

[00:00:18.690] - [VO]

On the Engender, Scotland's feminist policy podcast.

[00:00:23.110]

[Jingle]

[00:00:28.190] - Amanda Aitken

Hello, and welcome to On the Engender, Scotland's feminist policy podcast with me, Amanda Aitken, and my wonderful co-host, Alys Mumford.

[00:00:37.220] - Alys Mumford

Hello!

[00:00:38.390] - Amanda Aitken

How are you doing today, Alys?

[00:00:40.270] - Alys Mumford

I am good. I'm quite tired, but other than that, I'm pretty good.

[00:00:45.570] - Amanda Aitken

And today is our first proper episode of 2022 - woo!

[00:00:51.230] - Alys Mumford

Wahoo!

[00:00:51.230] - Amanda Aitken

Properly, formally starting the new season, which is great. And for our first episode, I'm so delighted that today we're going to get to talk about a keystone feminist issue, abortion and abortion rights. And we're joined by some wonderful women dedicating their time and passion to supporting women's reproductive rights in Scotland. I'm joined today with Alice Murray and Lucy Grieve from Back Off Scotland. Hello.

[00:01:14.150] - Alice Murray

Hi!

[00:01:15.470] - Lucy Grieve

Happy to be on.

[00:01:16.930] - Alys Mumford

So awesome that you've been able to join us and talk about the campaign.

[00:01:20.960] - Lucy Grieve

Yes, thank you for having us on.

[00:01:22.390] - Amanda Aitken

Yeah, last season we were discussing this and we're top of our wish list for 2022. And so here we are, already checking it off. But to kick us off on the right foot, we like to start the podcast by sharing something positive. I don't know who I'm going to ask first. This could be anything to do with something you've done recently or something you've seen in the news that you're like, that's great. Yeah. Just anything. I'm going to come to you first, Alys.

[00:01:51.420] - Alys Mumford

I actually have one at the moment, I didn't have to think too hard. So mine is about sports ball - normally, Amanda's purview, but the Welsh National women's rugby team have professionalised, which is very exciting. So previously, players weren't paid enough to live on. And so were all working jobs as well as playing rugby for Wales. So that's happened. That's really exciting. And the women's Six Nations is starting soon. So that's my positive - women's sport being put on. I mean, they're still

not getting paid the same as men, obviously lol. But you know - women's sport getting a little bit of backing, which is always nice to see.

[00:02:34.600] - Amanda Aitken

That's great. Okay, I'm going to come to you next, Lucy.

[00:02:37.410] - Lucy Grieve

Something I've recently been sort of delighted to hear about was the recent movement in the Supreme Court in the US. Initially, when I read the news that one of the justices was retiring - you know my fingers were crossed that it was going to be a Republican - it was going to be a Republican Justice. It didn't turn out being one. But I know that the front runner to take the place is the first Black woman Justice. So I think that's some great progress being made. I think it's quite startling always when you look at a picture of the make up of the Supreme Court, and it's so filled with white old men who are making the key decisions about things like abortion. So definitely I think it's definitely going the right direction to see that they're bringing some diversity, which is much needed to the Supreme Court. And I think having more women on the court to make that up - is definitely positive for things like abortion rights. So I've been excited about that.

[00:03:44.570] - Alys Mumford

Makes me think of the Ruth Bader Ginsburg quote - when will there be enough, like women on the Supreme Court - well when they're all women! [Laughter] We need to redress some of the male dominance for literally the history of the rest of the world.

[00:03:59.990] - Amanda Aitken

And Alice, what about yourself?

[00:04:02.690] - Alice Murray

I think I'm going to bring it to a less policy place. And it's Rihanna's pregnant - [sounds of agreement and laughter] - and all we've seen for the past 24 hours is photos of her supporting her pregnancy belly, which I love. And it just makes me very happy to see. I mean, it's kind of related to this episode for anyone to see themselves very happy and confident. And yeah, I just love those photos. That's all I've been thinking about for two days.

[00:04:27.610] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, it's given Twitter a break from just talking about the Sue Gray report. [Laughter]

[00:04:37.090] - Amanda Aitken

I like that - I think it was Forbes, put an article up and basically was just like - billionaire, amazing artist, like you know, Princess of Barbados - and her boyfriend are having a baby. And I was like yes - how she should be referred to. [Laughter]. It was so good.

[00:04:55.030] - Alys Mumford

Amanda, how about you?

[00:04:56.240] - Amanda Aitken

Yeah, I know. I was thinking about the Rihanna thing too, because those who listen to the podcast or follow me on Twitter will know I love Rihanna, but I don't know whether it's good or bad news for me personally, because I've been waiting on that new album for years and I feel like I'm never going to have it now.

[00:05:11.690] - Alys Mumford

Okay, that's not where I thought you were going with that.

[00:05:13.650] - Amanda Aitken

Oh, just like personally -

[00:05:15.910] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, you wanted Rihanna to - have your baby!

[00:05:18.310] - Amanda Aitken
I mean that too, that too.

[00:05:19.930] - Alys Mumford
It faces a lot of questions, I appreciate, but you know.

[00:05:22.560] - Amanda Aitken
Yeah, one day, one day - Rihanna will find me and she'll be like, yes [Laughter] - I don't want you A\$AP, I want Amanda. Yes, that's what's going to happen. No, but I - it was my birthday last week -

[00:05:35.590] - Alys Mumford
Woo!

