

Episode 1: “We need a cross-sector recovery strategy to secure young people’s futures!”

Ndidi: Hello and welcome to ‘Are you convinced?’ - my name is Ndidi Okezie.

Laura: and I'm Laura McInerney. And we're your hosts for this brand new podcast! Our debate show bridging the gap between all things education and youth services.

Ndidi: Each episode, we will take turns to persuade each other to see an issue in an entirely new way.

We'll bring guest experts in to either bolster or judge our positions. And at the end, we'll ask that all important question: ‘Are you convinced?’

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Ndidi: Okay. I'm so excited. So we are kicking off with what has been my most dominant reflection coming out of the tsunami that has been the past year. And that is that we need, urgently need, a cross sector recovery plan. If we are going to secure young people's futures. Against almost any metric, you can think of economical, educational, mental health, skills, safety, whatever it might be.

Young people have been one of the hardest hit groups from COVID. Lock downs, et cetera. But whilst it seems like we'd rather expend our energy getting caught up in fights about terminology, it might be the biggest elephant in the room. We're not actually getting ready for what's to come based on the magnitude of what we have to ensure is put in place.

We cannot even begin to imagine that the approaches we have used in the past could possibly work for young people now. Yet that's exactly what we're doing. Right now, you can go from sector conference to sector meetings, to sector government briefings, and you'll hear plans that are solely thinking about issues from that single perspective.

But surely we can appreciate that young people are not so easily compartmentalized as their needs intersect. So their support and opportunities should intersect. Also the biggest frustration I have, and I have a feeling this is going to be your point, Laura, is that when you talk about the need for unprecedented cross sector, multi-

year planning, what you hear back is it's not possible. It's not practical. And you know what? It's highly unlikely to even work. But for me, what you're really hearing is it's too difficult and it's not the way things are done, but I don't get that because if there's one thing that this year has taught us, it's that there are actually no sacred cows.

Everything is on the table. And where there is enough will, we can do what we once called impossible. Young people can't afford for us to continue in our siloed ways. So let me break it down. I think when schools are thinking about what needs to be done for young people coming out of lockdown, my point is they should really be also thinking about what youth organizations, social workers, mental health specialists, et cetera, should be doing right alongside them.

That needs to be part of your plan. And by the way, that goes vice versa for whichever professional you're talking about. There should be a single, but yeah, multifaceted, I know there are differences, but truly holistic joined up cross sector recovery plan for young people. We haven't faced the need like this in our lifetimes.

And so we can't afford to even entertain the notion of a lost generation of children and young people. But we will walk into that chaos if we don't take this moment to step away from our siloes and embrace a truly, cross sector recovery plan to secure young people's futures. So that's it. That's my proposition, Laura.

And you know what? I can't even begin to imagine how you couldn't be convinced by that. I mean, it would need to be a very cynical person who wouldn't be convinced by that just really straightforward proposition.

Laura: Far be it from believing that you're calling me cynical there! Is that what's happening?

Ndidi: Tell me what is so unconvincing about that. Come on. That pretty much makes sense.

Laura: So the proposition that you've put is we need a cross sector recovery strategy to secure young people's futures. And yeah, it's really difficult to argue against that on one level, because it sounds very pleasant and it sounds very nice, but I also think there are two or three things I kind of object to in it.

First of all, is this issue around cross sector is better, like in an ideal world, it sounds better. But do we have evidence that the more people that you pile into a problem from all different areas that we're better at solving it? And I was always reasonably convinced on this throughout the 2000s.

It is actually how the Labour government did quite a lot of its work. So for instance, education was often put in with children and young people. In fact, department of education was the department for children, schools, families, and kind of took this more holistic view. But you could also get to a position where you had to get sign off and agreement from so many different people that it slows policies right down.

And if we take the argument that everything is terrible - economically, educationally, mental health – everything is ruined. Then you want to be able to move quite fast to be able to recover. And then once you're recovered, that might be the moment to try and get cross sector plans because they're quite slow.

