

[00:00:03.730]
[Jingle]

[00:00:09.040] - Amanda Stanley

Hello and welcome to You'll Have Had Yer Feminism, a brand new podcast series where I, Amanda Stanley, will be looking at and celebrating the past 25 years of the women's movement in Scotland. Specifically, I'll be taking a look at such history through the lens of Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, Engender, who celebrated their 25th anniversary this time last year. Across this mini-series, I'll be delving deep into the archives of Engender, exploring its growth over the past quarter of a century and with that, its relationships and achievements with the wider women's equality movement in Scotland. I'll be talking to some of the key women who founded Engender to learn about the birth of the organisation in the early 90s.

[00:00:51.490] - Esther Breitenbach

Engender has been an organisation that had the kind of funding, and some core funding, not just relying on membership funding, and so that it could have a base, could be - and the women who were doing the work, it was seen as a real job and it had different kind of support networks that you need. Not women doing it on a voluntary basis, on top of everything else -

[00:01:16.240] - Leslie Hills

No, no, we were absolutely certain of that, yep.

[00:01:16.870] - Esther Breitenbach

- and their busy lives. So this was the real vision, to have an organisation that in that sense was sustainable.

[00:01:23.320] - Amanda Stanley

And also meeting with some of Scotland's women's organisations and feminists to discuss the work that they do and their aspirations, looking forward to the next 25 years.

[00:01:32.500] - Patrycja Kupiec

Seeing more women in those positions, of leadership. And I think that could come about from a cultural change, from that shift, whether it's going to happen within the next 25 years, I don't know. I would hope so, that through the work of organisations like Engender and our organisation. We can keep pushing for that shift. And obviously that's like what I want to see for my daughter as well. Like, I don't want to wake up in 25 years time and see that she is facing exactly the same challenges that I faced when I was a young woman.

[00:02:03.700] - Amanda Stanley

In the coming episodes, expect to hear everything from what keeps young feminists motivated to fight for change:

[00:02:10.090] - Brenna Jessie

Yeah, we protested. Yeah, we made it an election issue. Yeah, 600 people turned up at George Square, and were furious about women's access to Social Security. But, we didn't win. You know - the policy still exists, we didn't win. And so I feel a bit like a fraud, and that's really hard. I think that where I found strength is very much been in the solidarity and sisterhood from women, and about really trusting myself and what I'm doing and relying on that, at all times of being grounded in my friendship with other women.

[00:02:45.760] - Amanda Stanley

To wild stories of founding Engender members, sword fighting down in the borders.

[00:02:50.110] - Alice Brown

And I remember trying to get to bed that night going up the stairs. And it was a funny hotel because they had - do you remember the armour they had, suits of armour - and we were fighting each other with the swords [laughter] at various points. I thought, oh my god, if this armour tumbles down the

stairs, we really will be in trouble.

[00:03:07.468]

[Jingle]

[00:03:13.260] - Amanda Stanley

It's clear that there are many stories to tell, too many for this one series. There have, of course, also been a number of women who have been involved in, or supported Engender, in one way or another throughout the years. And again, too many to interview and of course, sadly, some who are no longer with us. However, their names and legacies live on with Engender. And I hope through the interviews you'll hear, alongside the archive research, and other conversations I had along the way, that this series will offer a snapshot into such histories and highlight how Scotland's feminist movement has for a long time, and continues to be, driven by a great sisterhood of women who desire to make Scotland a more equal place.

[00:03:50.420] - Amanda Stanley

Having personally worked with Engender for a couple of years now as their podcast producer, I've had the opportunity to feature so many incredible feminist voices from around the country covering a variety of topics, many of whom feature in this series, but an awful lot who don't. But don't fret, you can listen to all of those episodes by searching for On the Engender, wherever you get your podcasts. But one thing that has been missing through all the conversations I've recorded, is the history of Engender and where it all began. Engender is a well-established and respected policy and advocacy organisation here in Scotland today. And so it's hard to believe that there was once a time where the organisation didn't have an office, or paid staff, or that their research wasn't being brought up by politicians in debates. I wanted to find out more about this, about how and why Engender began, about the activism in Scotland in the early 90s in the lead up to the Scottish Parliament being formed, and what that would mean for women in Scotland in the years that followed.

[00:04:46.550] - Amanda Stanley

As with many stories around campaigning and activism, the roots of such equality driven movements such as the women's one, and indeed the creation of Engender, starts with planning and organising and hours of unpaid work, in order to lay the foundations to make something bigger. I sat down with one of the founding members of Engender, Esther Breitenbach, alongside the former head of Equalities, Human Rights and the Third Sector, of the Scottish government, Yvonne Strachan, and the former director of One Parent Families Scotland and previous convenor of Engender, Sue Robertson at Engender's office in Edinburgh. As we sat down, looking through old reports and archived materials, my first question to Esther really was, so how did it all begin?