[00:05:35.590] - Amanda Aitken
Which usually I'm like, oh whatever. But my partner took me away for a weekend in Edinburgh actually. And I hadn't been through for ages, just on a fun frolicking weekend and went and had delicious dinner and nice cocktails and things. And it just felt so good to be like out doing things. It just felt very luxurious and felt like a proper mini wee break.

[00:05:57.910] - Alys Mumford
Well that's funny because I remember last year it must have been on the podcast saying that you'd had your birthday and it was obviously a lockdown birthday and - but folk had been coming to your stoop and leaving you elderflower champagne and deliciousness, which also sounded pretty great.

[00:06:12.430] - Amanda Aitken
It was great.

[00:06:12.430] - Alys Mumford
But yeah so, doing things in real life sounds good also.

[00:06:14.360] - Amanda Aitken
Now I had to go to the elderflower champagne. It didn't come to me. So I don't know if that's better or worse - [Laughter]

[00:06:23.500] - Alys Mumford
The sacrifices we make to get out of lockdown.

[00:06:24.960] - Amanda Aitken
Exactly.

[00:06:29.210] - Alys Mumford
I think that might be the biggest range we've had of things. The US Supreme Court and Rihanna are obviously very related in many ways, but I love it. So before we delve into our main discussion today, we're going to hear from Engender's Policy Manager, Jill Wood, who gave me a wee update on just what's happening regarding abortion rights in the Scottish Parliament, in the government, and what seems to be going on in 2022.

[00:06:55.310] - Alys Mumford
Hi. So I'm here with Engender's Policy Manager, Jill. Hi, Jill.

[00:06:59.070] - Jill Wood
Hi, Alys.

[00:07:00.890] - Alys Mumford
Just wanted to catch up with you to give us a bit of an update on where abortion policy is in Scotland

at the moment, which is the moment being 2022 - start of the year. Can you give us a bit of an overview?

[00:07:12.320] - Jill Wood

Yeah so, the headlines are that abortion is still criminalised in Scotland.

[00:07:19.250] - Alys Mumford

Boooo.

[00:07:19.250] - Jill Wood

Boooo. In practice, that means that women and others needing abortion still need the permission of two doctors to just access routine healthcare and their basic reproductive rights. There are also issues with access to services, including the lack of provision in Scotland to have an abortion from 18 weeks onwards, which forces women to travel south to access care and acts as a barrier for all sorts of women for all sorts of reasons. And there's equality of access with patchy services or lack of consistency across different health boards, particularly in rural and island areas. So that's the kind of baseline situation which we wrote about in detail in a joint report in 2016 to coincide with abortion law being devolved to the Scottish Parliament, along with analysis on a bunch of other issues. Since then, we've not seen the Scottish Government enthusiastically embracing the agenda for change around abortion. But we have seen some steps in the right direction, although they're relatively minimal. So Scotland waived fees for Northern Irish women accessing abortion services. There are some tweaks happening at the moment to the notification process around abortion, which we're hoping might pave the way for further changes around data and what's collected in the future. And there have been important developments with early medical abortion at home. So since 2017, women have been able to take the second of the pills they need for medical abortion in the comfort of their own homes.

[00:08:42.530] - Alys Mumford

And that's been a real big change in the sort of comfort of women accessing abortion in terms of - we've spoken previously on the podcast about issues of women being forced to travel to simply to be sort of observed taking a second pill, which then can result in the abortion happening when they're not at home, when they're traveling home, or whether at work, all sorts of things. So that - it seems like quite a small change, but actually has a huge impact on the lives of folk accessing abortion.

[00:09:14.930] - Jill Wood

Yeah, even down to this choosing exactly when you want to take it or you don't have to worry about pain or discomfort or bleeding in public places. So it's a huge change. And we know that women like it.

[00:09:26.670] - Alys Mumford

Absolutely. And so but the biggest - well, not the biggest changes, but there have been some significant changes in the way we access abortion in Scotland as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which obviously saw huge shifts in the way we access healthcare in general, lots of pressure on various healthcare aspects, but also in this instance, actually made accessing reproductive healthcare easier for some women. Can you tell us about the COVID measures that happened?

[00:09:53.900] - Jill Wood

Yes. So, as I said, that permission for the second pill to be taken home and being introduced, and at the start of the pandemic, what's known as telemedical abortion care was temporarily introduced, meaning that the whole process, the initial consultation, the after care, take place remotely, and then women are able to take both of the pills, which constitute medical abortion at home. And obviously that was because of COVID and the risk of exposure, but it's also had the effect of a) improving the experience and access for various groups, women in rural areas, on islands, women experiencing abuse or coercive control, potentially women from certain communities of colour or some disabled women. But it's also proved that it's an entirely workable system, it's safe, and women prefer it. So there's been research on it. And like various things over the course of pandemic, they can no longer say this doesn't work. So where it's at now is it's been in place for two years, since the first lockdown. Scottish Government has consulted on whether to make the change permanent, with that

consultation closing a year ago. And this was, as you would expect, strongly supported by women's organisations, human rights groups, abortion care providers, and as well, organisations like the RCOG - the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. And as I said, it's backed by this empirical research into women's experiences of accessing it. But, Scottish Government has decided to conduct further research before making its decision. And as of yet, we haven't been able to ascertain any more detail or a time scale on that.

