

--between the lines--

Ep 08. Radical Help – Hilary Cottam

RICHARD LONGHURST: So Hilary, I think I must dive straight in with the most obvious question, which is: why are you here, talking an International Development institute on UK domestic issues?

HILARY COTTAM: Well I'm really delighted to be here, thank you so much for inviting me. I mean, *Radical Help* is really a book about how to make a 21st century welfare state. And it focuses on Britain. But the ideas within it, I developed through my international work, particularly the kind of different practice I have and the participatory practice was something I grew in Africa and Latin America. But I also think, more fundamentally, what Britain needs right now is a concept of development which goes beyond services that meet outputs and outcomes in a very sort of transactional way. And most of that thinking comes from Development Studies and so those roots are very important to me. And that's why it's great to be here.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Well, that's a very logical and interesting approach and I'm interested in the . . . well, the challenges, is the word people use, about professional silos and whether people were . . . the opposition you may have faced in crossing these contexts in this way.

HILARY COTTAM: Well, it is interesting, when I came to Britain, I mean, I did a PhD for various reasons, I wanted to extend my thinking, but I also wanted to live here and see if I could start to work here. And I wanted to work in local government, I thought that would be the level at which I could do the kind of community base-building that I do. And I couldn't find work, because nobody then – this was the late 90s – could make a connection between all the work I'd done in the developing world and here in the UK, which I think would not be the case today. Now, the forces of globalisation mean we can see different practice, but that's what sort of drove me down the social entrepreneurial route: I realised that I basically had to start something myself, which I did. I kind of had been working in Zambia and Mozambique on water systems; we had a government in the UK that was going to kind of renew outdated infrastructure in exactly the same way as I had fought against at the World Bank. And so I sent a pamphlet to every school in Britain and said, 'If you want to think differently about this, can you join me?' and that was really the beginning of my UK work.

RICHARD LONGHURST: So, in terms of getting into work, as it were, paid work, we all have to use paid work [laughs] . . .

HILARY COTTAM: [laughs]

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . did you find it was necessary to set up your own establishments as, in fact, you've done, that was the way to do it?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes, so that's what I did, basically, is I used that to kind of then raise money. And the first enterprise I built was about rethinking school buildings in this century, asking: what would a 21st century curriculum look like if we're going to invest all this money in British schools? Why are we going to kind of do up 1950s schools, why aren't we going to use that money to rethink links between a modern curriculum? And so I raised the money from foundations to do that work and did one school, which became a kind of award-winning school and then this process was replicated in many more schools across Britain.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Hm-hmm. So I just wanted to ask you about, you know there is the Sustainable Development Goal Framework . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . which is universal.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: And there's growing talk about what is the UK doing about the SDGs. And I just wanted to ask you again, are you finding when you talk about the SDGs that there is some feeling that development issues are being taken on board in the domestic sphere? Or is it [*words unclear, due to speaking over*]

HILARY COTTAM: Well, I mean, I think . . . it's a good question, because I think Britain has met one SDG – we've got good water and sanitation. I would say, I don't know what people say, but I would say we haven't met any of the rest of them. But, actually, I think I'm only asked to talk about SDGs in the international context, so I have done some talking around this, but never before in Britain and I think that there isn't . . . yes, that we need to raise the issues and raise the game in Britain, this isn't a matter of debate, and I certainly think at a kind of household level, if you went around and asked people, 'What you think about the SDGs?' nobody would know what you're talking about.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Well, I can certainly . . .

HILARY COTTAM: And that's a problem [*laughs*]