I also don't want to get into a fight about recovery versus catch up, [such as] does it make children feel very upset if they're told they've got to catch up... But I do think we have to think about how far recovery really, really matters.

If you take, for example, the work that John Hattie has been talking about (the professor of education) for the last 12 months, which looked at education in the wake of the New Zealand earthquakes, children were out of school for weeks at a time. It's an incredibly traumatic thing to have the earth move underneath your feet.

And yet actually those children, their achievement went up temporarily because they were so glad to be back at school. They really enjoyed the routine of getting back that they found achievement actually recovered really quickly. And the big problem was long-term. It went back down again. That's where I've got to, in terms of disagreeing with you. I don't know. Did that sound cynical?

Was it as cynical as you expected?

Ndidi: No - you do this thing where you talk and it all sounds very logical and it's like, of course actually, Oh God, that's actually much more practical. Yeah. But the problem is you also made my argument in your point, the reality is part of the pushback against it [cross-sector working] is that it's hard. And this idea that we don't have the evidence to know if it is actually worth doing strikes me as really odd, because what we're really talking about, is not treating young people as if the only issue that they may have is the one that you are focused on.

That's really the heart of it. So the reality is there are professionals who are thinking about young people from their particular lens, and it's left to that young person to join the dots on all the other interactions and services or opportunities they need. Surely, surely we can do better than that.

Laura: Well to help we've got our first guest of the day, Jonathan Simons, who is the Director at Public First and Head of the Education Practice. He's also a former civil

servant at number 10 Downing Street. And Jonathan was involved for many years in the Labour government that I was talking about before – so, working as part of the teams who are looking at some of those policies, hello, Jonathan.

Jonathan: Hello. Great to be here.

Laura: What's your view on this idea? Do you think that there should be a cross sector recovery strategy to secure young people's futures?

Jonathan: So my view on this is that I'd want to break that down into three parts.

So there's a cross sector part. There's a recovery strategy and there's a focus on young people. And I think taking those in, in reverse order. Definitely. Yes, we need a focus on young people. There hasn't been nearly enough of this during the pandemic. We've essentially protected the older generations and that needs to change.

Secondly, I think we do need a recovery strategy. I think we can't simply expect things to bounce back the way they are. The bit I really have an issue with, and the reason why I'm balanced, I tend towards your perspective, Laura, is that I, I am suspicious (I know, I know. I'm sorry Ndidi), I'm suspicious of cross sector.

It seems to me one of those things, which essentially, you know, Ndidi slightly dismissed the fact that it's impossible, it's impractical and it won't work. Um, those seem to me fairly, fairly conclusive counter-arguments. Um, and on balance, I hold to those.

Ndidi: Can I boo again? Like that's the problem with that, Jonathan is that those aren't tested viewpoints.

They are viewpoints that just have kind of been allowed to become the status quo. And as I'm saying, we're not just talking about a normal context or situation. Yeah. We're talking about an unprecedented kind of context and, you know, experience that we've had. I love your breaking down to the three points actually, but I don't know how you can agree that there needs to be focused on young people, there needs to be recovery plan, but then hesitate on the fact that that recovery plan needs to be joined up because forget the terminology of cross-sector, whatever it is. That's really what we're talking about. A joined up recovery plan.

Jonathan: So I think the issue here is that one of us is talking about moral purpose and one of us is being very boring and practical and talking about how it works.

And the difficulty is that when you're actually trying to make things change, you can't just have moral purpose - moral purpose, doesn't make programme delivery

work. That's why you have very, very boring people that try and join up all the dots of these, you know, moral purpose did not make Track and Trace work.

Moral purpose did not make the vaccine rollout work. They worked because you had teams of people doing really, really boring things like thinking about how the funding and the logistics and the organization and deployment and the managing and the quality assurance of it work. Now I can hear people literally dozing off, as I say those words, and I'm not opposed to the principle of youth sector organizations and mental health and social care working alongside schools.

My suspicion, and I have seen this in the past, is that it's not just assumed that these things are impossible. We have seen through 10 or 15 years' worth of fairly painful experiences, that money was being poured into a system, but because we didn't organize it properly, and we trusted on the fact that everyone was imbued with moral purpose, we didn't get the outcomes that we expected and that we delivered.