[00:11:30.920] - Alys Mumford

So we don't know what research they think is missing. They haven't specified that - is that right?

[00:11:36.080] - Jill Wood

No, we wrote to the Minister for Women's Health last summer, along with 25 other organisations, and we had an acknowledgement of that letter, but we didn't get any more detail.

[00:11:46.750] - Alys Mumford

Cool. Just generic research needed. I mean, we like research, but it feels like there's enough evidence on this one. Great, so that's what that is. We're sort of waiting on that and obviously trying to keep the pressure up as much as we can in terms of making that change permanent. You know, we've just seen it happen in England that that change has been made permanent around telemedical abortions. So hopefully Scotland will be following suit before too long. What else is coming up over the next couple of years that might see hopefully some changes to abortion provision in Scotland?

[00:12:15.790] - Jill Wood

Well, the first Women's Health Plan was published last year, and it includes improving access to abortion and contraception services as one of its six key areas. Within the abortion strand, the aims are that all women will be able to access timely abortion care without judgment, and that all women will have choice about when and where they access abortion care. So obviously, these are things that we want to see, but we haven't seen any movement yet on the specific actions that have been agreed in that plan, including around data, telemedical care that we've been talking about, and also on improving services. So we'll be monitoring that as the Women's Health Plan goes into its implementation phase, which runs until 2024. We as members of the subgroup that covered abortion, we did push for decriminalisation to be - for a commitment to decriminalisation, but unfortunately, that wasn't taken up. In terms of the bigger picture in Scotland, in the Scottish Parliament, four out of the five major parties at Holyrood mentioned abortion in their election manifestos for 2021. You can probably stab a guess at which four parties that was - the Scottish Green Party and the Lib Dems pledged to remove abortion from the criminal justice system. Scottish Labour talk about improving services, without any sort of specific detail. And then there's varying degrees of commitment to establishing buffer zones, which is another live issue that I know you'll be talking about later. And finally, maybe there's also crossover with the human rights agenda in Scotland. So there's the upcoming incorporation of CEDAW, and we will see more scope for action on abortion - when that agenda is implemented.

[00:14:11.710] - Alys Mumford

I think that's really exciting. I was chatting to someone about this the other day about obviously listeners to the podcast, will know we talk about CEDAW a lot, we're very excited about the incorporation of CEDAW. But now we are actually seeing conversations shift a little bit into, well you know, once CEDAW is incorporated, the impact that has on other areas of women's equality, whereas you can sometimes seem like incorporation is the end when we talk about CEDAW. But actually it's really exciting thinking once these rights are enshrined in Scot's law, what does that mean for our work on abortion? What does that mean on our work around violence against women? Around all these other things. So, yeah, exciting times. Great. Thank you so much for that rundown. We will link to the reports and things that Jill mentioned there the gender edit of the party manifestos - you can see what they're all saying and our abortion reports in the show notes. Thanks, Jill, bye!

[00:15:03.350] - Jill Wood

Bye!

[00:15:04.250] - Amanda Aitken

So now that we've heard a bit about the state of play in terms of abortion legislation and service delivery, Alice and Lucy, you're joining us from Back Off Scotland. I'm sure lots of listeners will know about your work and things that you've been doing, especially around trying to get buffer zones implemented in Scotland and across Scotland. But just in case, could you give us an intro to the issue and what you're doing about the issue also?

[00:15:28.170] - Lucy Grieve

Yeah, definitely. So our campaign started in October 2020, and essentially it came out of the resurgence of anti-choice protesters at the entrance of Chalmers Centre Sexual Health Clinic. We're all University students - or we were at that time. And it's very close to our campus. So while we couldn't go to a class because it was lockdown, people were picketing Chalmers Street, and we thought it was crazy that that was allowed and that there was sort of a real question needed to be asked about what was going on there and why we were allowing protesters to, number one, gather at a health facility, and number two, gather during lockdown as well. So we really thought - stem from a place of really thinking that patients seeking abortion services and other forms of reproductive and sexual health needs protected from intimidation harassment. So we came up with the idea of petitioning Edinburgh City Council specifically to introduce 150 metre buffer zones. So for people that don't know what a buffer zone is, it's a protest free zone. So it's not sort of like a physical area. There's no parameters or boundaries that are enacted. It's just a legal zone where you're sort of not allowed to - you know, either side as well - whether you're anti choice or pro choice, you're not allowed to picket, and you're not allowed to sort of have any discourse about your views within that space.

[00:17:05.620] - Alys Mumford

And it's interesting, isn't it? I think it's one of the things that people don't think happens in Scotland, that people picket and do this. And we are very much associate it with sort of Bible Belt America or Ireland, where you have escorts in Northern Ireland to accompany women in. But certainly I feel we've spoken about it on the podcast before, you know, I've got experience myself of going with friends to access abortion services at Chalmers in Edinburgh. And the appointment is being scheduled for 08:00 a.m. And the nurses say we do that because it's before the protesters arrive, you know, and so - it's so normalised. But actually the appointment system is working around these anti-choice, anti-women protesters. Yeah, I don't know if there's anything you've been doing to - sometimes people say, oh, people should just grow up and get over it. If you have to walk past something, it doesn't matter. But I don't know if you can just say something about the impact that this actually has on people seeking abortion care.

