



## **Finding Our Way with United We Climb (ft Marie Uri and Yasmin Lazarus) - Supporting equitable experiences & opportunities in Climbing & the Outdoors**

### **Full transcript**

#### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Hello, I'm Mary-Ann Ochota. And welcome to Finding Our Way, the podcast from the British Mountaineering Council. Okay, the BMC is all about diversifying the voices we normally hear, talking about the outdoors. So in each episode we talk to folk who are usually busy climbing, mountaineering or walking, and we find out what they've learnt from their adventures and explore what the rest of us can learn from them too. So think good chat, memorable stories, and hopefully some insight and inspiration from people who are making real change happen. Joining us today are two of the directors from United We Climb. They're a relatively new organisation and they're committed to helping people who are currently underserved and underrepresented in climbing and the outdoors. They create opportunities and events for people to get involved that are safe and welcoming, but they also, perhaps crucially, work with the climbing and outdoor industry to identify and remove barriers to better, more inclusive access. Connecting with us from London, welcome. Marie Uri, who uses she/her pronouns and Yasmin Lazarus who uses she/her pronouns. Hello. Welcome!

#### **Yasmin Lazarus**

Hi.

#### **Marie Uri**

Hi. Hello.

#### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Thanks for coming on Finding Our Way.

#### **Yasmin Lazarus**

Thank you for having us.

#### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Okay. So, first of all, tell me who you are, how you got into climbing, mountain sports, what kind of things you guys get out to?

#### **Marie Uri**

Yasmin?

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

I'm Yasmin. By day, I'm a child and educational psychologist and I think that feeds my passion to sort of understand people and their behaviour. And that kind of comes into my role at United We Climb too, but by hobby, I am a para-climber, which means I'm a climber with disabilities and chronic illnesses. I got into climbing maybe about eight years ago now? And I kind of stumbled upon it. A friend of mine wanted to take me for many years. I actually felt too self-conscious for a long time. I felt like I wouldn't be accepted within any kind of sporting community, but when I tried it, much to my surprise, it was amazing. People were cheering me on no matter what. You know, I think I was doing the easiest climb in the centre and very quickly I wanted to go outdoor climbing, and I did. I've always been in the Girlguiding movement as well, so I've always had a passion for the outdoors and I wanted to marry those two up as well. And yes, slowly, slowly I kind of weaved my way into the community a bit more and really saw that the climbing community is amazing, but that has a long way to go in terms of various things. And I'm really excited by the work that we're doing with United We Climb to start that journey.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

And how about you, Marie?

### **Marie Uri**

So how did I start? So I saw a friend climbing in Brazil and I was like, 'Oh, that looks really cool.' And I wanted to start doing it, but I didn't know how, so I contacted a friend and she took me to climbing and showed me how to do things. What happened then, is that I couldn't climb without her, so I went and I took a course so I knew how to do like a figure 8 and how to belay. And after that I think I got completely hooked. I started climbing just because it was so interesting and I think at the time when I started climbing, I didn't think about the way I look or who I was. I just wanted to do it. I just wanted to climb, to be fair. And a couple of years later, my friend Bobby was like, Oh, I'm really glad you stuck to it, because there's not many people looking like you doing it. What she meant was my size, because I was a little bit bigger and also as a black woman there were not many people my colour doing it. But I was just so passionate about it. And then a couple of years into climbing, I joined the Marylebone Mountaineering Club and they were so welcoming and it's like a little family and we go away on the weekends and this is how I got completely hooked with the climbing. So I weave in between bouldering, top-rope leading but my favourite is trad-climbing and it's really interesting now - once I joined United We Climb organisation I really felt privileged, in a sense. I felt that I was privileged to come into this sport and I want to share it with everyone and I want to help people to get into it because it's not easy. And I think the work we do with United We Climb is quite important. It's not just about 'does it diversify climbing?', but also, you know, representing different people, type of people, bodies, abilities. So yeah. That's in a nutshell how I got into climbing.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

So both of you have described that first experience of climbing as being relatively frictionless, maybe? That you did find people who were welcoming, who were at the wall or in the mountaineering club that kind of went 'Yeah, sure. You're in. Come join us! Let's have fun!' So doesn't that mean that there's no problem? That people are welcoming? That it doesn't matter what colour you are, what size you are... Oh, no, no, I'm getting... Okay, fill me in, breakdown where it's going wrong.