Laura: I'm going to bring our second guest in, in a sec, but Jonathan, can you give an example of where you saw that kind of thing happening, where there was lots and lots of money, and yet it didn't bring the kind of outcomes that you're talking about?

Jonathan: There's two examples, they're both related. One of which is actually a US example, which is, if you look at the work that Jeffrey Canada did in Harlem with the Harlem children's zones. And if you look at the way in which we try to bring in some of that in the UK with extended schools. Now in both of those instances, we had a very, very clear idea that was very close to what Nndidi's articulating here, which is that you bring all of these services together.

You wrap them around children, you have a team around the child, and that is the way in which we solve all those problems. I really, really like every single element of it. But what you saw in Harlem and what you saw in too many extended schools groups is that one of two things happened. Either, it was the only thing that helped was the school.

That's what we found in Holland children's zones. The only thing that improved those kids in the promise neighborhoods was the fact that schools got better. Or, what we saw in too many extended schools' groups again, it just didn't work. We had all these people sitting around imbued by moral purpose, working very hard spending lots of money, having lots of meetings, but actual outcomes for young people did not improve on whatever metric you choose to the extent that we could have expected for what was billions of pounds worth of taxpayer's money.

Laura: Nndidi, do you want to come in before I go into the second expert?

Ndidi: No, I have a feeling I need the second expert to come in. So let's go, let's let's turn the dial up.

Laura: Allow me to turn then, to our second guest expert. We have Anne Longfield joining us. Anne is a campaigner for children and young people.

She was the former Children's Commissioner for England from March, 2015 to February, 2021. And when we talk about moral purpose versus being boring, Anne which side would you say you fall on?

Anne: Well, I want my cake and eat it. I think you should have both. And I think what the problem is that actually, when.

Some of the, what Jonathan calls, the kind of boring rollout happens, some of the moral purpose gets diluted and then it ends up being too disparate and not being able to be counted in the end. So I want both, I will go to. Lots of different professionals on different places. And they will refer to kids in different ways.

You've got pupils, you've got patients, you've got prisoners. You know, they, at the end of the day are young people, but if people see them through the lens of their professional boundaries or indeed their professional services, then they end up certainly seeing part of that. So I want both, and I think for each of those examples, I can see how it could be done differently and it can be done differently by somehow having that leadership, but also that infrastructure that gives consistency because we have to get beyond actually joined up, meaning everyone sits in a room and feels comfy and warm and feels that something's happened just because everyone's had a chat into that kind of obsessive following up some kind of joint mission, which means that you can measure where risk to kids have reduced. You can measure where outcomes have improved, but actually there is a mechanism that you have locally to make that happen.

Laura: You said locally there at the end. So yeah. Who would be your person that does this in the system?

Anne: I think that obviously there's a role nationally, but I think this in the end is going to be about people and places locally and having that local infrastructure. Now I can remember all sorts of development boards. There was an early years development board. Yes. The West London and the children's zones approach, I think ultimately has to link with the strategic deliveries that we have in place, which are local authorities, but it has to be much more than that. It has to be a way that actually there can be joint accountability, but it has to involve others in delivering, that it has to have a vibrant role for the voluntary sector, but it can't be just something that's shunted out for someone else to do.

So I want to rebuild that into something which is much clearer and much simpler and much easier for people to work with.

Laura: Ndidi, are you nodding? I can't see you.

Ndidi: I'm nodding furiously. I'm jumping up and down. I'm clapping. I've got my pompoms out. This is exactly it. And I actually think, Jonathan your point, like misses the mark in terms of trying to divide it into moral purpose versus boring stuff. I actually think that's quite an easy way to dismiss what I'm talking about here, because I actually think the boring stuff is the joining up. The boring stuff is making sure that wait, even if I can say success for my bit, is it honestly success for that child? And a really practical example where I think that like, surely we recognize the flaws in what we're doing is we're talking about coming out of lockdown, there is all of this attention on summer, right.