[00:17:59.700] - Alice Murray

No, definitely. I think what you said about, first of all, about the whole kind of people think it happens in America or Ireland or wherever else is so true. I think a lot of the time, if people haven't seen it at Chalmers or other clinics, they are really shocked to think that happens in Scotland. I think a lot of people do like to think Scotland as being very progressive, which is obviously a nice thing. But, yeah, the fact that it happens on kind of our doorstep is really scary. And I think when I moved to Edinburgh when I was 17 and at that time, there would be protesters quite regularly at Chambers Clinic, and it was just, I guess the thing that people spoke about in Edinburgh of like, oh, they're back - kind of it's awful. And, you know, and would kind of roll their eyes. And so then when kind of Back Off was created and attempting to do something about it, I think it's obviously really important that it's not just a thing that everyone goes past and says, oh, they're there again, but it doesn't actually change. But yeah, I think the impact is definitely huge. I mean, obviously part of my involvement through the campaign is because of my own experience of accessing an abortion at Chambers Clinic where there was protesters. And I think it's really hard. I think one of the things that we found a lot in the campaign is that this idea of like what is harassment, and that a lot of politicians or journalists really want to see kind of hard hitting images of graphic posters or they want to see videos of people getting kind of shouted out very aggressively, which I definitely think is - it's disappointing because if people who use these services are telling me that they feel harassed and they feel intimidated, that should be enough. I mean, we can't speak for everyone. There is definitely some people who could walk past protesters and shrug it off and say, well, I know that it's my kind of legal right to access abortion. I'm going to go in anyway, and I'm going to get on with my day. If there was even one person that day who didn't go

because of that reason, that's enough to stop it.

[00:19:55.990] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, for sure. Particularly, I mean, obviously here in Engender, we talk about abortion all the time, and it's, as Amanda says, one of those sort of keystone issues we talk about. But that's not true across society, it's still stigmatised. And I mean, even just from the invasion of privacy point of view, particularly if you're in a sort of small community - or if you've got any sort of profile, if you're in the public eye, even just from that point of view, it's pretty shocking - so that to happen. But, yeah, it's amazing to see the sort of pick up of this idea through the work of Back Off Scotland. I don't know if you could let us know where the campaign's at at the minute. I know you talked about petitioning in Edinburgh, but it's moved on since then.

[00:20:37.390] - Lucy Grieve

Yeah so, it started off Edinburgh based, and we were actually called Back Off Chalmers, and we're petitioning the City Council. And we thought that would sort of necessitate the change that we needed. But we then realised that actually it was very widespread across Scotland. It was happening in Aberdeen, it's happening in Glasgow, it's happening in Falkirk, anywhere that there was abortion services being on offer, essentially. So we decided to scale up, I believe it was at the start of 2021, and we started operations to make it Back Off Scotland. And we started including scope for different cities. So we partnered up with Glasgow Students for Choice. They're great. Their President actually had a similar experience to Alice in that she was accessing abortion care in Glasgow this time, and she faced protesters and they actually approached her boyfriend as well. It's just shocking. So from there, I think we kind of realised that the only way to really stop it would be to get it legislated from the Scottish Government down and sort of from the outcome of the Edinburgh City Council petition, which was that it was passed and there was overwhelming support for it. And they believed that it needed to be sort of a framework, at the very least, needed to be made available from the Scottish Government. So from that, I think it got to maybe like summer last year, and we had this, you know, green light from Edinburgh City Council, and they were going to explore what they could do to introduce buffer zones. We'd be mentioned in the issue of buffer zones. It had been mentioned in the manifestos - the SNP, Labour, Lib Dems - the Greens have been quite vocal about it and nothing was happening. It was difficult, and we were trying to think of ways in which we could put pressure on sort of COSLA, so COSLA is the governing body for local authorities. We're trying to think about how we could really push that forward. And it was when Parliament started again for the new term, we were very happy at the time to see that there had been a mention of buffer zones and sort of looking into that in the Women's Health Strategy and also in the Programme for Government. It was great to see that there was a nod to buffer zones, something that's - you know, the evidence has shown it's been protests - like of this nature have been going on since the 1990s. So it was great to see that there was some movement being made as we entre a new term of Parliament. And then from there, it kind of just picked up steam, I think. We didn't feel as though enough was being done essentially, to implement any type of policy around the issue. And we had not heard anything else from Edinburgh Council. Glasgow Council had rejected our calls, saying it was an issue for the Scottish Government. So from there, there was a member's debate led by Gillian Mackay. A lot of cross party support being seen for that. And then now we're here in that we're about to launch the consultation for the proposal for the bill. And, yeah, the hope is that the bill process will go smoothly.

[00:23:59.910] - Alys Mumford

Such exciting times, and I think it's interesting and frustrating, to hear you talk about the COSLA and Scottish Government and where does it fall? And we also always hear that with Westminster and Scotland, you know - sort of any levels of devolution, you can feel like you're getting past from pillar to post, particularly with abortion, because it is a healthcare issue. It sits within criminal justice - absurdly. It's also a human rights issue and all these sorts of things. It's like, where does it - how can you just make people say, do something about this? But it sounds like you've been really successful in that. So that's really great to hear.