### **Marie Uri**

I'm going to take this one because it's very simple and well, simple and complex at the same time. I would say when I was going away with my club, I could tell that I wasn't the norm. I was the only black woman in the club, so we were going to the Lakes, Peak District, wherever we were going. The thing is, when you go outside of London, you get a little bit more stares, you get a little bit more micro aggression or just like condescending little comments like 'oh, well done, you went up there.' 'Oh, my God, you climb?' Uh... yes. I'm in full kit... But the thing is, like at the time, because it was within the club, you don't want to bring that back to the club - you are here for a good time. Also, I met so many other people who tell you they a different experience to mine, you know, coming into climbing. So climbing, yes, the climbing community is welcoming, but there are pockets of the climbing going on, who are not understanding the whole diversity of things. And, you know, I had a very interesting conversation not long ago about people who are in their little bubble. They've been climbing was the same people, they might have diverse people in the environment but maybe it's the diverse people who never told them about their struggle, never told them that about their experience. So those people are unaware of this. And for them, it's just what it is. It's like 'Yes, we are welcoming. We love everyone.' But they don't know about the struggle, even when they're not aware of it, because all they interested in is climbing; nothing else. Then it's interesting, what's happening in politics and I see people are struggling... And you know, I try to be compassionate and listening with people like that, but I try also to inform them that actually it's not plain sailing all the time. There are issues within the climbing communities.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Right. I've heard that phrase that 'the crag doesn't see colour' and I guess that's kind of a little bit naive because climbing operates within society and society definitely does see colour and size and disability and all the rest of it. Is that the kind of essence of it, Yasmin?

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

Well, I was going to say as well, yeah, I completely agree with Marie that we are very London-centric. We are so used to walking out, going to our local wall and actually it is a bit more representative, not loads, but a little bit more. And I think, actually, when you're new to climbing, you don't notice the microaggressions as well as I think... I wonder if Marie had the same experience as me. I'm also a plus-size climber and I didn't notice those sort of condescending comments. And for me, when I was a new climber, beta-spraying and that kind of stuff was almost appreciated. But now I'm a more...

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Wait, wait, wait... pause. As a non climber... What?

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

Beta-spraying is where someone will almost tell you how to do a climb unsolicited, so you might want to work it out for yourself and actually they're telling you, assuming that you can't do it, and it's 'spraying' because they are saying it at you in an unsolicited way.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

And that's called beta-spraying?

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

Beta-spraying. Because Beta is the knowledge of a route, and obviously spraying is just the spraying of words, right? Yeah, I received a lot of that at the beginning, but for me at the beginning it didn't feel like... Because anyone's a beginner and actually beginners want help. But now I'm eight years down the line and people assume I'm a beginner because of my size or assume i'm a beginner because of my disability, then you start to see those

microaggressions. So I think when you're a beginner you're almost blind to it, which in a way is good because I did feel, I think if I'd have felt the way I did now about that, I wouldn't have felt as welcome. And I think, the other thing for me, and this is a very personal thing, is that I have just become more disabled over time. I was not as disabled as I was when I started climbing, so I've noticed that a lot more. But yeah, I completely agree with Marie in that being London-centric is like being in a bubble. It really is.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Right. Okay. And when your London clubs or London groups of friends go out into those non-London venues, if you trad climbing, walking, out for the weekend or whatever, do they notice or experience those little looks or... I don't know, comments made, when you're at a site getting your kit ready?

### **Marie Uri**

I don't think they do. And I don't think it's fair for me to just let this happen. Because when you're in a club, like for example, people work all week and they want to go outside and just climb. And the people I'm with, they're very welcoming to their family and you know, I love them to bits. And we always, you know, we're supportive of each other. But sometimes you have to pick your battles and when you have those battles. And I think at the time, when I was going out with them, I chose not to because that's not the time. And so we never really talk about diversity. I mean, maybe we talk once, but I don't think for them it matters that much, as long as I know how to belay properly, you know? Take in the rope and you are very safe and like, you know, we didn't lose anyone. You know, hikers didn't lose anyone or we didn't leave anyone behind as climbers and stuff so it was fair. You know, sometimes you have to weigh-out where and where to bring those conversations out or not. And is it worth it in a sense, because you don't know how it's going to go.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Right. So that means that you're doing not only dealing with whatever that little altercation was, you're also dealing with 'Okay, well, what do I do with the information?' 'Do I share it with the group and make it all about race all of a sudden?' or 'do I just get my head down and focus on the climbing?' and you're still carrying that experience.

### **Marie Uri**

Well, yeah. But also like carrying that experience means that I am able to deal with it in a certain way. So now I can talk about it and I can make it better for other people. This is what it's about. So, like I said, you have to pick your battles and it's not all the time you have to go to war. And I have to say, sometimes I don't want to fight, I just want to go for a climb, but I still want to have those conversations when it's the right place and the right moment. I don't want to have the conflict and have the hard discussion, because sometimes it's not the right time.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Yeah. But you have United We Climb, which I'm guessing is very much the right time and the right place. On your website, you describe yourself as a JEDI organisation: justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. Tell me what that means and what is it that you do at United We Climb?

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

So most people are quite familiar with EDI, without the J, but I want to emphasise the equity part of it rather than using the term equality. I think we like to talk about equity because it's not about equality, it's about making sure that those that have the needs, get the resources, not that everyone gets the same resources, that those with the most need get the most

resources and that's a big priority of ours. And those that need the most representation, that have the least, get the most from us almost.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

So an example of that might be subsidised training courses for people from ethnic backgrounds that are not majority white, for example.