What's going to happen on summer. And you've got all of this money, effort, groups talking about catch up, talking about what needs to happen for young people from a learning perspective, but then you've got all these other (let me just talk specifically about the youth sector) you've got all of these programmes that are trying to think about how you prepare young people to be ready to learn, considering all the things that they've gone through, how you find young people again, because of all the things that have happened in terms of contact.

Those two strategies are on the whole, not connected. How does that feasibly make sense that you are talking about the same young person and you've got from the school system, you're thinking about this thing regarding that young person, somebody else is thinking about something else. People are going to create all these wonderful plans, all of these strategies, pour money into it, but never the Twain shall meet.

Never is there a moment to say, okay, if this is what the school's planning, how does what I'm doing aligned to that? And vice versa? I think not to do in that. Is part of the, I don't think it's moral purpose. I think it's because we're not comfortable enough with accountability that goes beyond just what we do.

Jonathan: Now you're talking my language Ndidi. Cause now you're talking about hard-edged accountability and you're talking about how you can incentivize human beings with human behaviors and natural human heuristics to do the right things and to do things in a way that actually makes a practical difference.

And the difficulty is that too often in the sector. And this is what you're not doing now, but too often in children's services broadly, we substitute. discussions about

accountability and discussions about human performance, for a sense that because we are all good people doing good things that ought to be enough.

So to take your really practical example, that absolutely should be that join up. But my point is let's take that a step further -who is going to be the person that instigates that discussion? It can't be done at the national level.

Who is going to be the person that says, right, these are the 50 or 100 or 200 children we are thinking about, this is the way in which we're going to convene the details about them.

This is how we're going to look at how they're doing. This is who's going to reach out to them. This is how we're going to fund that. This is how we're going to check whether it works or not. And my argument is, the only way to reliably make this work is to run it through the schools. The schools are the universal service for young people.

They are the only people that have tabs on the majority, not all, but the majority of young people that we're talking about. And I think unless we put somebody formally in the lead (and this is what extended schools got right, and got wrong) we risk just bringing too many people together for meetings, with tea and biscuits, where we all talk about the same children, but we don't have clear actions that come out of it. And a clear sense of who is on the hook if things don't go the way we want them to.

Anne: So I want us to use schools because they're built for kids, they're everywhere, most kids go, and we pay for them, you know, they're ours. So they're a resource that we have, I want them to be used, but I don't think that has to be, we just give money to schools and leave it to that because I think what we've got at the moment is we've got a school system, which doesn't have the join up that would make sure that it's actually a cohesive plan in every area.

So I want schools to clearly be part of the mix. And I would be very happy for most of this to happen in schools, but I think the organization and responsibility needs to go beyond that. And I think that is the infrastructure we are talking about - I'm talking about having to set up now. I don't think it has to be local authorities either, but I think probably it's easiest for them to do that.

And it would mean that there would need to be particular individuals who would be working on that, with that as their job purpose. Now that's a much wider brief than a lot of them already have, but it goes to the heart of wellbeing. And I think that now's the time to actually look at an infrastructure of wellbeing that can actually operate in local areas.

And we've got an infrastructure around safeguarding and infrastructure about community safety and the lights, but actually there isn't an infrastructure at the moment about wellbeing. The others aren't perfect, but at least they exist. And I think now's the time to put that in place for young people.

Ndidi: Can I just take my argument a bit further, because I don't know about you, Laura, but I feel like, you know, I think I've pretty much convinced the room. I don't know about you, but like, I feel like that this is now the time to push it. That even if you took Jonathan's approach, which again, for me, it's exactly what I'm talking about.

Definitely hard regard against it, not just soft, we are all doing something good, very, very concrete in terms of outcomes. But my next part of my argument is that this can't be short term. And this can't be framed around a particular government and tenure that we need to think about this because we've acknowledged it's going to be hard.

We've acknowledged that it's so complicated. All of these wonderful things that have been barriers in our way. So if we are deliberate about it, if we are specific in terms of understanding who kicks it off, who owns it, but we're clear that there is this value that comes from this, join up. This also can't be something that just gets shelved the next time a new government comes in.

