a lot of care staff who do amazing job every day.

CAROLINE 03:17

Yeah absolutely, and you so you've got this wonderful mission how do you how do you keep ensures everyone lives that mission that the everyone lives the Blackwood values?

FANCHEA 03:29

Yeah, I think it is for me it's really important that the values, you know, are clear simple and meaningful. So ours are, and they've lasted over time, you know keeping them over time is important to. So for us it is simple things like, that we want to be open and honest, we want to make sure that we all take responsibility across the organisation. We all want to make sure that we have respect and understanding and for everybody we come across and we all want to make sure that we keep our promises so those four values are as I say simple and some of the ways that we try to make sure then, that we live by them and everybody from our board to our frontline know and lives those values so our board we've got lots of examples for the board had to make difficult decisions but did them through the lens of the values. In terms of our people what we also do, so with our processes things like our personal development plans that everybody in the organisation has actually asks us all to articulate what we do through the values. So we give examples of what we've done and it just in terms of those thing so it brings it to life more as well. We also I think things like our external accreditations and we are proud to have a Gold Investors in People standard and that was a really useful one for us hearing from external accreditation, that the commitment to the values was hugely significant at Blackwood so very very reassuring to know that, particularly in the line of work we do where you know you must be extremely careful but I think actually having an emotional connection to values is one thing to, again have the right processes, but you must have the right emotional connection and the people feel okay about saying when something isn't done according to the values. So there's a range of ways but

you know it's one of the things I do feel that we've got really quite strong in Blackwood, and I am extremely pleased that is the case I want to keep it that way too.

CAROLINE 06:06

I mean that you know is it it's a hard job to get six hundred and fifty people aligned to those values and it's been such a tough time for the care sector throughout you know the last eighteen months and in particular, how have you been able to keep your team feeling motivated and supported through this difficult period?

FANCHEA 06:26

Yeah I think the pandemic has taught us lots and maybe I'll come back to that a little bit but if I can give you maybe just a couple of examples, both care and people not delivering frontline care. So for instance, our housing officers have all been working from home and you know in the housing profession people often have what they call a patch that a housing officer might have say two hundred customers to look after, and it in the early days a housing officer set about phoning every single customer cross country, Blackwood's dispersed right across Scotland so we want to make sure that people you know whether it's from Dingwall down to Stranraer, across Aberdeen, Ayr, Glasgow to Dundee, all of the areas where our customers live that we wanted to make contact with them and the housing officers didn't amazing job of getting everybody and out of that understand, if you like the extent of vulnerability in the context of the pandemic. Those who were shielding those who were maybe struggling to get, you know, food deliveries and so on so it was definitely going above but our kind of functional one really looking at people's whole life but gave us a really good kind of set of data of where people were vulnerable. So those were people working from home and then at the same time our care staff, leaving their own homes families every day and actually turning up at work and dealing with all of the issues including particularly in the early stages all kind of additional levels of PPE where the guidance was changing regularly. So really very different, but the focus on the customer was exactly the same. It was are they vulnerable, what's our job in looking after them and you know Caroline what I was again so pleased about is people didn't need me to tell them that. They told me so that was again very powerful, so the other big P in this is power and powerful and I think what we realised very early on again was that if we knew what our frontline, whether working from home or working in the community what they needed and we could work on delivering that for them and then leave them to do the job the you know we had full confidence that they would do the job and they would do it well and the year's evidence has shown that to be the case. So yes very powerful we've just done a little film going back over the year lots of kind of significant moments in either our care homes, or and some of our housing aspects, and we'd set up a hash tag "I'm in awe", which was really to let the staff know that we saw what they were doing and that it mattered and we had some other external people, people like the housing minister [unintelligible] the journalist, the wonderful Michelle McManus, um and Don Macaskill am chief exec of Scottish Care so a wide variety of people kind of joining in then then given their version of hashtag "I'm In Awe"and using that has built again use that evidence base that we are now able to kind of go do you know something that was done well, and people see themselves in it and recognise themselves and actually in many ways what the pandemic has done is reminded all of us but what happens at the frontline of

whatever business you're in is actually what matters. So really really kind of powerful stuff in and well we also do like everybody are delighted that today's the day when more of Scotland opens up, we've already had wonderful reunions of people with their families and so on and we hope we'll be able to keep it that way now but we also know that we're really capable of dealing with you know whatever comes to us in terms of looking after customers. Yeah yes a story all on its own.