**Marie Uri**

Yes.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Okay. That actually levels the playing field rather than going 'anyone can apply'.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Exactly.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Is not fair. Right. Okay.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Exactly. So, yeah, we have a big focus on that. And as we've said, we sort of noticed, we know that in the outdoors, even research tells us now there's been an abundance of research that in the outdoors, and lots of underserved communities, underrepresented communities are not accessing the same resources, they are not accessing anything that, you know, we might hope they are, and we would like there to be a way that we can help. So, that's a big part of what we do, for sure.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

So that's getting underrepresented communities into climbing, into these outdoor activities. What about the work that you do with industry and the workforce?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

So I think that we also noticed that actually a lot of the reasons for... Well, there are two kind of prongs of this. A lot of the reasons that there are gaps are because of the attitudes, the gaps in the workforce, in the industry. The way the industry is set up is not accessible to these populations, but also not representative. That's the other prong. The industry itself is not representative of people who would like to climb, people who are accessing climbing or would like to access climbing. And I think that double prong is really contributing to the lack of empowerment we're seeing from these populations. A lot of the work that we're doing is to try and tackle both those problems. We'd like to empower industry to be more representative, but also empower industry to have the tools to make climbing a more accessible, more representative, and more equitable place for everyone. And I think that actually what's been my experience so far is that a lot of climbing walls in particular do want to do this, they just really actually don't know how or they've got the wrong idea of how to do this. And so it does seem to be that we've got a big role for that ahead of us.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Yeah. Okay. So I mean, that is the gazillion dollar question, isn't it? So, 'okay, we've got an issue that perhaps people, overall agree with that; some people don't, but let's assume you do. How do you go about doing it and what is the wrong way of doing it?'

**Marie Uri**

I mean, we have partnerships with a few climbing walls and a few brands and they want to support us. And well, I want to say about brands and places supporting; when you support, and not do just one project and then say bye-bye, you do a project and you carry on going, and the support is not necessarily always financial. Yeah, it could be manpower. It could be training people. It could be providing entrance to the climbing wall or it could be like providing a gear hustle or things like marketing or mentorship. So there are different layers we can do, but also we try to make them understand what it is to make climbing accessible. I'll tell you a little story, just my favourite lately, I have a friend I was talking with, about making climbing accessible and my friends said 'but really cheap shoes are only £40.00.' And I said, 'you know, like £40.00 is a lot of money for some people. Some people they can't even afford a £1.50 bus ride.' And the issue with climbing and getting people into climbing, it doesn't stop at the wall. It started way before that. So how do we make people understand that accessibility is not just 'give us a discount for people to get into climbing.' You have to understand the whole journey of that person to come to their first session. So this is what we're trying to do. We're trying to educate people about what it is to be accessible. I want it to be equitable as well. So it's not simple, but you have these conversations to make sure people understand that there are other biases that go into climbing, it's not just financial. There's also a lack of representation. If you don't see people that look like you in those spaces, you don't want to go there. And we have examples of that. We have people say that to us, that they didn't know they could go climbing. I'm a black woman and I have met many black girls and women who told me they didn't know black women were climbing. I'm like, everyone climbs. For me, everyone can do it. But it's because I know that. But they didn't know that. I'm an RCI in training and we took a group of black women outside and some of them went, 'oh, wow, it's amazing that you're doing that because we didn't know there is a space for us.'

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

It's our favourite line. 'You cannot be what you do not see.'

### **Marie Uri**

Yeah, exactly. And it's the same with the para-climbers. The para-climbers collective is such an amazing bunch of people and they're from all different walks of life, and I think a lot of people when they see us coming to a climbing wall, they're just amazed, and I can see the look of bewilderment. But I like that. I like that because people now they can, you know, like that's the thing we do. We have to change the mindset of people, of what it is to be equitable and inclusive.

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

I think you're so right, Marie, that it has to be sustainable, isn't just like, 'okay, we give you this money and this one project, bye-bye.' A big focus of what United We Climb want to do is that sustainability element. How can this continue? And I guess in answer to your million dollar question is, 'well, we're working on it.' Our first step is we're doing some research, we're conducting some research of our own. The ultimate aim is we would like to provide some training to climbing walls that would like to access it, about how to provide an equitable, accessible climbing experience. But we would like that training to be focussed on the real life experiences of members of the community that are more accessible, or are struggling, or have those barriers. So therefore we're conducting some research, we're mid-process, which is really exciting. We're going to have some focus groups. Initially, our focus groups are para-climbers, black and ethnic minority climbers and LGBTQ+ climbers. Those are just our initial focus groups. We would love to expand it to other groups. We're trying to keep it contained for now.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**



And these are people who are interested in indoor climbing or does it include sport, bouldering, trad climbing, whatever discipline?