So my long-term recovery plan is long term.

Laura: But I'm not sure that you have convinced everyone that it's a cross sector, recovery strategy. I've just heard two people say essentially what we need is an education strategy in which, and this is my other worry about this whole cross-sector stuff is that it very often begins that, and then we're ends up as no actually schools should do it.

And probably one of the reasons I'm more skeptical about cross sector work than I was 10 or 12 years ago is what happened with the education, health and care plans over the last 10 years. So moving to a system of special educational needs, which was supposed to be holistic and where education and care and health all work together what's actually happened over the last 10 years is that schools by large now also have to provide in-house quite a lot of health and quite a lot of care, and don't really get a lot of support and a lot of funding for it.

And I agree with you that in an ideal world, would you maybe put schools at the center, bring loads of youth, then bring loads of summer schools and extended schools, bring in therapists, yeah, sure. But what actually always ends up happening

is the funding doesn't come in with it. Schools end up with massive amounts of responsibilities and then they end up not focusing on education.

And I was pretty critical of the idea of changing away from department children's schools and families to the department of education. I'm still not sure it was the right moment and the right way to do it. But I understand now that if you don't keep education quite central, you can end up with it not being talked about.

At all and all of these other issues become what takes all of this space and takes over the whole sector.

Ndidi: Can I just do a pulse check though, because I don't think anyone said that Laura and I think what you've done, this is typically what tends to happen when we talk about cross sector and then the role of different people.

Particularly if we say the school should initiate it for all the reasons that we've heard. The school initiating cross sector collaboration does not equate to the school doing it. And I think that's the problem. So what both, exactly what Jonathan just laid out and then actually pushed it even further away from the notion that it always has to essentially be the school that kicks it off.

None of those things mean that it all becomes embedded in the school strategy. That's not what we're talking about.

Anne: Mine wasn't an education strategy, mine was a wellbeing strategy, but I do think...

Laura: But in schools, right? So if we think that schools are synonymous, synonymous with the education aspect of this, rather than the youth or broader sector.

Anne: I mean, a lot of schools when they, when they were, um, redeveloped, the buildings were developed, were built on a community basis. They were designed around communities. So there could be further use than just the classroom time.

I know that's a generalization. I mean, Laura, one thing you say, I think I'd really agree with this about there's no time to lose because you know, sometimes these things, partnership creations, they can take months and months and years. But I think there is something here about, you know, the notion of building back.

Yes, of course we've got to regain ground, but the better part of it. And the reason I believe that so much has landed on the doorstep of schools. And we've seen it over the last year, especially with schools, you know, reaching out to families, delivering food, you know, all of those things is that actually all those are other services.

The infrastructure stuff. I'm talking about, the help for families, support for children with special needs and the likes. So many of those have found themselves dwindling in an environment where there were a real shortage of funds. So there's a point here that say in an ideal world, we might have this, but we know it's not going to happen because there won't be funds.

Well, actually I'm not prepared to say there won't be funds. And we've seen actually over the last year, what happens when those services aren't there and what the head teachers are told - they can't do both.

They can't run the level of support that they had during the pandemic with families when schools were only partially opened, and also have kids in school and teach them as well. And it's exposed a layer of need for kids and their families that just wasn't being met before.

Jonathan: Anne is completely right on this, but I want to take this on and slightly disagree and I think it also goes back to Laura's point.

So. That is absolutely what we have seen even pre pandemic over the last decade - schools funding has more or less held up and almost every other service funding, particularly that within local government has shriveled. And the reason is because you have to go to where the capacity is and you have to go to where the kids are and schools have the physical capacity.

As Anne said, my nervousness about funding any other organization other than schools is that it is ultimately schools that will end up carrying the can and the responsibility for this, which is why I've always been a fan of schools, grouping themselves to do this. And it may require dedicated people. It may require, for example, groups of schools hiring their own.