[00:05:27.980] - Esther Breitenbach

I think the first thing to say is, Sue Innes who was then writing as a columnist in Scotland on Sunday, who took the initiative to pool a group together, to organise a conference. And I was working in Aberdeen at the time, and then I moved back to Edinburgh, I think just before the conference happened, or maybe just after. That was held at the City Chambers, it was chaired by Sheena McDonald, and Yvonne and I were among the speakers. And after that, it of was typical format, I don't know, probably I've given the programme to somebody, so there was workshops, you know, there was plenary sessions and workshops. And there was a lot of talk at that stage about we need something - it was initially the idea that people needed to communicate more. There was a lot going on, but we didn't necessarily know about it. So, it was the idea of just being an information network. And when we first had these discussions that it was around that issue of an information network. And so I think we started - there was people met, and I wouldn't care to say how often before Engender as such came into being, because even then I think there was quite a lot of turnover, and who was coming to the meetings. But we were, first of all, talking about it as some Scottish Women's Information Network, and then it was sort of, Women's Foundation Scotland was an idea. It was also, you know, to try and raise some funds. And I was looking, because I know there's this issue about when did it actually start, and it's like 25 years [Sounds of agreement from other people]. Well, I looked at some papers, I found. And actually, as you can see, the first newsletter with Engender, as the name of the organisation was published in June 1992. And it was - Engender was registered as a limited company

on the 16th of September, 1992. So, in that sense, 1992 really is the starting point.

[00:07:24.890] - Amanda Stanley

Because it's 1993 that became a membership organisation which I think is what, the anniversary is?

[00:07:30.000] - Esther Breitenbach

That's right.

[00:07:30.002] - Multiple voices

Yes, yes. [Sounds of agreement]

[00:07:31.550] - Esther Breitenbach

And money was raised by a number of people giving quite generous donations [Sounds of agreement], and then other people who didn't have the cash putting in what they could. But the generous donations really provided a base, for the organisation. And what we decided to do was to produce nice materials to launch it. And so we had a designer, Lizzie Sanders, who was part of - her company was called Millhouse. And Lizzie did these nice leaflets and the logo and so on. So before we launched as an organisation, we had the kind of nice folders, and the leaflets. And then yes, the formal launch was early 1993.

[00:08:12.500] - Amanda Stanley

These donations would help to get Engender up and running. And when I met fellow founding members Alice Brown and Leslie Hills, Leslie spoke in more detail about how they gathered their initial donations, calling on friends, women and men alike, to chip in. But before that, here, Alice explains what the turning point was in the lead up to the parliament being formed and how that really created an opportunity for changing how women were represented in politics and government.

[00:08:37.550] - Alice Brown

The '92 general election was pivotal, because at that stage people were expecting a change of government and it didn't happen, which meant devolution wasn't going to happen. So that opportunity to create a different kind of democracy, so it's broader than - it's about representation more generally. And we were saying you can't talk about democracy and representation, if you don't actually think about women's role in this, it's not - don't just keep it as if it's non-politically gendered. And so at that stage, when we saw what had happened, before the election, we'd set up a big conference called Changing the Face of Scottish Politics, which was really instrumental because we had to -

[00:09:22.300] - Leslie Hills

It was in Glasgow.

[00:09:22.930] - Alice Brown

- it was in Glasgow, and it was done through the John Wheatley Centre at the time. And we used these organisations like John Wheatley, and I was at the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, to get them active and actually supporting events, to get some debate going on some of this. And that it was one of the few events that they held, that actually was sold out, you know, you couldn't get in! And so there was 200 women, all came together. And what they were asked to do, was to imagine a parliament that actually was 50/50 and what difference that would make to ordinary women. And we weren't talking about just politically active women. And this, again, is one unique features of this, that it crossed party, but crucially, it actually was non-party. It was just a lot of women, in all different walks of life saying this isn't right.

[00:10:14.480] - Leslie Hills

And very, very aware of all women who don't have a voice, because we were all people who did have a certain amount of voice -

[00:10:21.610] - Alice Brown

We had a voice, to some extent.

[00:10:21.610] - Leslie Hills
- although, it was continually not listened to.

[00:10:23.890] - Alice Brown
Yes. So, when the election was lost from a Labour perspective, that went by. So we had a recall conference to say, look, it might be lost and everyone's depressed, but actually the campaign really starts now. We get ready for the next one. And we were very strategic. This is what I think is something, and we were very collaborative, because, you know, there's not often a good history of people collaborating well on some of these things. And so there was space for everyone to, I think, get engaged, if they wanted to get engaged. That was one of the things I remember about it as well. But the crucial thing, I think that drew people together was, in a lifetime, when do you get the opportunity to create a parliament, and to do so in peaceful circumstances. You could not let that once in a lifetime opportunity pass, it was a unique opportunity. Because once you have incumbency, once you have bums on seats, you can't get them off. And that's what we found in Westminster. Before the next election, there was only three women MPs representing Scottish constituencies out of seventy two. I mean, that's just appalling. So once these seats were taken, so it was a new house and new seats. This is what galvanised people to think, well, actually, if you start more or less 50/50, then the thing starts on an equal basis.