CAROLINE 11:11

Yeah and I I find that so so impactful really the I'm In Awe hashtag I really love that and if it's okay we'll share the film as part of of this when it goes out to bring that to life for people. So you know it's it's it's it has been a really tough time bit but what you're describing is that your people are so aligned to the value the mission of what they do and they know that the customer is at the heart and at the forefront and that's really what's been what what's really seen it through I suppose and and technology and innovations is was a big focus for you Blackwood isn't it well what what was the impact there tell us about your technology and what impact does it have in helping you serve your purpose?

FANCHEA 11:56

Yeah Blackwood's been around for next year the fifty years and it's called Blackwood after Maragaret Blackwood, Dr Margaret Blackwood she was the founder she herself was disabled and she was relentless in terms of actually getting people to work with her and understand how to make the lives and the services for people with disabilities much better than they we're at that point. And I'm on it was really interesting because one of her rarely focuses walls on technology, very different technology than we use another which was or was aware of the design and technology really did impact how people can live and what they can do um so when I came to Blackwood I was really interested in that kind of legacy I'm on the on the find that there was an awful lot that we could do would be right for now and for the future and and keep using this as I say that legacy to really renew the purpose and I think what we found over the last few years that where we use technology, either in terms of including people giving everybody the means to be able to communicate from wherever they are in Scotland and whatever the condition that they can communicate through technology in a way really you obviously couldn't do a number of years ago and the on the pandemic's again been a huge opportunity in terms of changing mindsets and increasing, you know, the opportunities there, excuse me. So so one of the things that we did was developed software called a with a Dutch software company that we've branded Clever Clogs and the Clogs are the menu in people's lives so you can choose which aspect of your life you want in the Clogs and use the software to set that up so for example when we first set it up, we find that most people actually they were motivated to use it because of their interests in things like music or gardening not when their care rota was going to be or how they you know reported a repair so being able to help people set their own entertainment centers in Clever Clogs as a kind of digital hub has led us into ways of literally connecting with people that really are different now. And there's amazing again stories in that Caroline where people who you know in many cases the considered hard to reach or you know they won't be able to use technology and we are wrong. They can they're not hard to reach they're there. It's easy to do a call with them and we find families also realising that you know that their loved one could do more

than they thought so that independent living piece comes through really strongly in the use of technology but it also meant that we had to do things like make sure everybody literally had connections has digital connections broadband wifi in all our developments as well as devices and as well as digital coaching which we put in place as well. The job's not done one for a long time but that along with things like home automation in a in the Blackwood House where people you know they don't need somebody to come in to put up the blinds or whatever those tasks are but they can do them through technology last but not least and shouldn't got me started on this topic Caroline last but not least my lot of my own people know that I'm very fond of Pepper the Robot and Pepper is being developed for assisted living so when you come to need you know assistance to live independently then Pepper either robot or AI in a different forms would be so much more part of your life and in Blackwood we wanted to make sure that we stay aware but also help maybe vanguard very practical aspects of that over the next few years. So it's incredibly interesting and creative part over how we re imagine our services but again with really practical benefits and as I say I'm trying to make sure Blackwood has a purpose for the future as well.

CAROLINE 16:55

Yeah I mean it's really it's really rethinking, and I suppose it's fascinating what you said there, you know even family members make assumptions and and and we were wrong. So you know how have you got that message across you're not supposed to I'm I'm thinking here by government about local authority about family members who might say actually you know my my my family member my colleague will be able to use that technology but you know different how do you get that message across?

FANCHEA 17:27

It's it's being persistence another P, and for example one of the services we set up a few years ago with Edinburgh's Health and Social Care Partnership was what was called the night support service using Clever Cogs who basically video conference and rather than having somebody sleeping overnight in somebody's home and that was really good has been very successful but incredibly slow in the early stages because usually either families or sometimes the professionals involved maybe social workers thought it was too risky for people and so on and on, and keeping demonstrating to me demonstrations are the only way for you know that's why people believe us because we tell them yes actually practicing the showing people let them try it out testing it those with the ways that really slowly built it up and then people tell each other and if we put enough safeguards people are willing to give it a go and fundamentally our credibility also lies with - it isn't for everybody - so knowing the difference there. But for families it's incredibly important that they're involved and have the confidence in what's going on before they'll they'll really feel okay yeah, so there's lots of those kind of examples where it is about keeping going keeping try and keeping adjustment, you might want to redesign again.