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah, well, we would love to include, from my point of view as I'm helping to draft the focus groups script at the moment, I'd like to hear about their experiences of all types of climbing, but with the focus that this is going initially to climbing walls. But I think actually it will go to outdoor instructors, too. We would love to be able to influence outdoor instructors. We'd like to be able to have an impact as far as we can. I think our first impact would be sort of those indoor climbing walls where the majority of our climbers are accessing at the moment, or not accessing, rather, you know? But we want to hear it from them. I'm a para-climber myself and they want to assume that my barriers to climbing are exactly the same of that of another climber and design a whole training based on that. We want sort of evidence based training and we can then develop a programme from, we've got a grant for that from one of our business partners, one of the brands that supports us and they've been incredible. We've been really thankful. Big shout-out to Arc'teryx. They're incredible. We are so chuffed to be partnered with Arc'teryx. They also, to make climbing accessible for our communities, have already given us a grant to fund our research and our training programme, they've given us the funding specifically for the development of the training programme and not for the research itself. It's for the development of that, but our research is kind of linked to that. They've also given us free entries to one set of climbing walls that's all over London so our communities can access it. We do a variety of sessions throughout the month on a monthly rolling basis for our communities. Both Marie and I help facilitate that. And they've given those that can't access it due to financial reasons, they put some punches on the system and we can give those out on a needs based basis and it's really fantastic. So yeah, shout out to Arc'teryx. Thank you.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Nice one. What's the time scale for your research, for the training, for I guess climbing centres going, 'oh, okay, we need some of this. We know that we need some of this.' How quickly can you start changing things?

### **Marie Uri**

I think it's a very interesting question because in terms of timescale, it's quite complicated, isn't it? I'm working 9 to 5, Yasmeen has a demanding job, Rachel has got her own business, so those things are taking quite a bit of time, because we all volunteer. So it does take a lot of organising and I'm hoping by next year we will be done. But like I said, it's because we're all doing it, we have a team of volunteers, we all volunteer. Nobody is getting paid and we're doing that alongside our lives. Do you want to add anything?

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

I was going to say exactly the same. I think it's important to emphasise that we are all doing this on a voluntary basis right now, just because we are so passionate about it. Yeah, that's literally what we're doing. Timeline wise, we would like to, by the end of this calendar year, have completed our research and have a draft pilot out for the training. Whether that's realistic, I hope so. Yeah, I've just finished a doctorate, almost. So I've been a bit busy with that but you know, that frees me up a little bit but then you never know what will come up. So we're all doing this on a voluntary basis and we want to put as much time into it as possible, but there are only so many hours in the day and we do also want to climb ourselves!

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

It's kind of a gnarly problem, isn't it? The idea of wanting to reach audiences who don't necessarily know they have permission or a space that they can get involved with outdoor activities that you're kind of getting stuck into the much bigger societal issues, of poverty, of access, of deprivation or privilege. How do you reach the people who aren't already hovering around the leaflet and going 'Oh, wait, I see something that kind of takes my interest. Maybe I could? Look, that's someone who looks like me.' We're not even seeing it because they're so far away from that first step.

### **Marie Uri**

I was going to say there's a lot of networking, there's a lot of posting, being visible, going to all the climbing walls, I think. Yasmin, you're very good at doing all of London stuff. I'm doing a lot of outdoor. We're been in touch with all the companies that want to do stuff, like Black Dog Outdoors as well, they want to support us. So it's about doing collaboration, about reposting other people's stuff. So you keep churning a machine where you have different groups like, for example, we are supporting quite a few groups that set up by themselves because they define their ways and their needs. So we got (?), we've got (?) of colour, we've got the para-climbing collective, we've got the Asian climbing crews days with a few women of colours in Sheffield, there's a group of LGBTQ+ in Sheffield. So it's about building this network of people and supporting them. Ideally you want everyone to come and climb and go about their business like it's just climbing. But the reality is, all those groups need support for getting out there, and you will find that different groups have different needs. So some groups are quite good at doing it themselves and going out there, and some clubs might need a little bit more support.

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. And I think as well, you're right that a lot of the networking we've done, is we almost see ourselves with these smaller groups. We almost see ourselves in our umbrella to support them like they're their own groups, but we support them as much as we can. They almost have their own networking ability. So for example, as you said, ClimbMuz is run by a good friend of all Siddrah and therefore is doing her own networking within the Muslim community. So we've almost got such a wide network of different groups there but to reach those people, there is real hard-to-access groups that don't even know climbing exists. Rachel's done quite a bit of work about this, our other director Rachel. There's three of us, she's the other one and she's been in contact with local community trusts. So up in Sheffield they've organised community events, like the people who've literally never heard of climbing, they had this boulder in a park, these play structures, and they did stuff to do with that and it was just an area/community thing. And she's been really good in Sheffield networking up there and trying to improve outreach. So yeah, I think it is difficult because how do you reach a hard to reach population? That's the eternal question.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

I was just going to say that the organisation that you mentioned, for our listeners, the organisation that you mentioned ClimbMuz is Climb-Mus[lim] as in Muslim climbers.