[00:11:44.830] - Leslie Hills
And if you don't have first past the post -

[00:11:46.620] - Alice Brown
And if you don't have first past the post, there's ways of achieving it.

[00:11:48.990] - Leslie Hills
For most deficits. [?Unclear]

[00:11:49.450] - Alice Brown
That's right, yeah. But Leslie made a point earlier about evidence and data and information. And this is one of the key things that Engender focused on. And if I go back a bit, Esther and I and a woman called Fiona Myers, produced for the Equal Opportunities Commission just before the election, a document, which did a complete literature survey of what we know about women in Scotland. And of course what it showed was howling gaps. And what it also demonstrated was that evidence wasn't even being collected. So there is just basic things about data, and statistical analysis, you couldn't do. Because it wasn't broken down by sex, let alone region, or lots of other categories. And without that basic information, it was difficult actually to make the argument. But that was why the gender audit was born out of Engender, that became one of its real babies, because it was a source of just fundamental information about women in business, women in law, women in culture, women in politics, and crudely, you know - knowledge is power. But it - Les mentioned raising awareness. It was a real tool for actually taking that out with us and saying, you know, look at these low levels of representation. And actually appealing to men about it, because I think, well, genuinely some of them - not that they weren't aware - but they just didn't even think about it.

[00:13:18.090] - Leslie Hills
They didn't think it was important, it really wasn't. But, there were men with goodwill.

[00:13:23.880] - Alice Brown
Yes.

[00:13:24.390] - Leslie Hills
And I do remember one of the things when we decided to raise money to get started, I sent a letter to all the men that I knew, that I knew would be helpful towards us. And I was explaining that we wanted to set up an organisation that would take away all their power [Laughter]. And I elaborated on this to some extent, and then said that if they gave me money, I promised I would not harangue them at dinner parties ever again. I didn't keep that promise. But actually, people gave me - [unclear] gave me about 100 quid. It was a lot of money at the time. And there was a fiver from here, and a fiver from

there, which was quite nice. And I think it was part of what we felt, that the last thing we wanted to do was to alienate. We wanted to have the data to make our point, so that these men could not refute it, and would not want to refute it basically.

[00:14:14.890] - Alice Brown

Indeed, indeed. Because the argument was always, that this would actually improve democracy, because, remember, the context was about, you know, real debates about democracy. This would improve democracy, because it would give a voice to people who currently don't have a voice yet, are impacted by all sorts of policies, people, not just women's issues - transport, economics, anything you care to mention. And you started to see people saying, yeah I can get your point, and you bring a different perspective to the table. You therefore would have policies that were much more in tune with people's needs, etc. So that was the kind of debates you would have, so it wasn't confrontational. As I said, it was trying to influence key men as well, who were decision makers and gatekeepers, to a large extent. Yeah, just again, to reinforce -

[00:15:08.190] - Leslie Hills

That's quite interesting how terrified they were. [Laughter]

[00:15:10.008] - Alice Brown

Yes!

[00:15:10.710] - Amanda Stanley

I was going to ask, how successful was that?

[00:15:12.900] - Alice Brown

Well, they started to take it seriously because suddenly, you know, women do vote, surprise, surprise. And you then started to get that click between actually, party interest. Brian was one of the very, very few journalists, Brian Taylor, who started to take us seriously, because you couldn't get anyone to - I think you've said this Leslie - couldn't get anyone to be interested because we weren't interesting. In their view. And then suddenly we started doing things like the demonstration outside St. Andrews House with the dirty washing, and stuff like that. And, you know, to raise awareness, big campaigns in the newspapers, 50/50, and again, people contributed to get these adverts in the newspapers. And suddenly you've got the gentleman or two saying - mm, yeah. And Brian was one of the few that took it very, very seriously, and started to say - oh, this could actually influence the outcome of the election? This is where, again, the academic backgrounds were useful. And also a key element here was the comparative dimension. We drew on evidence from Sweden, Finland, Norway, and others, to say - look this can be done. It's not beyond the realms of possibility. And this is how individual parties can do it.

[00:16:26.870] - Amanda Stanley

During all of this work and campaigning in the early 90s, Engender was also still formalising itself as an organisation. It already started gaining traction, but still needed to figure out how the structure of the organisation should look. With little time to waste, the group would head to the borders for an intensive planning weekend.