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . agree with you there, I'm finding that . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Right.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . very much in my own experience. So, just to come on to your book, which I enjoyed reading very much. You place a lot of . . . well, not 'a lot', the central emphasis is on relationships.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: And the thing that occurs to me is that we see, frankly, you know, as you've pointed out, a lot of our instruments of the welfare state don't really take that into account. So how do you feel about the design of programmes that, from the start, take relationships into account? You . . . it requires a lot of start-up time, it requires a lot of listening and a lot of design, when people really want to see you just get up and get going and get the money out of the door.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. So I mean, I tell a history, a very short history of the welfare state in the book and I think what's really interesting is that relationships were always designed out of British institutions, that Beveridge and the founders of these post-war institutions felt that they couldn't trust what they called 'the common man', you know, who had all these emotions and couldn't be trusted, so you needed very strong bureaucratic rules and apparatus in order to make change. And I think what I make an argument for is that although one could argue that was fine for its time, it's definitely not fine now because the nature of our problems has changed. So, if you think about challenges of aging or climate change or chronic conditions, all the big challenges across the world – and this is definitely a British issue and an issue in Africa, Latin America and so on – these are challenges that can only be solved with deep participation, horizontal bonds between people. But I really like the fact that you asked me, 'Does this not take a lot of start-up time?' because it does and I use a design process that, you know, the first nine months are around opening up what the question should be, fostering those relationships. Now what I would argue, and I think what the kind of metrics around my work show, is that if you invest that time in the beginning, later on speed up, and you have fast and sustainable social change. But, of course, the problem is in a current era of log frames and everything else, how do you persuade people to fund those open processes at the beginning – and that's definitely a challenge and, actually, becoming more of a challenge.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Yes, I mean, funders want to see results and they want to see them quickly [*words unclear due to speaking over*]

HILARY COTTAM: Well, more than that, they actually want you to tell them right at the beginning what you're going to find.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Yes.

HILARY COTTAM: And, in my work, what I say is, I take an issue like aging and I say, 'Would you like to put in money?' I think I run probably the biggest social innovation projects in Britain, because I'm designing to kind of make system change, so I need to kind of already work at a certain scale, and I say, 'You know, everybody's had a go at this problem, nobody knows the answer, so put some money in, we'll start this open participatory process and we do not know what's going to happen.' So those are brave and committed funders because that's not the usual way, unfortunately, of doing work.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Hm-hmm. Well, I think you'll find aspects of that, certainly, in some of the development work that's being done here. But as a very broad judgment do you feel that the development community is, as it were, further ahead on this participatory work than the UK domestic community? That's a very broad question, I know.

HILARY COTTAM: Well, I mean, definitely I learned all my methods here at IDS. I mean I talk about Robert Chambers in the book, the . . . what I learnt from Robert here at IDS was completely life-changing for me and changed the way that I work. I then had to grow and change those methods in a UK context, which I also talk about, which is where design comes in. I think that when I came to work here in the late 90s, what had been happening in the so-called developing world was far ahead of anything that had happened in the UK. I'm not sure now, I don't know the developing world well enough, but people tell me that it's quite hard – you can do it in small pockets, but to really do deep and open participative work is becoming harder, but probably everywhere, because of certain . . . I'd say neoliberal frameworks that we're trying to work within. I'm sure the practice is still kind of more . . . more radical in the developing world.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Because as you mentioned in your book, Robert has this phrase, 'handing over the state' . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: And what this is supposed to signify is handing over power.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: In other words, those who were previously in charge of other people say, 'Now look, you're in charge . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . and we'll follow what you do.'

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: So, again, you've been talking about is very power-laden, you know, either implicitly or explicitly.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. And so a good example . . . as you say, *Radical Help* I go cradle to grave to show what a 21st century welfare state would look like and I start living on estates in Swindon alongside families that have got all kinds of problems of debt, poverty, abuse. And I tell the story of one mother called Ella who has got 73 different social, health workers and so on around her, 73 different people involved in the life of her and her family. And, literally, we ask all those people to hand the stick back to Ella and we say, 'Look, you've had decades to try and resolve this, nothing is happening, would you

all stand back and we'll ask Ella . . . we'll offer support and she can figure her own way out of this crisis,' and that's exactly what happens and then we kind of replicate that work with many more families. And I think that's exactly what we're trying to do: hand over the stick.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Yes, I mean, when I read that I thought, 'This is totally mad.'