Mental health support outside of really acute services. It may well involve schools hiring youth services or educational welfare staff or pastoral staff more broadly. I think those two things can run side by side, as long as you're very clear as a head teacher, who within your organization is delivering education. Who's delivering what at children's services. I think that's fine.

Anne: And I agree with so much of that. But there needs to be somewhere in there, which is about not only the funding, but the consistency and the part of it which has always as well, fallen short recently, I think, is the fact that there aren't those organizations there, or those individuals there in the consistency or in the volume required to make that a reality.

So there has to be something that runs alongside that, there needs to be that wider family support and wider wellbeing support that is grown around schools. And then I think we've got a model that you can work with.

Ndidi: So I feel like I need to figure out a way to kind of bring people back to where I am as well. I feel like I got 50% of the room maybe? So your point, Jonathan, and I think this is the, to what you were saying again, Laura, the danger of that is this equivalence of schools being the initiator that I think you initially said, and people on the hook, I guess, to make sure that the work that the collaboration starts is effective and has very clear goals. I don't think that that's a real stretch to everything happening within the construct of the school. And the reason why I have two problems with that one, after being in teaching for 10 years, being a school leader, thinking very much about school leadership and teacher training for, you know, almost 20 years now, the biggest revelation I've had coming into the youth sector is how under utilized expertise of other people were in our thinking.

And I think there's a, um, dare I say a bit of an arrogance that comes from this notion that a school is best place to do everything. And the problem is if you go too far down the spectrum, which is, you know, it's all within the school, it's the school's job to work with everybody as opposed to a real, mutually equal collaboration that the school might be responsible for initiating and holding the pen on, but that's not quite the same thing as well. I think the last thing you said, the problem I think is that we therefore do a disservice to the expertise that exist outside of teacher training, outside of school development - what we keep doing is not working. And it's young people that continue to be the sacrificial lambs to this, and I'm not talking moral purpose and all soft kumbaya stuff. This is real concrete, young people that are being, I think like, failed, really because we, as adults cannot digest the fact that our approach is not working for them.

Anne: It also gives those that are responsible for responding in policy terms and funding terms, some kind of false sense of security that something's actually happening. So a couple of years ago, when we had the terrible few months of very high youth violence that we saw on the streets, Actually counted how many interventions there were from government. There were around 12 different pots of money that were created at that time, across different parts of government, they would all been around 30 or 40 million each.

They each lived their life course in a very small area of activity that I couldn't tell you any one of them, what the name was or what they did. If you put that together and have something which is much more joined up, but also much more focused and can bring in others to be able to deliver it in a much more accountable way.

You're much more likely to get some real results at the end of it, but there's something else here. I think there's also something about. Within whatever notion we actually come down on the end has been right or wrong here. When the troubled families programme started to work, there you had an approach to working with families, which is around working alongside them and working with a family directly.

And they said in the initial days that actually that worker would be orchestrating the other 16 professionals involved in that adult's life. Now there is something there, it's not quite the same, but it translates to what young people actually experienced as well. So the services we choose to have need to be about whole children's lives and stick with them rather than being a segment of them.

Jonathan: So I think that's a really, really great example actually. And troubled families is a really good example of actually where the state did (if you read the evaluations), did incredibly effective work. And I think it also relates to the other point that you just made out, which I hear so many times and really, really resonates, which has, as you say, you have 12 different pots of £30 million, if we'd have had one part of £360 million, we could have done a lot more than the sum of its parts.

And I think if you've got those two things together, you really can get a long way. Again, what troubled families did though, is it had somebody who was there - it had the point person, right? It had the key worker who was the person who worked with the family. And it was their decision as to whether, you know, they went round at seven o'clock and dragged the kids and the parents out of bed.

It was their decision as to whether they focused on getting back to work. It was their decision on whether they focused on substance abuse or youth violence. And, it was a personalized approach in that instance to every family now. It was wildly expensive and couldn't begin to scale to the issues Ndidi's talking about, but it also wouldn't need to, but again, it had somebody that was on the hook and had some money and made it work.