CAROLINE 19:10

And Fanchea you and I have known each other for a couple years now, and you know one thing I admire one of the many things I admire about you is your passion for for what you do your passion for Blackwood but also you've got a little cheeky sense humour in there Fanchea and I think that's down to your your Irish roots so tell us about that.

FANCHEA 19:35

Caroline I've never noticed that and apparently I still sound Irish despite having lived in Scotland a very long time now so I yeah I think when you talk to him you know when you go back to your values I mean I think one of the things I found growing up in Northern Ireland, the law, my sense of social justice is actually best from that so you know when you get past the stage of everything your mum and dad do is wrong, which probably you and I are living with at the moment in terms of our own kids, but at the same time when you go back to what those values were what were based on and definitely that's you know, I feel I benefitted and brought them with me not that Scotland doesn't have lots of that too but to some extent I think that's probably why I've always felt at home but in terms of sense of humour I can't possibly understand what you're talking about as to why that would be relevant coming from Ireland.

CAROLINE 20:40

And and listen what what what's purposeful leadership mean to you, you know how does that play out is that is there, what have you learned along the way as a as a leader yourself you've you've had a you know a long successful career in in this space haven't you?

FANCHEA 20:57

Yes sort of less of the long term length, I hope I hope to have another period of time in it too for me fundamentally it's about having clear purpose, if I've got that then then I do believe I can build around that and let's come back to the people. But actually for me always having the right processes and frameworks, it's those things that none of us really love, maybe some people do, but if you don't have them then you actually you actually can't consistently and systematically keep going. Having those in place to me is an important part all of the leadership, this discussions about the right people and. And it's tough so where it's not right for people that we helped make their decisions and and and kind of move on because there'll be other things they're good at I think those things are important. For the purposeful leadership as well has to be about keeping your energy your inspiration and an ideally creativity because where does the world go without creativity so I think there's that real focus on learning on changing, on moving forward and and occasionally I'm known for being impatient.

CAROLINE 22:28

No!

FANCHEA 22:28

I'm not really understood why but nothing's ever fast enough and that's the piece that still can't quite work out if that's good or a bad bit of the leadership. For me the the other important it is that I don't have to get everything right I'd have to retain some humility and be able to say I got that wrong or the other the really useful thing is "I don't know, I don't know how to? Can you help?" and those things are just so important in team contribution as well. So yeah that's that's a quick run run some of the things that are important to me Caroline.

FANCHEA 23:11

Yeah it is yes it's so refreshing really to hear to hear that Fanchea because I think you and I have had you know some chats in the past and I think we can both be described as impatient, impatient but driven I suppose, is is the way that I flip it on its head and terms of a positive and it is because you know we we we we just want it to happen now because we're so passionate about what we do but I I love the love the you're talking about the people, processes and and the learning really and you talked about energy and inspiration, so who inspires you? I mean who do you who do you learn from, who's out there now who is doing great stuff in this purposeful leaders space?

FANCHEA 23:55

Gosh I'm I'm not very good at individuals and Caroline you probably already know I'm absolutely no good with self help books home and learn and learning from that, but actually you know I think when the things I really found when I came to Blackwood particularly, a lot of the inspiration came from some of the people who live in our homes and get our services, because many of them off of you know disabilities that it would be easy for them not to do things. And actually they've found really creative solutions to kind of make sure that they can live independently and that really inspired me to go well what more can we help with? What more can we do so you know without sounding cheesy about that that's been enormously important to keep that focus on on the people you're there for really. I've always found you know, good support within the networks of professional networks that have been involved in in Housing, while I'm not up for too many self help books I do think reading quite widely it's a huge help you and I know the vestige network is rich and the people that we you know joined together with and and bring lots of unexpected things for us to think about, and having that kind of energy and creativity is really really important so a pretty wide variety not all the usual places I suppose is what I would say.