### **Marie Uri**

Yeah.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

Reading the transcript, that's going to be pretty sensible to you but for those listening that's what we're talking about.

### **Marie Uri**





What I was going to say as well, it's very interesting; I heard we had someone push us and say they wanted to have a bit more diversity within their community and I had a conversation with someone else and that person was saying 'if you want to have more diversity, don't wait for the diversity to come to you. Go to them.' So you have to go to the places where you have more diverse people because they don't know you exist and they can't come to you, see. It's a both way thing. So you can't just suspect that people will come to you. You have to go to them. But also there is another thing as well; within your community, if you want to have more diversity, you have to show them diversity as well. You have to show them that you have people within your communities that are diverse, that look like them, because they exist. You know, people they like to see a king. Yeah. It's a societal thing, you know, like...

**Yasmin Lazarus**

It's going back to that first point of, you know, well, why were we phased when we first started? I do also believe that's because of the kind of people that we both are. And I think that like...

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Just in terms of your personality?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yes, and I don't think that there are, as you know, a lot of people that go, 'okay, well, I don't care.' There are a lot of people that look at the community around them and go, I can't see anyone like me. You know, I feel uncomfortable. I'm very like, 'Oh, well, I'm going to go stand in this crowd.' We're both very like that. But that's actually not the norm. I think this is why we've kind of found ourselves in this position, in this organisation, I believe, because we break the cycle of people, in inverted commas, you know? It is a cycle of, 'well, you don't see the people, so they're not there, but then they're not that, so you don't see them in it.' But we're very much like, 'okay, but we don't care about that.' But a lot of people do.

**Marie Uri**

It is a weird one, like I said, when I started climbing, I didn't see many people like me, but I didn't care. I just wanted to climb. I just wanted to enjoy it. And when I joined my club that was all nice. And I was like 'oh, yes, Brilliant, I have to buy a tent, let go.' But not everyone has that gazillions of confidence. And, you know, I don't say I'm not shy or anything like that, I have my moments. But say when you come to do things, I just go about it, and this is why I want to empower people to go into climbing. So the way we do it in another example, is different affinities group everywhere, but ideally you want the affinities group separate, you know whatever group that, they're going climbing, they get the confidence and then they can go climbing by themselves. They know now the environment where they're going, is going to be safe so they can go by themselves as well. So it's like almost you're introducing 'Come to a group, come to this wall.' Now you know the wall, you can come by yourself because you'll be fine and ideally you want everyone to have that. But not everyone is like that and this is what we're trying to do.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Yeah. So this idea of the affinity group, so a group for people who share some kind of specific aspect of their identity?

**Marie Uri**

Community group if you want.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

So I guess that's a stepping stone towards a future where genuinely, people don't see the difference and it is accessible regardless.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Well, I think there's a lot of controversy, actually. Not controversy... more like split opinions, I would say. I would say that a lot of people personally, I think we would like it to be that affinity groups exist because people need affinity groups, they need that safety and sometimes they just need a place where they can be with people that share those characteristics, but also the role of an affinity group, and it can be both/and it doesn't have to be either/or. So the other role of an affinity group is to allow people to participate in the wider climbing community and to give them that stepping stone. Whereas I think a lot of people see, and I've seen, we've seen this backlash, unfortunately, on Instagram where people see affinity groups and saying it's segregation.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Yeah. So that it kind of promotes division.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yes. And you know, we would argue that actually, no, it promotes safety, it promotes that community to feel accepted, to feel safe, to feel belonging. Belonging is a big factor in whether people take something up or not, including a job, including, and this is where my sort of psychology ability intersects with climbing. We know that especially actually in children and young people in my research, in a school community, there's so much research on school belonging. It's the same in adults. We know that belonging is such a big factor in whether someone continues to do something or whether someone's mental health is positively affected by something, whether they feel they belong. It's a basic human characteristic. We have evolved to feel like we need to be accepted in groups to be kept safe. It's an evolutionary response. So I think that affinity groups empower that. And actually, okay, some people might only ever want to climb in their affinity group and that's their choice. But if one person feels from their affinity group that that has enabled them to feel safe at a wall and then go by themselves or in a pair, that's amazing. Then we have, you know, done a service to the community, done a service to them and I think that, yeah, it can be a both/and situation. It doesn't have to be an either/or.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

How much work is there, do you think, for people who are in the majority to actually acknowledge all the things that they take for granted? I noticed on your inclusive climbing Facebook group, you know, there's the kind of group rules, the regular ones, you know, be polite, no spam, blah, blah, blah. But then the last one was 'Check your privilege' and it explains it. I'm going to read what you've written: 'do the work around your privileges, know white supremacy, fragility, racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia or other -isms here. If you get called out...' And I think this is really cool, if you get called out, be open to the learning opportunity.' How much of your work, United We Climb, how much of your work is actually with the majority white, cis, straight, able bodied male, perhaps climbing community to go 'folks, you've got some work to do here.'

**Yasmin Lazarus**

I think a lot of it.