[00:16:44.000] - Leslie Hills

We were all incredibly busy. And I think that meant that we would meet once a month, after we got started and we were incredibly efficient.

[00:16:56.750] - Alice Brown

[Sounds of agreement] Yep.

[00:16:57.350] - Leslie Hills

We all knew what we were doing. Even at that time, we were on computers, which was most unusual. And we were just really, really efficient at getting things done, which was hugely important, I think. And after we had called that meeting where you were, and we all put 200 pounds in, and then having to decide what we were going to do, and get our structure set up properly, we decided to go away for

the weekend. And we went to the borders.

[00:17:24.140] - Amanda Stanley

Could you expand on that? Because that's something that I thought was interesting on the second newsletter it was, that you spoke about that and what happened.

[00:17:32.740] - Leslie Hills

Yes.

[00:17:33.590] - Amanda Stanley

It would be quite interesting, just for the people who will be listening, if you could expand on what happened when you were down in the borders?

[00:17:40.280] - Leslie Hills

I had been working for the Scottish Education Department and running committees, and I had discovered - we used to have these terrible meetings in some government building in Glasgow, and they'd put us up in some terrible hotel. And I discovered that for exactly the same money, if not less, we could have a proper weekend away in a hotel in the borders. At that time, they were doing a few days very cheaply in winter.

[00:18:03.512] - Alice Brown

That's right, that's right.

[00:18:04.070] - Leslie Hills

So, you know -

[00:18:04.850] - Alice Brown

A bed and breakfast. Or a dinner, bed and breakfast!

[00:18:07.990] - Leslie Hills

I would, sort of - I mean they were all men on the committees that I was on. I was never, ever on a committee that I wasn't the only woman on, which meant, of course, that if you made a mistake - oh, women were useless and not the other way round. So we decided to go to this hotel. And we were very efficient and very serious, I think. But we had, I can't remember, the agenda was about structure, I think. How we were going to set this up.

[00:18:34.958] - Alice Brown

And membership -

[00:18:35.390] - Leslie Hills

And also absolutely getting aims straight. And membership, what membership would be, and how we would organise it. And there were interim aims, and because the parliament wasn't anywhere near set up. So it was all of that. And building towards it.

[00:18:51.530] - Alice Brown

It was the planning, it was that planning again.

[00:18:53.570] - Leslie Hills

Yep, exactly. Really, I mean, after the weekend, you asked about the weekend and the story that we tell is, of the work that we did. But in the evening, we went and we went to the bar, and it was so funny. There was a whole bunch of us. Now, it's difficult for you young women to understand that the sight of a group of women, who weren't knitting, who were out on a Saturday night -

[00:19:19.340] - Alice Brown

Enjoying themselves -

[00:19:19.910] - Leslie Hills

on their own, enjoying themselves -

[00:19:21.740] - Alice Brown
without men.

[00:19:21.740] - Leslie Hills
drinking, and clearly, you know, enjoying each other's company, was not just surprising to the men that were there, but was anathema to them.

[00:19:29.930] - Alice Brown
It was threatening, actually.

[00:19:30.710] - Leslie Hills
It was a real threat. You know, because women's friendships were not encouraged.

[00:19:35.600] - Alice Brown
No.

[00:19:35.600] - Leslie Hills
And there were no spaces where you could do it, women. Lesley Riddoch and I went over dinner round about that time, wee bit later. We went to a place on Leith Walk, and the guy who was serving us came up and said - on your own tonight, ladies, are you?

[00:19:49.150] - Alice Brown
[Laughter]

[00:19:51.490] - Leslie Hills
We've always said - no, I'm with her! [Laughter] It was just extraordinary. One of the other things that I ought to say, though, is that it was '92, so I would be nearly 50.

[00:20:04.980] - Alice Brown
Yeah, you were just under 50.

[00:20:05.700] - Leslie Hills
And what we all thought was, we wanted to do this, get it set up, get it going and hand it over. And it was very much our thoughts because I mean, Margaret was older than me, Oona was older than me. Hope's, just older than me. And we all felt that we didn't want it to turn into one of these institutions, run by people for their own purposes, basically.

[00:20:31.752] - Alice Brown
Yes, yes, it was to be an evolving, growing organisation -

[00:20:32.900] - Leslie Hills
- as it got older, and really want it. And that was one of the things that we, kind of, came out with. We must find a way of getting young women involved. And to a huge extent that worked.

[00:20:46.310] - Alice Brown
It did. I mean, I think one of the things about that organisational weekend, because it was incredibly efficient, because it went off on Saturday morning. We sat down, we got organised and had the flip charts out, and we were doing all the stuff. But we'd all been active. And in politics, you know, you and I in the Labour Party, we knew how to run meetings. We held positions in different organisations, that we knew about structures, so we thought, let's forget this because we'd all been hippies in our day. Let's forget the structuralist stuff. Some things have to get done, decisions have to be made. We want to keep it open, but we need you know - we're very clear about some of the ways of setting up an organisation. And I think we underestimated the skills that we brought, actually, you know, because we just did it. That weekend.