HILARY COTTAM: *[laughs]*

RICHARD LONGHURST: You know, why is no one in the system saying, 'Look, maybe there could be 10 people but not 73.'?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: So were there . . . when you were introducing your very radical approaches, were there other people saying, 'Well, we know that there's a problem, but we have important things to suggest, but a bit less radical,'? So are there people in the system who are not quite going the full bulk of that you're saying . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes, yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . but nevertheless are trying to improve things a bit? And can you work with them?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes, definitely there are. But I think your question is so important, because, first of all, why do people not see it? And that goes back to the question you ask asked at the beginning is: professionals working in silos. They are all sitting, visiting Ella's house, they're not always there at the same time and only Ella sitting there on her sofa has the experience of all these people – and so do I when I'm there – has this experience, otherwise, you know, the policeman's there at one time and the social worker's there at another and so there's not . . . until we made an actual, physical plot of this, there wasn't a kind of obvious recognition this was happening. However, the leaders of the Authority where she lived could see the money involved and they said, 'There's got to be another way.' But I think what's really important is that, with kind of market frameworks that have taken over so much work all around the world, there's been this real emphasis on risk. And so if you manage people's lives and nothing really awful happens, nothing will happen to you as a leader. But if you take a risk to say, 'Let's all stand back and think about it in a different way,' and something does happen, then, of course, the wrath of the media and politicians will rain down on you. So, in the British system it's very, very brave to try and change it. And so there are people trying to change it already in the system and those are the allies, those people that are trying to kind of make work, and, 'Can we amplify what's already good that's happening in institutions?' is also a big part of what I do.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Yes, when I read your book I realised you were caught between many forces: the privatisation forces, but also the, 'We cannot dismantle the Beveridge concept . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . of the welfare state.' So you've really being caught in a lot of crossfire in that regard.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes and I can feel it on social media now and I think that . . . because I think one of the things that's happened is that, because the welfare state is under fire and there've been such massive deep cuts, that those, perhaps on the left, who tend to defend the welfare state have sort of dug in and said, you know, 'We can't tinker with it, we've just got to hold it where it is.' And, actually, I think what we need to do is kind of reinvent that original vision and we need a welfare state, but one for this century and really that's why I wrote *Radical Help* because I thought what's needed . . . I mean, the book is written for the general public and it tells a lot of stories, because I think what we need are stories that can help us imagine what those frameworks that we love, but no longer work for us, could be like in the future.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Could you just say a little bit about your experiences in Moulsecoomb?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Because that is just, you know, you could . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Down the road.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . almost look out the window and say, 'There's Moulsecoomb.'

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. I came through Moulsecoomb on the train earlier today. So, Chapter 2 is about Youth Work – what could we do to support young people? And I worked in two places to do this experiment, which actually failed – it's the example of failure in the book. And so I was invited to work in Moulsecoomb. And I suppose local authorities were very concerned about what was happening to young people growing up there. And that, however much they might try and improve schools, for example, it wasn't enough to transform the opportunities of young people. And I think what we saw and experienced Moulsecoomb is why a developmental framework is so important, that doesn't just talk about providing opportunities. What we saw in Moulsecoomb were young people that were utterly cut off from the wider framework and possibility of Brighton, you know, no visits to the town centre, no visits to the seaside living . . . partly that's the geography of the South Downs and difficulties of local transport and so on, so our response was how could we connect those young people in Moulsecoomb to different people and opportunities that were all across the local area. How could they develop bonds that could begin to elicit what they might be interested in, how they

could grow as young people and, actually, we were very successful in doing that. The problem was that we enabled young people in Moulsecoomb to make a huge array of relationships with other younger people, older people, and it was considered to be very risky by the Local Authority that you were having teenagers interacting with other people, as they saw it, unsupervised. I mean, in fact we had checked out through police checks and everything, but they saw it as too unsupervised and couldn't allow those kinds of connections to happen. But social research shows those connections are actually what transform and lead to different life chances.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Yes, this is the central message of your book really, you connect people up that might not otherwise get together . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . to develop capabilities. And I was . . . many little things in the book I was very surprised to read and one of them was about the youth of Moulsecoomb not ever getting into Brighton . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . as the main town and how disconnected they were from that.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes, I mean, their school is a pathway from the estate, there's kind of high unemployment. Again, for parents living on Universal Credit or whatever, it's very difficult to take expensive local bus journeys. And so what would and did make a difference for those young people was to kind of begin to say to them, 'What are you interested in? And through those interests how can I connect you to others?' And there's a huge amount of social research, as I say, that shows that really who we know is going to kind of make a difference to our life chances and, also, that as we're becoming an increasingly unequal society, we know less and less diverse people.