[00:24:38.970] - Amanda Aitken

Yeah, most definitely. I was going to also ask if you've had any other examples of successes so far in the campaign, too, just because you've been doing a lot. And like Alys said, it must be frustrating

going between the Scottish Government and local government. But even with politicians and things, have you had any good connections with people since the start of the new term?

[00:25:01.240] - Lucy Grieve

Yeah, I think there's been surprisingly for us, I guess, because when we went into it, we're given sort of advice, being like, oh, it's a really difficult issue, abortion when it comes to the floor of Parliament, it's a conscience vote. And from that it was kind of like, all right, well, maybe we shouldn't expect that much, but we definitely - like the overpouring support that we've received. It's just been great - key figures in the Labour Party as well. So Monica Lennon has been such a vocal supporter, and that's been really encouraging to us, obviously, because she had such huge success with the Period Poverty Bill. So just the sort of - the cross party - like we even saw support in the Tory Party, like, very vocal, sort of - how can we help? What can we do? Language. That does indicate success. And I think part of that is also our messaging. So our messaging is very clearly not about the morality or the ethical implications. Obviously, we're very pro-choice, but just not to get into those debates and be like this is a healthcare issue. It's a legal right for women to be able to access these services. It's absolutely inappropriate that there's any form of politicising of the body from anybody outside the healthcare facility. Our big thing is if you want to pull into question the legislation, then go to Parliament. But why are you doing it to individual people that are attending services and might be their most vulnerable as well? It's just completely not on. And I think a lot of people see that.

[00:26:37.010] - Alys Mumford

It's interesting as well, I presume - I don't know if this has come into your sort of work much, but the parallels with COVID and thinking about protesters at - I mean, we see it more down south than up here, but there are obviously anti-vax protesters up here. But protesting at a hospital when people are going in to visit dying relatives and being told that the disease does not exist or is a hoax, you know it's - I wonder if that sort of opened people's eyes a little bit to how weird protesting at hospital or healthcare facility is.

[00:27:07.800] - Alice Murray

I think so. I think it's one thing that we often talk about in the campaign is things like, I don't know if you were at like a dentist or if you're, I don't know - any of these things and someone's protesting outside, they would be removed. And I think that the vaccination one is definitely a really interesting one because I think that - and I've not seen too many of them, but I think anyone that was kind of protesting outside of a vaccination clinic or somewhere, like that, those places are so highly security guarded, they would be asked to leave, they would be removed. So, yeah, it's just crazy that as soon as it's kind of anything that's to do with the reproductive system or sexual healthcare or abortion -

[00:27:45.466]

Just women -

[00:27:45.970] - Alice Murray

Yeah, just women [laughter] - the lines just start to really blur and it's like, oh, well, you know. And I think it's really frustrating as well like all the time at Chalmers Clinic, the staff are obviously unhappy with it, but they kind of - we just accept it to be a normalised thing that's what we do. Whereas in any other workplace, you wouldn't have to come in every single day and kind of be told that what you're doing is wrong. And if you were, they would be removed. So I definitely think it has drawn a lot of very interesting parallels.

[00:28:14.180] - Alys Mumford

Hello, so I'm just popping in here again on this episode to share a quick conversation that I had with Jane Carnall from Abortion Rights Edinburgh. I caught up with Jane recently to discuss her work with Abortion Rights Edinburgh and their activism for reproductive rights.

[00:28:28.040] - Jane Carnall

Abortion Rights Edinburgh is an affiliate group or a subgroup of Abortion Rights UK wide group. We meet regularly as Abortion Rights Scotland every month. Abortion Rights Edinburgh got started as a group of feminists keen on abortion rights in 2008 when famously, well, I don't know how famously -

Alex Salmond paid one of his few visits to Westminster as an MP to vote to reduce abortion access limits in a big reproductive healthcare bill that was passing through the Parliament at that time. Abortion rights law then not being devolved to Scotland. He was contacted to ask about his vote by one of our group and he responded on his MSP headed note paper to say that abortion rights was not devolved Scotland.

[00:29:19.730] - Alys Mumford

[Laughter] Wow, that's a beautiful anecdote that covers so much in Scottish politics. In one story.

[00:29:31.130] - Jane Carnall

Yes! Following this, we had a kind of group meeting about 30 women in Edinburgh and we went on meeting - the hardcore group essentially came down to about six or seven women. And one of my experiences is standing in a demo holding a sign saying 'Our Bodies Our Choice' is having elderly men and woman coming up to me going, So what are you doing here? And I explained, we're here to demonstrate for abortion rights. And I can then point at the other group and say, and they're here because they think a woman shouldn't be allowed to seek legal abortion. And they look at me and they go, what? Why? Why are they there? Because the Abortion Law is now 55 years old. It's been decades since it was anything but settled law that in Scotland, a woman can walk into a clinic and say, I need an abortion and get an abortion. She can go to a GP and say I need an abortion, get abortion. Since the pandemic, she can call the telemedicine helpline and say I need an abortion and get abortion pills through the post. It's not controversial, except that you have anti-abortion activists who try and claim it is controversial.