[00:21:30.190] - Leslie Hills
There was no wandering off -

[00:21:31.370] - Alice Brown
No, no.

[00:21:31.660] - Leslie Hills
There was nothing, it was absolutely to the point.

[00:21:34.510] - Alice Brown
I've got one or two photos, I was trying to find last night, but I'll look for them. And I remember trying to get to bed that night, going up the stairs. And it was a funny hotel because it had - do you remember the armour? They had suits of armour. [Laughter] And we were fighting each other with the swords at various points. I thought, oh my God, if this armour tumbles down the stairs we really will be in trouble. But we actually got very aggressive comments from guys in the bar. I mean, really aggressive. I mean, you know, totally uncalled for. Because we weren't bothering them. But it was, it really was, you know, who are you? And you, what are you? You know, and how dare you be out without men? That was the implication wasn't it.

[00:22:16.600] - Amanda Stanley
Men being disgruntled at women having fun, and taking up space is definitely still very much so a problem today. Within the realms of the media and politics in Scotland also, women continue to be underrepresented, but also under supported. Which is why in the early years of Engender, there was a desire to create a space for women to meet. As Esther and Sue explain.

[00:22:37.570] - Sue Robertson
There was some discussion around, in the early stages, about that part of the purpose might be having a women's centre as well.

[00:22:47.830] - Yvonne Strachan
Oh, yes, I'd forgotten about that.

[00:22:49.060] - Esther Breitenbach
It wasn't so much a centre, but a club!

[00:22:52.130] - Sue Robertson
Yes, yes, yes. Because -

[00:22:54.070] - Amanda Stanley
When can we bring that back? [Laughter]

[00:22:56.080] - Esther Breitenbach
But the idea of the club, I'll elaborate on that a bit because I think it was quite an important concept and I think it's a shame it didn't happen. The idea was it would be a space for women to drop in, and feel relaxed and talk about politics, and other things. So that they would have a social space, and it would be situated near the parliament. The assumption would be that we'd have a parliament. And so it would be there as an organisation that you could have, you know, this kind of formal, informal discussions going on around the political issues, and be close by, you know, have your building with your social club element [Sounds of agreement]. Close by the parliament, so that you could act as a sort of lobbying organisation. And I think, you know, we'd talk through the issues about the club, that while it would have been a sort of a women's space, you would have had the capacity to invite male guests, you know. And the male allies point is probably important. [Sounds of agreement]

[00:23:52.160] - Multiple voices
Yes, yes.

[00:23:53.330] - Esther Breitenbach

Some men gave money, as well. [Sounds of agreement]

[00:23:56.340] - Yvonne Strachan
And who were always kind of I guess, a supporter.

[00:23:58.460] - Multiple voices
Yes. Yes.

[00:23:59.860] - Amanda Stanley
It's interesting that you said near the parliament because obviously now, although not a social hub, our new office is very close to the parliament!

[00:24:06.020] - Multiple voices
[Sounds of agreement and voices overlapping]

[00:24:08.560] - Yvonne Strachan
It's come to fruition!

[00:24:09.700] - Amanda Stanley
Yeah, it has! All we need now is a bar built-in somewhere.

[00:24:13.810] - Sue Robertson
Well it was interesting because I think the model, that Engender started off with, there was some wealthy women putting in money, and other people contributing what they could, had quite a long tail over the years because there was an issue from early on, of Engender being seen as a rather elitist organisation. And because initially membership fees were quite high because we were trying to raise money by that means. And one of the kind of tensions that was around in the early stages was trying to kind of be as successful as possible to women throughout Scotland, but also, you know, trying to have the money to do the things that we were doing, so -

[00:24:51.550] - Esther Breitenbach
Well I think the perception that people were quite wealthy was a misperception, Sue. So we were talking really about middle class professionals.

[00:24:58.780] - Sue Robertson
Yes, yes - not very wealthy.

[00:24:59.810] - Esther Breitenbach
Yes, yes.

[00:25:01.330] - Multiple voices
[Laughter]

[00:25:04.950] - Esther Breitenbach
That's important point to make, because, you know, [Sounds of agreement] there were a lot of people out there in that position. But so, self-finance, also want to add to that because we did this, sort of, the business plan, which I think we were looking for something like sixty seven thousand pounds at the time. And we maybe had a few thousand that we'd raised from the donations. And I was treasurer at the time. And actually it was very frustrating because once we'd got enough money to start doing things, couldn't get people to be interested in fundraising.

[00:25:35.980] - Sue Robertson
Yeah.