I think the one other point I wanted to make, though slightly random, and probably a point for Ndidi's side, is the only difficulty I see with having schools at the center of this is what do you do about people who are over the age of 16 and certainly over the age of 18. And I think the one thing I was really, really struck by is the ONS just put out their latest updates on the labour market.

Now the ONS say that 693,000 people have lost their jobs over the last year. 63% of those people who've lost their jobs were under 25. A further 25% were between the age of 25 and 34. So 88% of everyone who's lost their job in the last year is under the age of 34.

And people who are aged between 50 and 64, 32,000 more of them are employed than were a year ago. So Ndidi is 100% right, that we are failing our generation of young people here, or we risk failing a generation of young people. And that includes people from the ages of, let's say, 16 to 25. And I don't know what the answer is, but schools at the center of this risks losing some of those people in a way that we can't afford to do.

Ndidi: Again, literally Jonathan just said, everything Anne just said on that point, I put that to you. And where where's your head at on this right now?

Laura: And I take a lot from what you said as I indeed, I think you made some really important points around the arrogance, particularly often of the education sector.

And I was guilty of this myself as a teacher, not seeing the broader sector at times until I stepped out. When I was a journalist interviewing people in the broader sector, we're working with businesses that said, I think building on everything you've just said, I would argue. That's the reason why I don't agree that the idea of cross sector recovery strategy to secure young people's futures is the way forwards.

I think it doesn't work and it doesn't work because overwhelmingly what I've heard is its funding. It's not a plan. It's not a strategy. It's not even joined up thinking, it's funding that has been at the heart of the problems for such a long time. And they will be at the heart of the problems going forward so maybe a strategy would help with the funding.

I could maybe take that argument, but ultimately it's the cash. And I also think it's arrogant, not just to think that. Schools should be at the center or teachers should be at the center, but it's arrogant to think that everybody has to speak to everybody else in order to move forward on this. If you take something like the troubled families program, it took a specific issue.

It got specific key workers and they did a job that they were trained really well to be able to do so. Yes, it was coordinating, but it wasn't a big national strategy. Nobody sat down and said, every single person, who's a troubled family will have these sign off points. What they did was they created a role.

They gave accountability to that role. They gave funding to that person and then they solved the problem as best they could. And for me, it's why, if you're looking at something like summer schools, Why not just fund summer schools really well with the people who can resolve them - they could use schools as a channel.

They might get in touch with schools. They might speak to schools that might be the grounds or the location, but it's not a cross sector strategy. It's its own thing. And I

just think if we spend too much time trying to get too many people in the room, it slows us down. I think that it's money not strategy, which is at the heart of all of this.

But I will accept. You've all convinced me that there does need to be more done for young people and that young people specifically, aren't going to bounce back. Jonathan, that was particularly compelling from the ONS so well done on that bit.

Ndidi: Okay. So just before we bring it to a close, I want to introduce a really special feature.

It's probably fair to say it has been a long time since we were all young, but we want to definitely bring in the voices of young people on this. And so this feature is called #AskYouth let's have a listen.

plays #AskYouth feature - see IGTV

Ndidi: So to wrap up, for me, the bottom line of this is that in all of the areas where we spoke about what's difficult, I really disagree that it's primarily about funding. And I think that it ultimately is about intention and it is about being held to account on what any and all of us are doing and whether it works. But for me, the bottom line is it's a luxury to think about this from the adult's perspective.

And nobody can convince me that if we really started from what is best for the young person, thinking about connecting what we are doing and aligning what we're doing and ensuring that there is a safety net on terms of whatever that young person might need, depending on whatever professional needs to step in, no one can convince me that is not best for the young person. So right now we are stuck in a system and we're stuck in an approach that ultimately says it's too hard for adults to figure this out, all the barriers in our way. I don't think 2020 allows us to keep saying that. There have been things that have happened over the last year, but I think all of us would never have dreamt could have happened at the pace, at the speed or at all.

And so that's it. Bottom line for me is COVID has resulted in us needing to do unprecedented things in order to ensure that we are not seeing young people suffering for generations to come purely because we couldn't join up the solutions that work. So that's it. So I'm going to ask and see where people have landed.