CAROLINE 25:39

Yes no that that's that's great and while we're just thinking about purposeful leadership and people, I suppose, you've got an online community, I didn't I didn't know about this called Bespoken? It's got over three thousand members, what is that why why did you create that?

FANCHEA 26:00

It was created a few years ago now it's just being kind of reviewed and renewed and the idea was that it would get people working with us to co-design products and services and so it would be people sharing with each other as well, things they'd found to help make their lives better, easier or whatever should have top kind of variety of motives early on but then developed as a membership network and it meant that from we developed the idea of the Blackwood House which is our new standard of accessible housing and its highly accessible connected beautiful and affordable house for for this century and and as we were developing the ideas for that the design guide for that and the actual developments then the Bespoken community could link in then join and put in common some plans and so on, so all of those things became really important and co-design Caroline I'm sorry about this but you can probably hear the cat.

CAROLINE 27:19

Love it! I love a blooper! P.s. Fanchea steps off to let cat out of room, brilliant.

FANCHEA 27:34

This working from home isn't all it's cracked up to be.

CAROLINE 27:36

Yeah I really I really I really Fanchea I love the community it's something that we're really thinking about, creating that community I suppose it's a about getting voices heard as well isn't it and that commonality as well to get the community around some common interests and and how that all works really.

FANCHEA 27:56

Absolutely I think that is the shared interest and you know one of the all the things that's going to come forward in Scotland, probably potentially in the next couple years is around a human rights bill and actually having ways of people engaged in to co design and participate and be empowered will become an even better bigger part of our culture so yeah all sorts of ways to that.

CAROLINE 28:19

No that's that's that's really smart, and it's it's also again what you talked about at the start which is a customer centric and and you're you're this positive about disabled people is that a recruitment process tell us a bit about that?

FANCHEA 28:44

It is really again the kind of benchmarks for showing that you deliver to a standard on that yeah in terms of recruitment you know what we would want to encourage people with disabilities into work but the way our processes into one work, that that should be right in many ways for for people to feel confident that they can work with us.

CAROLINE 29:09

And finally Fanchea you know it's been it's been so great to hear about you, about the work, about the team about the people what are you passionate about outside of Blackwood?

FANCHEA 29:24

Ooh goodness Caroline you know the answer to that is prosecco. [laughs]

CAROLINE 29:30

I was hoping it was going to be a P I love it

FANCHEA 29:34

Yeah well it's a P you always bring up for me which is awfully good, no I think there's lots of things and you'll know as well that while I wouldn't describe myself as an athlete I absolutely love being able to do sport. Paddle, another P Spanish tennis for anybody out there brilliant get into it. So but actually being outdoors, being active is hugely important for me and helps my resilience as well as everything else and and then the prosecco I think I can clearly say, here today I never drink it on my own it's always about being social and that's the piece that turn hopefully you know we'll all be able to enjoy even more in the coming months as Scotland eases lock down, responsibly and slightly.

CAROLINE 30:31

Absolutely I can't I can't wait for it to be to be you and I sharing a bottle of prosecco Fanchea and day and putting the world to rights. Listen as it's been an absolute pleasure thank thanks for taking the time to speak to us and I'm always in awe of everything that you and your and your team do and Fanchea I'm always in awe of everything that you and and Blackwood are trying to do just just finally tell us about what's next for Blackwood what's what's coming up.

FANCHEA 31:10

Oh gosh we've got lots, we are involved in Innovate UK funded development that brings up neighbourhoods for independent living so in three neighbourhoods across Scotland and there will be more on this soon, we're working with local people to establish what is it that gives all of us more productive years as we age, so there's been lots of really interesting things I'll be able to make sure to bring sports into that too, but all sorts of aspects on that as well as Blackwood House program, delighted that we're now able to build you know upwards of about three hundred to four hundred new homes in the Blackwood House ND keeping going as I said the job around digital inclusion is never done and keeping going with that as well as the quality of service that we're known for and that means that people's trust us and are confident in what we do. So yeah there's lots more on that and it's about opening up the future on that.

CAROLINE 32:20

And Fanchea just you know wish you every success with that and I'm sure with you at the helm it will it will absolutely be that, thanks so much.

FANCHEA 32:28

Thank you Caroline, thanks.