**Marie Uri**

We've been talking to some organisations both separately or together at some points and it's really interesting to see how they don't fully understand what it is to be inclusive.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Can you give me an example?

**Marie Uri**

I don't want to give away certain things, but like, for example, when you want to be creating inclusivity and people don't understand that like for the basic thing, like if you have a session for example, just lowering down the music because you have people who are neuro-diverse and it is almost mind blowing to them that we ask that.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Is a lack of trust, isn't there Marie? That's what we've almost seen is that we, even as people that are part of a community that are, you know, I am myself neurodivergent, people that are part of that say, 'well, actually it would really help if X, Y and Z' say you lower the music. And say it repeatedly and say it will also help this group and it will also help this group. And then they don't do it. It's almost like it seems like, yeah, there's a lack of trust because they almost just cause it doesn't affect them.

**Marie Uri**

And they don't understand it. It doesn't hit. And sometimes it is very difficult to get into the position to say, yeah, the reason we asked that is not to make your life difficult. We actually try to make and create an environment and we don't ask it to be like all the time, just for the time we are here as a group because we bring in business as well. You know, we understand we have a few demands, but we are trying to make it suitable for some people who need that special requirement to come back to you. They will come back because you made them feel welcome. And sometimes that's difficult, all the difficult conversations we had about, um, discount and accessibility, especially within the disabled community where people don't understand that, you know, sometimes we don't have the money.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

But it's like exactly what you said. It's exactly what you said, Marie, that people don't even think about the journey to the climbing wall. Climbing doesn't just start at the wall. And, you know, people who are disabled, researchers found, that people who are disabled on average have what they call a disability tax. So people who are disabled on average have to spend £583 per month more than they're able bodied counterparts on things related to disability. Now, that's just an average. It could be more or less. And that that in itself has such an impact, as you can imagine on...

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Can you give me an example of what that £583 might get spent on?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. So I can give you examples from my life, for example. So there are some days I'm lucky enough that, well, I'm not lucky, I am needy enough that I have a freedom pass, which means I can use Transport for London stuff for free. However, there are days where my pain is so severe that I cannot face getting on a tube. I will therefore, if I want to go somewhere, I have to take a taxi. That's an extra cost. I will have to think about the cost of that taxi. Additionally, as it's a sort of monthly average that additionally I have to pay to get my glasses done, I have to pay for a tint. What the people who are listening can't see is that my glasses are tinted. They have a precision tint on them. So not only every time my prescription changes do I have to pay for new lenses, I have to pay for a new tint. That's an extra cost related to my disability. What you also can't see, I'm sitting on a chair that has a specific cushion on it. I have one of these on my office chair. I have one in my car. I have one to prevent, so I have a connective tissue disorder, it prevents my spine from miss aligning as I

sit. It's all these different little things that kind of add up that you just don't even think about every move. I kind of have to think more about how this is going to impact my disability? And there are financial elements to that. And I think that, yeah, we had a big thing with the para-climbing community where actually people were not able to access even the concession price that was being offered because it was so high and people yet don't understand these sort of hidden costs of disability. So we're really trying to disseminate that research that was done by the disability charity Scope and they've called it the disability tax and it's a really useful document to read if you want to. And it does explain those additional costs and give a real sort of justification of actually why people who are disabled do need to have financial considerations as well as physical access considerations when they are all trying to go to sort of an event like one of ours.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

It strikes me so strongly talking to you both that this idea that the burden of making climbing more diverse, more equitable falls disproportionately on the people who already perhaps have more burden? Is that fair to say? In that experience that the people who have it easy, who stroll up, take it all for granted are going 'oh, well, thanks. Thanks, Jasmine. Thanks, Marie, for doing all that work because it's, you know, it's good. Well done you.' Pat on the head etc. But it's so easy to default to the idea that this is work that you should be doing. It isn't is it? It should be work that everybody should be doing.

### **Yasmin Lazarus**

I mean, I think that's the idea, that idea of privilege as well, isn't it? And checking your privilege. And I think that a lot of people become defensive when talking about privilege as well. And I think it's it's worth mentioning this and this is the way I explain it, because privilege is, I think, not something, well, I've had experiences where I've had white friends get very defensive going, 'well, white privilege isn't a thing, blah, blah, blah, because I'm working class, I'm disabled, I'm this. Therefore I've had it hard too.' And I've explained to them, 'no, that's not what the concept of privilege is about.' Yes. You don't have able-body privilege. So something that an able bodied person can do without thinking, without you don't have and yes, you don't have, you know, awkward class financial privilege, but you do have white privilege. Privilege is not about having it easy or having your whole life handed to you on a plate. Privilege is about those specific experiences that you do or don't have to face because of a characteristic that you do or don't have. And I think that it's really important to define it as that, because people become, they hit terms and they become very defensive about them. I think the first step in removing this defensiveness and enabling this self-learning is to really help people to think about it in that no one is saying you got it easy. I think everyone has hardships. Everyone faces different things in their life. But it's about thinking, well, actually, what in my life have I not had to think about? What in my life has someone who has a specific characteristic that I don't have not even been able to access, to think about, you know, just because just because they have a characteristic. And I think it's really important to think of it like that, to try and help remove some of this defensiveness because you're you as you write out for us, I think learning opportunities are what we hope to facilitate as well. And everyone's going to be at different stage of their learning in terms of their anti-racist learning, in terms of their, every part of diversity and inclusion. Like people are going to be at different stages. People are going to be a bit at different stages, learning about themselves and about what they've had to sort of experience about perhaps past trauma, anything. You know, people are going to be a really different stages. I think it's about us just being able to facilitate that next step to that person.