Um, I have a feeling I know where we're going to end, but let's start Jonathan. proposition, the kind of debate topic here is that we need a cross sector recovery plan to secure young people's futures.

Jonathan: Oh Ndidi, you make me sound like the worst person ever, because....

Laura: Remember boring versus moral purpose, Jonathan, you have to decide now!

Jonathan: This is the bit where I trample on your hopes and dreams and say, I'm hearing your desire have a better place for all children.

Um, it's all terribly difficult. Have you not read the treasury funding guidance?

I fear that I still do come up against the cross sector elements of this. We need lots of people involved. But to me, a cross sector strategy is too often a recipe for a lot of adults thinking they're helping, but not actually helping.

And on that narrow basis, I am not convinced.

Ndidi: Okay. Anne, Children's commissioner campaigner per excellence. Are you convinced?

Anne: Former! So. On the basis that we can change the wording from cross sector to joined up and on the basis that that means that we can also have real accountability and the kind of focus that troubled families brought those families, then I am convinced that we do, but I think the whole notion of cross sector business is outdated and has so many connotations, which are slow and nonproductive that actually we need to reinvent that infrastructure and make it applicable to the situation we are now in.

Ndidi: Right. I'll take it. I'll take it.

Yeah. Turn, turn the whole thing on its head, but I'll take it was somewhere in there. The hardest nut to crack, Laura? Are you convinced?

Laura: I mean I want to take a lesson from Anne's diplomacy, which was just extraordinary because I could be like, well, if we can just change it to we need some more funding, I'm totally up for that. That sounds great. Um, so big, big props for that one. Anne, I enjoyed that sway.

Um, no, I think for me in the end, I do come down on the same side as Jonathan. The problem with strategies is that they can be a byword for not doing anything and talking, and I know. Ndidi you were like that's just a big excuse because you don't want to have a difficult conversation and that could also be true.

I'm willing to accept that proposition, but for me, the speed, the money, and the fact that when you've got people who are experts, let them crack on and do it, and don't keep making them try and talk to other people that are either not interested, don't see what the point is, is the quickest way that we can help young people get back on the road to recovery that you've all convinced me. We need to be on.

Ndidi: Okay, well, I'll take it. I'll take it.

Anne: I think you got there just about.

Laura: Anne Longfield thank you for joining us today and Jonathan Simons. Anne, where can our listeners find out more about you and the work that you do?

Anne: The social media platform, not least Twitter, but other than that, if you email contact@annelongfield.com, you'll get us.

Laura: And Jonathan where can our listeners connect with you?

Jonathan: Yeah. Likewise, Twitter quite frequently - more frequently than is probably good for me. Um, but also the Public First website has a lot of the work that, uh, that I do professionally. And you can find out more about it there.

Laura: Brilliant. Thank you. Well, that's it.

That's it for the show. Thank you for coming with us on this ride. You can subscribe to the show on Apple podcasts, Spotify, SoundCloud, or anywhere you get your podcasts.

Ndidi: And we are so excited because we have officially launched a Clubhouse club just for Are You Convinced? So for all of you who are on Clubhouse, search Are You Convinced?

Join the club, and we'll see you over there to continue conversations around all of the issues and topics that we discussed on the show. Really excited to hear from you, the community, and get you involved in these debates.

Laura: Remember we'd love to hear from you via our social channels too. You can join the community by following us @ukyouth on Twitter and Instagram @uk.youth.

Tell us what you thought of the show, and if you're going to say that I was wrong, at least try and be kind about it.

Ndidi: And playing us out. I am so excited about this. I want to introduce you to a amazing group called G Town. They are performing a special song that they wrote just for UK Youth, as part of our recent Inspiring Hope Awards.

I really love this song. I feel like the words should be like an Anthem for the past year. Huge. Thanks to G Town for doing this. Everyone enjoy. Are You Convinced is a podcast brought to you by the charity UK Youth, produced by Sarah Myles and presented by Ndidi Okezie and Laura McInerney. Don't forget to rate and subscribe to the show. Thank you for listening. We appreciate it.