RICHARD LONGHURST: You mentioned a bit about reflective practice . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Which is a favourite . . . which is a well-known topic here and I was just wondering, again, whether . . . what people's reactions were to that, your colleagues and other people, that you would go through this process of looking at what you're doing and, again, returning to what Robert Chambers says, his famous phrase 'embrace error' . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: You know, if you think you've done something wrong admit it.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: I mean, was important in your work?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes, I mean, I say that all our work is always a prototype and I use the analogy of Formula One, that even the winning car is still a prototype that you can find error in, you can take apart and you can improve and I think that mindset of sort of 'tinker and get going' is really, really important to me. But it's so interesting that you say you talk about reflective practice here. You see, nobody I know talks about reflective practice. I need to spend more time here and one of the things that . . . quite a lot of the book is dedicated to how hard it is to be a professional in current welfare services and why we've got huge vacancies in the NHS and so on, and how can we have well-supported professional careers and I think reflective practice is part of that. And in everything I started, I put that in. But it's expensive and that often gets a bit that's cut out later down the line, when we're no longer around. So it's good that you're emphasising it here.

RICHARD LONGHURST: I think, certainly in our research, when we become involved with communities that that is part of it. Where you've got to examine what you do.

HILARY COTTAM: Well, I think there's this commitment to kind of really good intellectual thinking and practice here at IDS and that that leads . . . that's very unusual and it leads to that kind of iteration and reflection.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Yes. So I think that's an important topic. So I must just say then, as you've raised that point, I thought your book was a wonderful interweaving of practice and research.

HILARY COTTAM: Thank you.

RICHARD LONGHURST: So what came first? I mean, did you do a quick literature review and said, 'Look, this folks . . . this is out there, these are our ideas,'? Or did you establish certain practices and thought, 'What's there in the literature to back this up?'

HILARY COTTAM: So, I'm continually going in circles, really. I think it's like chicken and egg and, I mean, when I studied here I'd already worked for a number of years in Africa and Latin America. So I've continually tried to weave the two together. But how the actual experiments in the book work is, I write a very short manifesto and I say, you know, 'Research shows this, practice looks like this – usually very different to research and, you know, what would happen if we imagined like this?' really broad brush strokes and then that provides the kind of opening question to do the actual work with communities and to begin to build a solution to support older people, or a better way to find good work – these are the kinds of examples in the book – and then, of course, then I rethink the kind of practice and the theory, so one is building on the other the whole time.

RICHARD LONGHURST: I was also very interested to read some of your comments about scaling up and replication. Because . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: This is something I think that people here get asked a lot about, 'You've got to scale up', you know, and 'it's no good having a pilot, it's got to work on a broader scale, what would you recommend?' But you were trying . . . I wouldn't say you were pouring cold on water that, but you were necessarily saying, 'Look, again, it's a generally slow process, and people have to learn and listen, our relationships get interconnected.'

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: So is there . . . have you got any ideas on the fact that, okay, [Participle](#) has done this and now we are . . . we've got to go, we've run out of money, but we really hope that the interconnectedness will continue,' and are there things you can be . . . you can institute at the beginning of a programme to ensure that interconnectedness will continue?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. So we didn't run out of money, actually, it's just that after 10 years I thought, 'I can't keep repeating these experiments, the work's out there,' and actually the third part of the book is dedicated to how to kind of do this work. So . . . of a nine month process the first third is dedicated to finding out what actually is the problem, because usually what we tackle in our work is a symptom, not a problem. And then, once we've got a whole array of problems, the next part of the process is saying, 'Which of these problems will actually begin to crack open the system?', because I'm interested in system change, so I'm interested in mass scale, I want many millions, billions to benefit. But what I don't think will achieve that is a kind of cookie-cutter rolling out, industrial process. So I think what's really important is: what is the problem you choose in the beginning and how can that begin to lever open the system? And then what we have done is we've been able to kind of replicate the work by thinking, 'Okay, what are the core components that we can put into different places where they can grow organically.' But I think I have wasted a lot of years, actually, thinking about industrial change. You know, everybody says, 'Can you scale up?' and you go down that path and you think, 'Yes, yes, I must be able to prove industrial scale,' and it's taken me a long time and a lot of work to see that that is not the way forward, but other ways are the ways forward. I mean, in my book I draw on Robin Murray who also taught me here and talks about economies of cooperation rather than economies of scale. You know, a lot of the co-operative movement has done kind of plants, and grown in a much more organic way. So they've reached what we would all call 'scale' but not through that industrial scaling process, and that's what interests me.