### **Mary-Ann Ochota**

We're coming to the end of our time together. I mean, if it's fair to say, if there was one thing that you would want listeners of the podcast to think about and then actually do, what would it be? Climbers, let's assume - or outdoor lovers.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. I think for me it's... Be curious. Check your assumptions. Before you say something to someone. Before you think something about someone, take a step back. Ask yourself where that assumption is coming from. Just be curious if you're going to ask the question. Ask sensitively, ask if it's the right time and yeah, be open, be curious and keep learning.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

How about you, Marie?

**Marie Uri**

I would say. I would say be welcoming. Be kind, be friendly. Just say hello. Yeah. You know, we don't ask much. If you see someone who's different from you to say hi, a smile. And so, you know, these solid acts. Don't stare. Stop staring!

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

I mean, it's like literally the experience, people are just staring at you?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah.

**Marie Uri**

Oh, I had a yeah, close to home, dead stare. And because I'm a bit cheeky, I just look at a person and smile.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. And actually, we had an occasion where you were with Rachel and I. And actually, I think we would have been with anyone else. They wouldn't have noticed that because you were with Rachel and I, we were like, is this actually happening?

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

And is it an aggressive stare? A curious stare? Like what kind of...

**Marie Uri**

No, it wasn't friendly. Some of them, they're not friendly. So like the one with the (?) was a deadpan stare like...

**Yasmin Lazarus**

It's almost like they're questioning, isn't it? Like, I felt like they were almost judging your belay ability. They were almost like your ability, which I was getting very angry about. Yeah.

**Marie Uri**

Actually.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

She throws up her hands listeners. That's what that noise was.

**Marie Uri**

I can't be angry. I can't be angry. And like I said to someone not long ago, as a black woman, I can't be angry because people are going to remember my actions, not what I say.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Oh, then you're the angry black woman.

**Marie Uri**

Thank you. I rest my case.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Oh, no.

**Marie Uri**

Yes. So, you know, you have to be able to lock in and you have to be able to, because this is a saying. You can't be angry all the time. You can't be angry. And you have to question all things and you have to almost be compassionate and understanding towards a person and saying, okay, they haven't seen this before. I'm going to you know, I'm going to show them in a nice manner who I am. Because I'm not a nasty person, I'm a nice person.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Oh, my goodness. You guys are saints.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

We're practising what we preach, we're being open. We're being curious. We think you actually made that person. Actually, we were, you know, we were in Sheffield. Maybe that person's actually never seen a black person at the climbing wall before. Maybe. And actually, how can we change that perception and how can... And yes, as you said before, the responsibility shouldn't be on our shoulders, but we want to practise what we preach and we want to do what we can. And yeah, be kind, and be welcoming ourselves and be open and be curious ourselves. I guess so. Yeah.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Yeah, I guess. Give people the benefit of the doubt in assuming that their behaviour or that action is based on ignorance rather than malice. And so that's, there's an opportunity for education and sharing and building relationships, I guess?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

I would hope so.

**Marie Uri**

Me too.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Well, I think you guys are ace. What is next for United We Climb? You've got your training programme, the rest of your research programme. I mean, that's going to be keeping you busy for sure.

**Marie Uri**

Yes, I'm working on the pathway, which is like getting my Rock Climbing Instructor qualification. So it's one of the pathways we have. We already have, so the way we do it, this is a training or mentorship like mentoring people. We have one person we went through the whole cycle, already got like the mentoring and that helped to get into training and then now they're employed. So that's next in a sense. Yasmin, anything else?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. I think to grow our team, to grow our capacity, to grow our resources, to grow our income, essentially to make what we do sustainable. So I think, you know, we would love to have merchandise because we've got team T-shirts and actually I get approached at the climbing wall and people say what is United We Climb? It's a great opportunity for me to say 'well...' You know, and give them the whole spiel. So actually we would love to have merchandise. I think to carry on with helping all affinity groups as well, helping them expand and support as many groups as we can.

**Marie Uri**

Taking people outdoors as well.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Getting people outdoors, which is actually very hard because there are insurance things involved in that.