[00:30:45.390] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, I think that's a really good point. So we're chatting to folk from Back Off Scotland in this episode as well, and they talk about how surprised people are to find out that these vigils happen and that people do protest because yeah - it's generally only people that are at a counter protest or that are accessing abortion services that ever witness that. I think people are still quite shocked that those views are still held and so vehemently held by a small group of folk in Scotland. So I think that's a really good point. Telemedical abortion you mentioned there. And I know that's something you're keen to talk more about. So we know - we heard from Jill at the start of the podcast that this was introduced during the pandemic, and we're sort of fighting for that to be made permanent. But can you say a little bit more about why that's an issue that Abortion Rights Edinburgh are working on, why it's so important for reproductive rights?

[00:31:44.200] - Jane Carnall

Well, in Edinburgh, we are effectively privileged. It's not just - there's any number of - you can go to your GP. If it turns out your GP has issues about providing abortion, you can go to the Chalmers' Clinic. It's true that there is often a vigil outside The Chalmers' Clinic saying you shouldn't have that right, but they are required by Police Scotland to stand on the other side of the road. And generally speaking, they do. In other parts of Scotland, though, you can have a situation where there is one GP within traveling distance and that one GP might turn out to be - you know, to have a conscientious objection to abortion. You might have one pharmacy in traveling distance, and the one pharmacist on duty has an issue of providing with emergency contraception or abortion pills. Telemedicine - and if you travel then - in the pre-COVID days, it was a requirement that a person goes to clinic, be handed the pills by a doctor, take the pills within the doctor's sight, and then go home. And if they have a long way to travel, it meant they could start having abortion on public transport. And that's just incredible that anybody should be in that situation. What we have also found out is that while - ongoing, while COVID is still a health risk, telemedicine will be available essentially till the pandemic is in our rear view mirror. We would like that obviously to go on permanently simply because it's so obviously useful. Data shows that the same number of abortions are taking place, but in general, abortions taking place at the earlier stage of gestation, because telemedicine is faster. And this applies across your data, across deprivation level, regardless of how rich or poor you are, it means that anybody can get an abortion. They can get abortion quickly as soon as they've decided they want to have an abortion. And that is just basic. And in Scotland at the moment, that means make a phone call, get a pack, take the pills, and if you have any issues, you have any queries, if - which is vanishingly unlikely - you have a health emergency, you call the helpline. Apparently, the people who have been using the

helpline have been using it to ask questions. Nobody's used it - nobody, as far as we know, has used it for actual health emergency. They've used it because you know - 'is this normal what I'm experiencing?', 'when should I take the pills?', 'What will happen?'. And I think the pandemic has demonstrated in Scotland that it's daft to do anything else but say - right, you want an early medical abortion. You don't want to surgical abortion for whatever reason. I think people should be able to have a surgical abortion if they want one. But you should be able to have an early medical abortion as soon as you are ready to ask for one.

[00:34:30.440] - Alys Mumford

Absolutely. I think your last point there about you should be able to have what you want, and it's - the clue's in the name, pro-choice. But we did see some people say, well, telemedical abortion means we're never going to be - women are never going to be able to see doctors or they're not going to be able to talk about if they want to have an abortion, they're just going to be forced these things. It's just worth emphasising that, of course, women and anyone that needs an abortion can still go to a GP, they can still go to a clinic. They can still have it all in a medical environment, if that's what they choose. But the vast majority of people choose to have - to take the medicine at home, surrounded by loved ones, if that's their choice or on their own. So, yeah, absolutely.

[00:35:09.385] - Jane Carnall

Exactly.

[00:35:10.330] - Alys Mumford

It's not forcing people into any particular course. So alongside pushing for that to be made permanent, what else is Abortion Rights Edinburgh working on, interested in? Is there anything coming up you want to tell folk about?

[00:35:21.610] - Jane Carnall

Well, one of the things that we think ought to happen is that there should be a levelling up of the packs provider - still going to a telemedicine, because in some health boards, they simplify the pills. Some health boards have provided full care support. So extra pads, painkillers and anti-nausea meds, these are all things that are available to the counter, but we think it's a fair point that nobody who needs the abortion should have to have an extra trip. It's just one more thing to do. They should get the pack and the packs should have everything they need.

[00:35:47.890] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, absolutely. That's a really good point.

[00:35:48.680] - Jane Carnall

I think we were deciding that we would campaign - we would ask people to write to - in the newsletter. We'd ask people to write to the Health Minister to say you know - level up the packs, make sure everyone has the same access. We have - going on to what else we do. One of the things we do regularly - we haven't done the last two years - is a regular celebration 1967 Abortion Act in Edinburgh on Lothian Road. There's been other places in Scotland that have held a similar one, but in Edinburgh we've held this since 2012, which is when the anti-choicers decided they would have theirs. And I heard about it just a few weeks beforehand, decided right - we will show up and we'll be there with colourful signs saying, you know - celebrate abortion, celebrate abortion access. And we've done that every year except now, well 2020 and 2021 for obvious reasons. And I hope we'll be able to do it again this year on the 30th April. It's always the last Saturday in April, which is the closest to 27th April, which is when in 1968 the Abortion Act became law.

[00:36:56.010] - Alys Mumford

Amazing. Yes, so look out for that this year. Hopefully it can go ahead. Well, it's really great to hear what you've been up to and the sort of history of Abortion Rights Edinburgh, and I hadn't realised that about how you came to be. So that's a very good story. I'll hold on to that. As we sort of close up. Is there anything you can tell folks about how to stay in contact with you? You mentioned a newsletter. How could people get involved with your work?