RICHARD LONGHURST: And so you do feel in those circumstances that people's capabilities have grown and they've been able to cope with this new status quo that they're working in?

HILARY COTTAM: You mean when the programmes grow bigger?

RICHARD LONGHURST: When they grow bigger and reform. . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . obviously, for example, coming back to Moulsecoomb, and the . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: people, the younger people are going into Brighton and they are interconnecting with employers . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . mostly are they able to cope with that new dynamic?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. So, I mean, I suppose that will be a really good example of that, in Moulsecoomb we set up a kind of community which we called 'Loops' and we took young people through experiences and grew relationships and then actually they drew in more young people. But then when we grew that program in Croydon, we just took the core concepts and then we started it, in a way, with kind of different relationships in Croydon and that's the way I grow, sort of like a beehive, if you like, rather than growing some sort of back office. So there's some bits that are core. Another example will be the ageing work I do, we have this kind of enterprise called Circle and it has scale, because it's gone to lots of different places, but each one is slightly different, it just keeps the core capability concepts. Now, the question would be: how many members of a Circle or Loops could you have before that . . . I think probably about two thousand, before you need to get the next hive going, if you like.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Are you going back or planning to go back to some of these experiments, to see what's there and building on that, because that's . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. Yeah, so I'm very I mean . . .

RICHARD LONGHURST: You've invested so much time and energy into these.

HILARY COTTAM: *[laughs]* So, some of the work which I write about in the book has really grown exponentially. So, in some places we started an experiment and it's gone on to transform the whole way that a Local Authority works and I'm very much in connection because, of course, that work's grown way beyond what I started. So I am now learning from something that I can't claim any credit to, but started with something that we did, so I'm still learning. I'm also, of course, thinking now about what's going to be the next thing that I do and I'm very interested in the area of good work and I'm hoping to grow and build on the work chapter in the book.

RICHARD LONGHURST: So coming back to some of the old development/domestic crossovers I was very interesting to read about the A.K. Sen capabilities approach . . .

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: . . . which I've certainly seen used in a development context. So, how was that important to you and how did you use it in your social experiment?

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. So I suppose that I had learnt about Sen and the approach and Martha Nussbaum's work and I think Sen was at the World Bank when I was there, so there was a kind of overlap and I learned the approaches. And they attract me for a couple of reasons. One is power, that they're about power, which was a question you addressed before about re-conceiving agency, but also I think what's very important is that they work on internal issues: how you perceive yourself, as well as external issues. You know, 'Do you live in a community where there isn't any good work?', for example, like we can't just pretend that that isn't an external block. So I think that dynamic way of working is really important and quite lacking in a UK context, where we do either tend to ignore those external problems and, particularly recently, with the whole happiness agenda, have really focused on the idea that somehow people can just change their lives by focusing on their internal realities. So I think that this work is about power, it's about challenging that, it's about a developmental journey – so it's not just about saying, 'Perhaps you've got a problem with drugs, you just have to kind of get to a point where you don't,' it's about how can all of us flourish in a kind of deep and meaningful way. So I found it a very powerful way of working, but it is a way of working that people are beginning to talk about now, I think, in the UK context but is new here and I think should not be, and I think it should be embedded in UK policy.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Have you heard . . . has this been brushed off by people saying, 'Oh, it's just about training and education, we're doing all of that.' So we do things to *them* as it were.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: So that their capabilities are grown, do people understand that it has to be grown internally?

HILARY COTTAM: Yeah, so that's such a brilliant question because, of course, that's the other thing, you know, you can't do a capability to somebody, you have to provide support, but you can't do it. And that is absolutely turning our British welfare models on their head. And I think that that's a kind of ongoing . . . I don't know, journey, struggle you might even call it. And definitely what I find is that people do sit there saying, 'Oh yes, yes we do this.' And then when you ask people to visit the practice and actually see it – you know, a bit like the way we worked with Robert all those years ago –

when people actually see it, then they realise, 'No, this is different to what I do,' and that kind of moment of change comes. And people are released, they want to work in a different way.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Well let me move towards wrapping up by talking a bit more about capabilities. Your book, I mean, how far do you think this is helping the capabilities of other people, the policymakers and the decision-makers? You've done a lot of work publicising it and so on. Have you had any positive feedback from people who have sort of seen the light and said, 'Yes, we must do things differently,'?