[00:25:36.400] - Esther Breitenbach
And I did things, you're probably familiar with this from your organisational life, Sue -

[00:25:41.710] - Sue Robertson
Yes.

[00:25:41.710] - Esther Breitenbach
I wrote to companies and so on to ask for sponsorship, but I think we weren't quite within [sounds of agreement] you know, that sort of milieu, if you like, where we could pool in that sort of money [sounds of agreement].

[00:25:52.780] - Yvonne Strachan
And that was an issue for Engender for a while, actually, because it was about changing the way you think about gender equality, and about women's position [sounds of agreement], whether it's statistically or - that wasn't like, we're going out, sorting out homelessness or doing something, but it was hugely important for changing the social position and the economic position for women. So that meant, it automatically wasn't that attractive to external, you know, businesses, or others [sounds of agreement] who are looking to say, on their bottom line well, we give to this charity, or that kind of operation [sounds of agreement]. And that fell through actually long into the park, because we had to make the case, [sounds of agreement], as to why Engender in the nature of it, should have the resources to do it. But just as a parallel, it's not obviously specifically to do with Engender, but it's contextual. Is that right from the outset of the equality unit having, or of there being a million pounds in the very first series of budget that we had, there's been money that has gone, most of the budget that the equality unit was responsible for, went out to projects right the way through. So, you know, I suppose there were two important things. One, is that the amount of money never decreased. It only ever increased. Which I mean, it might be held static, but we never lost - [sounds of agreement] never lost that support. And money that goes out, so all the you know, the intermediary Scottish Women's Aid, well Engender Scottish Women's Convention, but they also went out to lots of local projects. So, you know, working with violence against women across women's aid groups, that level of support, you know, sometimes there will be changes. But, you know, there was always a, you know, inside government, a commitment across really, political hues, I would have to say around this that, you know, might've been a slightly different emphasis, but to continue to support women's organisations, and organisations campaigning around women's equality, in the field. So, you know, the women's international centre will have been benefited. So, you know as well as others. So I think there's - in a way you could argue, that the work that Engender and work that was done in all the prep, to get both a different set up around devolution. But also the importance of equality and equal opportunities being part of the fabric, has continued to feed through [sounds of agreement], if you like, from the support coming in from the state, as well as what can be generated outside. And that comes with, you know, constraints inevitably. But I feel, I still think it's given Scotland [sounds of agreement] opportunities, you know, to ensure that the third sector, if you like, and women's organisations will then have a strength, or have a - have resources to enable them to do things.

[00:28:33.990] - Amanda Stanley
Yvonne's work with others and Engender specifically within the Scottish Parliament at that time, was so important because, as they said, the impact of that work in those early years continues to be felt today. But the hard work leading up to that point had been going on for many years, from the original Women 50/50 campaign to the numerous political conferences, and individual activism that women were participating in. And within Engender, one of the most significant pieces of research launched during the 90s, was their gender audit. The audit was launched with the aim of creating information on women's lives in Scotland, something that was under researched and even more so under published. Esther Breitenbach played a pivotal role in the creation of it, and here she breaks down where they got the data and what they did with it.

[00:29:17.550] - Esther Breitenbach
So, the gender audit was an idea that certainly I was pushing at an early stage, and I remember a meeting, it was at Hope Johnson's flat, and Suzy Innes was there. And myself and Ellen Kelly, it maybe was just the four of us, I can't remember. But Ellen saying, oh, we don't really need that, everybody knows.

[00:29:37.400] - Multiple voices

[Laughter]

[00:29:39.810] - Esther Breitenbach

And I was saying, no Ellen, people don't know what the position is in terms of gender difference. And anyway, Ellen sometimes did make comments like that, you know, but she didn't mean that she wasn't supportive and committed to it. So what emerged out of that was a group that was, you know, people came and went with the group. But we put together, this was done on a voluntary basis, and it was a mixture of analysing official statistics. So there were government statistics, but also bringing in bits of research, quite often postgraduate research that, you know, there were some who'd done work on women in the arts, and the Arts Council, that kind of thing. So it was a mixture of officially published data, which wasn't necessarily disaggregated or published in that form [sounds of agreement]. So we would be compiling tables and doing analysis, and as I say, using other research. And the first one came out in 1993, and it was published annually, I think until 2000. In 1995, we got some money from the Equal Opportunities Commission. In fact, I will also mention the research review, which isn't about the gender audit, but in, would've been, 1993, we applied the EOC Commission to Research Review on equality issues in Scotland. And we put in a bid, it was Alice Brown and myself, as a joint Engender Edinburgh University bid, so that brought some money into Engender. And Fiona Myers was employed as a researcher on it, and Alice and I did bits, and we all wrote it together. And that was again a sort of baseline report on equality issues in Scotland. And it obviously parallels the gender audit. We went back to the EOC to ask them for some money in 1995. We got a grant from the EOC, that helped with the design. And I'm not saying it's particularly flash, but what we got, this sort of summary bit in the, sort of I say, I'm holding on, [laughter] like the 1995 gender audit here and, you know, just a summary in an easily understandable format. And at that time, it was suggested we should press release it. And the person who did it was Linda Martin, who was active in the Glasgow group. Linda Martin did a press release. And much to my surprise, it got picked up by the newspapers, because well, it's not news. I mean, on the one hand, I would disagree with Ellen that everybody knew it. But on the other hand, it wasn't news you know, you're talking about trends, social trends, and slow change, and gender pay gaps and things like that. But it got picked up certainly that year, perhaps subsequently. So there was a lot of publicity in the Scottish press, including as I found in my files, in the Daily Mail. [Laughter] "Choked by Housework!" [?] So the idea that domestic labour was preventing people, women, from getting into the top jobs, but that would be putting words in my mouth. That's not quite how I would put it.