**Marie Uri**

And structure, insurance, helmets, harnesses, all those things.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. So I think we would like to be able to grow in what we can provide to our community and the industry in general. I personally would love it if we were a nationally recognised organisation within the climbing community where people say almost we could be, you know, giving consultative services on a paid and not voluntary basis one day. Where people say, 'well, we have got this problem with access, we notice that this community are not accessing our wall and we noticed we've got this equity issue. Oh, where do we go?' We go to United because, you know, I would love that to be like that's like my ideal magic wand situation. That's all there. Yeah. Yeah.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Amazing. I wish you the absolute best of luck and I look forward to watching you grow and flourish because, crikey, you guys have chops and dynamism and ambition, which is badly needed.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Thank you.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

So, we are going to finish off with our quickfire questions, these ten questions we ask our guests on Finding Our Way. Are you ready? And I'm going to just for, you know, keeping things neat and tidy. Let's go, Marie and then Yasmin for each answer.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Okay.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Question number one, describe yourself in three words.

**Marie Uri**

Friendly, bubbly, trad-climber.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Climber, psychologist, hat-lady - is that one word?

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Hat lady? Let's hyphenate it! Favourite mountain or crag snack, or wall snack if you're indoor climbing?

**Marie Uri**

Oh. Oh. Peanut butter! I just. Yeah.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Crunchy or smooth?

**Marie Uri**

Oh, crunchy.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Obviously.

**Marie Uri**

Oh, no. Sorry! Yasmin, you have an allergy to nuts, right?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah, but it's fine. I always have a (?) on me. It's not a snack, but it's my fuel.

**Marie Uri**

Oh, can I change mine? Candy Kittens! Because I can share it with my friend, because it's vegan.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Awh! Look at you. Inclusive to the last! Okay. Best mountain, outdoor, or climbing memory?

**Marie Uri**

Fighting Flying Buttress. I'm obsessed. It took me a year. And it's not the E1, it's the HVD.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

And for me, physically hugging the rock of the lockdown, like coming out, really quite scaring my friend going 'I love the rock!'. I think they're a bit traumatised.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Question number four, Bucket List Destination?

**Marie Uri**

Thailand! Australia! Going back to see my mum, again. Vietnam!

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Well, I think everyone says Kalymnos is a good climbing place, so somewhere sort of... Greek island-y with lots of climbing.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Hot and fun.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. Hot and climby and fun. Yeah.



**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Okay. Nice. How often do you get lost, Marie?

**Marie Uri**

All the time!

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

It's a miracle she found her laptop for this podcast. If you could go for a climb with someone famous, who would it be? Either climbing famous or outside world famous.

**Marie Uri**

Oh... Lynn Hill.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Is that a climber?

**Marie Uri**

Yeah.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Okay, fine. Okay. Yasmin?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Who would I go climbing with who is famous? That's a really hard one.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Or not famous. Who's your favourite person to go climbing with then?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Oh, all the para-climbers.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Chocolate or cheese?

**Marie Uri**

Chocolate. 85%.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Chocolate. Always chocolate for me.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

If you were an animal, what animal would you be?

**Marie Uri**

A sloth. Climbing efficiency.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Nice.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. I'd be a cat. I was always told, you know, I sleep enough that I just sleep and cuddle, and yeah. I'm a cat.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

One thing you always carry in your climbing bag.

**Marie Uri**

My shoes.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

I'm like a walking pharmacy. If anyone ever needs paracetamol, plasters, I've always got that. So I'm like, Yeah, I'm the walking pharmacy.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

What does climbing mean to you?

**Marie Uri**

Everything.

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Oh I can't re top that can I? It's my happy place, it's my escapism, it's my social life at times. Yeah, it means the world to me as well.

**Marie Uri**

Yeah.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

And lastly, we want more of you. Where do we go? This is your chance to plug your social media handles, website etc.

**Marie Uri**

@unitedweclimb @mijosy @UK.paraclimbing.collective

**Yasmin Lazarus**

I'm @the.climb.2.healthy on Instagram. Lots of dots. I know the dots. Yeah I think those are the key ones.

**Marie Uri**

We have a website; unitedweclimb.com

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

And you've got open surveys at the moment. So if people are interested and they want to contribute to your research, they can go to your website?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah, I think. Will that be...

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Will that be the case in autumn though?

**Yasmin Lazarus**

Yeah. And I think we will be recruiting for focus groups very soon, so watch out for that. We always want to hear from people about their experiences in climbing and actually probably the easiest way to get us is on Instagram. So I would say definitely shoot us a DM there. And we just love to hear from you.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

Really awesome. Yeah. Thank you very much. And listeners, don't worry, you don't need to work out where all those dots go, just go to show notes on the BMC website and all the links will be there. And the same for if you are accessing the transcripts. Thank you so much, Yasmin and Marie, this has been an excellent conversation and I think that you guys are ace.

**Mary-Ann Ochota**

And thank you also for listening. If you liked what you heard, subscribe so you don't miss an episode. Share the podcast with friends and please do let us know what you think. Use @teamBMC on Instagram and Twitter and the hashtag #FindingOurWay. I'll see you soon.

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