HILARY COTTAM: Well, it's quite early days, I've just gone into a third edition in hardback which is kind of amazing for a book on the welfare state. I wrote the book, as I said, I didn't write it for policymakers. I wrote it for the general public. And, actually, what's really surprised me is that particularly professionals in the current welfare state are reading it. And I think what's happening is that there's lots of people who want to do this work that it struck a chord with and they're like, 'Yes, actually this is possible, I can see that I'm not mad in the corner thinking this is the way to change things, I can go forward and change these things.' So I've had a lot of very positive reaction, unexpected really, from all corners of the health service, social work and so on, so I think that's very exciting. The bigger political picture, I think, you know we're currently, as we speak, lost in a kind of, you know, Brexit deep hole. So unfortunately it's not a time for those debates, but hopefully, you know, just as the work goes much deeper, so the book will last.

RICHARD LONGHURST: But one of the more unsettling matters I read in your book was that you did have David Cameron and Eric Pickles turn up on your door and they were interested and they just did say, 'Well, look great, this has got to go nationwide.' And of course, it just then went nowhere.

HILARY COTTAM: Well, so that would be a classic example of scale, as we were talking about before, which is that they came, they thought it was incredible, they said, 'We must provide this work to every . . .' what they call – I wouldn't use this language – 'problem family, troubled family in Britain.' And so they set up a market mechanism by which Local Authorities were rewarded if they turned families around. And of course what happened was that therefore, you know, such is the kind of nature of the system, families were . . . I mean, we invite families to participate. They put families in the system that were not nearly as . . . they didn't have the same complex issues as the families we'd originally worked with and then they said that they kind of ticked a box and said that they'd process these families. So I think there were two problems: one was that they didn't work with families with the complexity that we were working with, and the second was that two now longitudinal evaluations have shown that there was no impact on those families whatsoever. So for me, that would be a classic example of taking a really good idea and not growing it in the right way, but just pushing it through a kind of industrial pipeline. But places where our teams had started and were left have carried on with the work and they are still growing and getting very good

. . . I don't want to call it 'results', but families' lives are changing in the programmes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Another one of the things I liked about the book was you kept, or you collected, cost data.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes.

RICHARD LONGHURST: And so you showed that your approaches were not, as one might expect, more expensive, but less expensive. So all of the listening and the nurturing was not an expensive business in terms of costs?

HILARY COTTAM: No. So I think that's really important and it also goes back to a very good question you asked earlier which is that we're spending less. It might *look* expensive, because we're really investing in building that relationship which takes time, but after that, change happens very fast at the individual level and at the community and system level. So all the work we do costs less and, of course, actually, I would say that if . . . let's say, a family like Ella's are able to then exit the system, they've been in it, revolving and can exit, then that's a kind of even bigger change. I mean, I don't do the work to save money, but I am pragmatic and there isn't any money – or we're not allowed to use any money in the UK at the moment – so we have to kind of work within those parameters.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Well, I just feel this has been absolutely fascinating, both reading your book and then hearing you now. And so, final question, in terms of, perhaps, our student body for who we feel optimism, because they are the ones taking things forward, what would you tell them to do in terms of implementing some of the ideas that you've promoted there and shown work.

HILARY COTTAM: Yes. I think what I would say is, wherever you come from in the world, the most important thing would be to spend some time actually living alongside others. By which I don't mean, in inverted commas, 'a field visit', I mean really getting to know the reality of others and imbibing that, because that will kind of change your perspective on the world and will empower you to do work that really, really leads to meaningful change, rather than the better management of problems. And you know, in my case that work happened here at IDS when I went to work in Harlow in Essex doing waste rounds, collecting the bins alongside the bin men. So, you know, it can be in your own country it doesn't matter where you're from. I think you need to turn those perspectives on their head and that's the most important part. And then you can really think about the theory, but that very different practice, outside of institutions, I think is fundamental.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Well on that note, thank you very much Hilary.

HILARY COTTAM: Thank you. It's so great to be here. Thank you.

RICHARD LONGHURST: Thank you again.