[00:33:07.550] - Esther Breitenbach

However, the gender audit was all voluntary labour, you know, and Louise Tate was the person who helped with all the layout and the tables and, you know, the formatting. You have to remember how new IT was [Sounds of agreement], we weren't doing cutting and pasting with pritt-stick as we did in the 70s. But here is is relatively new, and we had it done, it was printed at the Reprographics Department in Edinburgh University, which meant it was pretty cheaply done. And I would take the stuff down there and [inaudible 00:33:44] would print it and collect the copies, and then we'd distribute them, and they were for sale. I found a leaflet, so the 1994 one, for example, to individuals it was seven pounds a copy; to Engender members, five pounds a copy; to institutions, fifteen pounds a copy. So we'd do all that kind of thing, you know, people taking bundles and selling them and bringing back the money, and you know very, well kind of, hands-on practical, not a sophisticated operation. We might have had some in bookshops, probably did have in [crosstalk 00:34:18] a few copies -

[00:34:19.610] - Sue Robertson

Yes. And places like, sort of, independent bookshops.

[00:34:23.780] - Esther Breitenbach

Yes, so yes exactly. And to be honest, I can't remember financially whether, you know, the sales ever covered the costs or not. Because one of the things about the money that we had raised, in the beginning, was that it was enough to get the printing costs. And as I say, we were selling them. So whether or not it was breaking even I can't remember. But what was interesting, I think sometime in the mid-nineties, there was someone who was doing research about women's organisations in the third sector, who came to interview somebody - Siobhan, Reardon maybe? Not very sure about her surname, but I'm not even sure whether she was London-based or not. But she Siobhan was very

surprised, well she assumed, because we were producing this publication that there was an office and staff [Laughter][Sounds of agreement]. I was saying - no! So, I think that the gender audit gave a profile to the organisation [Sounds of agreement].

[00:35:19.440] - Sue Robertson

It was hugely important for credibility for Engender, yes.

[00:35:23.750] - Esther Breitenbach

They were very pleased to hear - [Laughter]

[00:35:24.500] - Sue Robertson

Yeah, I think it was one of our main, sort of, products, and it was always lingering in the background. The pressure behind it was also to get the Government to produce it because - [crosstalk 00:35:34]

[00:35:35.360] - Yvonne Strachan

I think that was the important thing, actually, although you say everybody knew, there wasn't any collection of data.

[00:35:41.010] - Multiple voices

No, no, no.

[00:35:41.780] - Yvonne Strachan

In a specific way, so what the gender audit was doing, was saying, here it is. And there was nowhere else that had that collation of material [Sound of agreement]. So not only was it significant for the visibility of Engender really important, actually the reason why people, it was in one place, with the information in a way that was accessible and people could say, my gosh, is this the state of play? So, and other organisations who then used the gender audit as information that allowed them to argue their case, or say well, look at this [Sounds of agreement]. It was hugely, hugely powerful and important. And I mean, there is a story then about what happens internally within government.

[00:36:19.760] - Multiple voices

Yes.

[00:36:20.120] - Yvonne Strachan

On the back of that, because the data collections were not disaggregated. So, I mean, yes, [crosstalk 00:36:25] so there's another story about this which is really important [Sounds of agreement], and continued to this day, which is about how we helped move, you know - [crosstalk 00:36:34]

[00:36:35.840] - Esther Breitenbach

I will add on to that, because I continued working with gender-disaggregated statistics in Government and beyond, as it were, and which was not any longer within Engender. But one of the things that happened, again when I came to work at the Scottish Office as a Women's Issues Research Consultant. There was already an atmosphere that, you know, things can be done and we had to negotiate. The statisticians weren't necessarily clued up about why it was important. I remember having a conversation with somebody about transport, and saying, well, why would it be worth looking at gender differences? And I'm saying, well, you know, there's things like public transport users, things about like driving licences and things, about who has accidents, and that sort of thing that are worth looking at from a gender perspective.