[00:37:24.190] - Jane Carnall

We are on Facebook, findable of the usual way is Edinburgh Abortion Rights. We have a Twitter account which is @EdinProChoice. We are affiliated with the national group of UK wide and in Scotland, and it is the UK wide group that does the administrative work of producing it's own newsletter. But if you register as a member of Abortion Rights in Scotland, you will get a regular monthly newsletter and be invited to take part in our monthly meetings. If you're interested in knowing what we're doing, we do post things on Twitter - campaigns that we're doing. We contacted every single - well, every single reasonable candidate who was standing for election in Scotland at the elections last year. We didn't trouble ourselves with the non-parliamentary parties. We did contact SNP, Labour, Greens, Conservatives, Lib Dems to ask them if they would support - essentially if they would support keeping abortion safe, legal and accessible in Scotland in the term of next parliament. We now have a spreadsheet of MSPs with their views where they responded. Obviously not all candidates responded. One of the things that we plan to do, we hope to do is to see if we can take the initiative and essentially reform legislation. The only reason telemedicine is an issue is because it is technically in breach of the Abortion Act. A special public health modification had to be made to essentially allow a woman to have a consultation by phone. I mean, obviously this is standard on so many things during the pandemic. If you can, you'll have a consultation by phone because that's safer than going into the clinic. But what would be great would be if we could change the law in Scotland so that in the future it wouldn't even be an issue. If you need abortion, you get one.

[00:39:30.860] - Alys Mumford

Thanks so much for that, Jane. We've covered so much, and we'll link to all those social media links and tell folks how they can find out more about your work in the show notes. So now let's go back to the rest of our conversation with Back Off Scotland, as Amanda asks them if they're hopeful for the future.

[00:39:45.030] - Amanda Aitken

It's just so amazing to hear and to see about all the work that you're doing. You know, an avid follower online, the work you're doing really just continues the legacy of abortion rights campaigns around the world and at the same time, reproductive rights, but also women's equality, as Alys had mentioned earlier. Because right now it's quite scary place. The news isn't great both local and around the world, but putting that to the side, do you feel hopeful that you can win? Do you feel hopeful for 2022 and what you're hopefully going to see happen this year?

[00:40:15.180] - Lucy Grieve

Yeah, definitely. I think one thing I've been very strong on the start with that's been, I guess good for the team sort of morale as well is like, I'm completely confident we're going to get legislation on this. I think we're at a place where we're introducing a Women's Health Minister. Scotland wants to be world leading on women's healthcare and these sort of specific issues. So I think we're in a political climate that will allow for serious legislation changes to be made, and I really do think that we will get there. Will it be as easy as introducing this bill in September this year and then it going through all the stages and being successful in the end? Maybe, I hope so. But I think if it's not from that, it's going to be making space to allow for eventual legislation changes. We're just definitely going to keep fighting and Back Off Scotland is going to be a thing until we get legislation. We're not going anywhere. So I think we do feel really confident about that.

[00:41:21.650] - Alice Murray

I think it's hard to think - I totally agree with Lucy and we always do feel like that. But it's just so frustrating when you know, for example, the Lent 40 days will be coming up, like around the corner. And so just with that in your head, knowing that it will be another whole period of most days, at least two people outside of Chalmers' Clinic or other clinics all day for that period of time, and knowing that the Government obviously know about that, and I get that it's obviously just the way - it's the nature of policy, but it's still really frustrating to know that we have the support and that people agree that it's wrong. And we have petition and we just have to kind of wait it out and know that that's going to happen in a way. So, yeah, it's definitely kind of ups and downs with that.

[00:42:03.470] - Amanda Aitken

Yeah, definitely. I guess like you said, it's frustrating to see the length of time that these things take, especially if you already know that you've got support there. But hopefully in the meantime, you've got lots of support already. And for our listeners, how can they get in touch with you if they want to support, if they want to help with your campaigns? And what can listeners do to get active?

[00:42:30.230] - Lucy Grieve

Yeah, I'd say following us on social media, we had to think about this as well. And the best way, I think we found, is sort of pointing people towards our Instagram or Twitter. We're very active on there, and there will be different calls to actions at different times. So, for example, we're currently working on creating the consultation for the proposal of the bill. So from that, once we do that, there'll be a call to action for people to fill that in. And that will be really key, I think, to the success, because if you look at anti-choice activity in Scotland, they have a lot of resources at their hands. They can definitely offer a sizable roadblock for the things that we're trying to do. So I think just keeping up to date with our social media and we'll post a lot about when we need something, when there's a call to action. So if it's messaging your - emailing rather your MSP, or signing a petition, like, it definitely changes. But the support we've had so far from our social media, it's definitely been the best way, I think, to engage with people that are trying to make a change.

[00:43:38.690] - Alys Mumford

Amazing. We will obviously link to all of those accounts in the show notes, so to find them, follow Back Off Scotland and support them however you can. Before we sort of come to a close, is there anything that you want to say, either of you, about the campaign or about what you're doing or just anything you want to tell our listeners?