[00:37:21.140] - Amanda Stanley

Looking at every area of public life through a gendered lens, in the way Esther spoke about, continues to be a key part of Engender's work today. And her example of public transport being a gendered issue at the end there, reminded me of one of our previous podcasts from 2018 on this very topic. Just like with this podcast you're listening to just now, you can listen to that episode of On The Engender via our website, or wherever you get your podcasts. To round out this episode, I want to go back to Leslie and Alice, as they discuss the political motivation of Engender in the 90s, where they campaigned with fellow women's and equalities organisations to encourage women into politics and

to stand for election. One of these organisations was the original Women 50/50 campaign. And later in this series, we'll hear from Talat Yaqoob of the Current Women 50/50 campaign, as she discusses the progress that's been made, but also what still needs to change. Until then, here is Leslie and Alice recalling so vividly, how it felt to be at the opening of the Parliament following that first election, whereby a record number of women were elected.

[00:38:21.440] - Alice Brown

I think one of the most exciting things was that first opening of the Scottish Parliament, when it was a realisation of all that campaigning. And you know, if you're lucky enough to be invited to the opening ceremony, you're in there and you're waiting, and there's a big procession up the Royal Mile, you could hear the music, you could hear the chanting, and the doors burst open. And that old assembly building, remember, at the top of the mound -

[00:38:45.890] - Leslie Hills

I was actually filming it -

[00:38:47.960] - Alice Brown

Wasn't it amazing!

[00:38:49.760] - Leslie Hills

I was doing it and giving stuff to the BBC.

[00:38:51.050] - Alice Brown

And it was so emotional, because suddenly in walked colour, you didn't see just men in suits. There was all the colours of these women, the 48 women in that first Parliament. I mean, the Labour Party was only party to actually get 50/50, because of the mechanism. But they walked in, 48 of them out 129. So what, less than 40 percent, but still, it was amazing, and it kind of brought, symbolised. So you had that symbolic representation and you actually saw the results of that campaign. And it's interesting that a lot of women that won seats were not necessarily active in the campaign. And I remember going to thing a few years afterwards and someone said, well, there were lots of women elected. I'm not sure how, but it happened. And you're thinking, well, wait a minute. You know, you've got to realise that this did not happen by accident. This happened by the hard work, the passion, the commitment, of so many women, who didn't want to be in the Parliament. It was always assumed that we wanted seats, that's why we're active.

[00:39:54.980] - Leslie Hills

No, absolutely not.

[00:39:54.980] - Alice Brown

And that's another important point, none of these women wanted seats. None of us ever entered Parliament in that way, but we wanted other women to enter. So, I mean, what was disappointing though was, after that first tranche, the way in which the numbers dipped again. And it just shows that actually you can never stop making the case. And that's back to the making the case again and again and again. I mean, sometimes I think I have I still got to say this, about getting women on platforms and so on, seeing future generations. And that's why I think you - it's great to see young women now, starting to think much more about again, because the numbers have dropped and needs that constant reinvention.

[00:40:36.860] - Leslie Hills

But it's an interesting thing why they have dropped, I mean it's not just about procedures.

[00:40:40.470] - Alice Brown

No, no.

[00:40:40.850] - Leslie Hills

The thing that happened with many of the women was, that they decided they needed a life back.

[00:40:45.650] - Alice Brown

I think one thing that has amazed me is, I never thought I would see the day that the Scottish Parliament had so many women leaders of parties. I didn't think that would be in my lifetime, to be honest. And it has happened for all sorts of reasons, we could go into. But it's also, as we said, the very first years of the Parliament, women constantly criticised, one of the things that is 'progress', in inverted commas, is that we kind of take it for granted that there are women in there, at least. You know, maybe not as many as we want, but you don't get that kind of obvious stuff in the media, it's still under cover, a lot of the sexism and the chauvinism. But it's quite interesting, that it's accepted that there will be women in political positions.

[00:41:36.770] - Amanda Stanley

Thank you to Alice Brown, Leslie Hills, Esther Breitenbach, Sue Robertson, and Yvonne Strachan, for taking the time to sit down and share their memories. There are many more stories to come in the next episode as I sit down with more fierce feminists to discuss their memories of working within the women's sector throughout the past 25 years. So be sure to stay tuned for that.

[00:41:57.770] - Amanda Stanley

You'll Have Had Yer Feminism is hosted and produced by me, Amanda Stanley, on behalf of Engender, and the music featured throughout was written and performed by Lauren Mayberry. You can follow Engender on Twitter, @EngenderScot. And be sure to click subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss the next episode. To find out more about Engender's Heritage Project, and the photography exhibition that accompanies this podcast head to youllhavehadyerfeminism.com

[00:42:21.910]

[Jingle plays out]