[00:44:02.450] - Lucy Grieve

I think one thing for me that I was quite surprised at was how difficult it was to sort of interact with the Women's Health Minister. So I think just giving people context, it was actually a very difficult sort of discussion to have. So when we met, I think it was in September was it Alice? With Maree Todd for having a Women's Health Minister enacted, it was like the absolute biggest stumbling block we've ever faced. And for that, I think a wider question maybe needs to be asked about the role of a Women's Health Minister that sort of also presides over, like other things in their portfolio, sort of like as sport, right. And then abortion isn't in the health portfolio. It's in the public health portfolio. And then buffer zones would come under, like the justice portfolio. It's very confusing. I think that sort of called into question how confusing the ministerial shake up that happened, like halfway through our campaign, kind of like, did affect us. And we think abortion is something that should be firmly in the health portfolio. So definitely more sort of question or more awareness from everybody around that might shed light on why it's been so sort of difficult for us to make more progress faster.

[00:45:27.850] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, that's really interesting. And I think it's funny because Engender does a lot of work on the Women's Health Plan and actually one of the things lots of folks have been talking about is not making that all focus on reproduction. Because often people say well, women's health is periods, menopause, and babies. That's what it is. And to actually say, well, there's medical misogyny in all areas. There's racism in medicine. So trying to say don't just focus on reproductive rights, but actually there's still so much to go on reproductive rights, and yet it's not even seen as - so in one way, health focuses too much on that. In another way, it completely ignores it and says, no, this isn't an issue of healthcare. This is an issue of, as you say, morals or public health. It sort of reminds me of - there's a Marilyn Waring quote talking about gender budgeting and unpaid work done by women and saying basically, I'm sort of sick of all these arguments about who does the dishes. But at the end of the day, someone needs to do the dishes. And it's like we can talk about how we shouldn't be reducing things to this, but actually that's where society is. That the truth is that people accessing abortion care are faced with this. So yes, bit of a tangent there.

[00:46:51.690] - Alys Mumford

So, we are going to finish up the podcast with recommendations, as we always do. So alongside, obviously following and supporting Back Off Scotland and keeping up to date with their work. Has anyone got a recommendation for us? It could be something to do with this topic or it could be

something entirely frivolous.

[00:47:11.670] - Lucy Grieve

I read a great book, at the sort of end of last year, and it was called Without Apology: The Abortion Struggle Now, and it was written by Jenny Brown. I just loved this book. I think - it's quite focused on sort of the American struggle now, but I think it definitely really hits hard, shows, you know, what actually could happen over here if our rights sort of continue to be eroded, shows the sort of dark pathway could be going down, actually restricting abortion access. And I think it was really great, illuminating the point that an abortion ban doesn't stop abortion, it just stops safe abortion. So I would absolutely - it's quite a small book as well, I think The Lighthouse Books in Edinburgh - I got that there. And I love that place as well. Great for anything about women's rights. Yeah, that would be my recommendation.

[00:48:09.460] - Alys Mumford

Incredible, thank you. Amanda, recommendation from you, please?

[00:48:13.550] - Amanda Aitken

Yeah, mine is quite on the spot. But today - we're recording this at the very beginning of LGBT History Month, and I just wanted to, you know, I think we do this if it's not Bake off, it's the Women's Library that we're plugging so - [Laughter]. But I just wanted to shout out to the Women's Library and if you've not done it and you live in Glasgow or if you're through in Glasgow this month, you should do their Stride with Pride LGBT Heritage Walking Tour. It's a great way to find out about LGBT histories in Glasgow and also shamelessly plugging that I did the audio guide for it. [Laughter]. If you're not sick of listening to me on this podcast, go walk around Glasgow with me.

[00:48:57.030] - Alys Mumford

That's delightful. Everyone should do that.

[00:48:59.360] - Amanda Aitken

They should, yeah, it's a really fun walk. It's really good. And I learnt so much about the history of Glasgow whilst doing it and I love me some facts, so it's always good to learn about your town. What about you, Alys?

[00:49:12.060] - Alys Mumford

My recommendation is a book as well and it's quite an old book now, but it's The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks By Rebecca Skloot, which I've had on my shelf for a while and I've just read and it's brilliant. So it's talking about the medical misogyny involved in the discovery of the HeLa cells which are used in all sorts of genetics, cancer research, all sorts of things, but were basically taken without sort of informed consent from a Black woman in the 50s in the States. And the story is Henrietta's story, but the story of her family and the story of medical misogyny and racism. It's depressing, obviously, but it's really thoughtfully done, including some really beautiful - so it's written by a white woman and there's lots of conversations about her writing about a woman of colour and she sort of relays verbatim conversations she's had with people of colour, essentially sort of making her pass a test to prove she sort of gets stuff before they'll give her any information, which is quite pleasing. So, yeah - recommend that. And I'm going to have a frivolous one as well because you mentioned the Bake Off and it's the Pottery Throw Down Which I resisted for quite a long time, but The Great Pottery Throw Down - just watch people making pots. Very pleasing.

[00:50:38.270] - Amanda Aitken

Thank you so much to our guests and yeah, thanks again for listening and we will link to everything that we have mentioned today in this podcast from Back Off Scotland, from our recommendations, and yeah, we'll see you next time.

[00:50:56.590] - Amanda Aitken

On the Engender hosted by Alys Mumford and produced by myself, Amanda Aitken. The music featured throughout Was written and performed by Bossy Love. To find out more about the work of Engender, head to engender.scot or follow us on Twitter at @EngenderScot and be sure to click

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