

[00:00:03.750]
[Jingle]

[00:00:09.010] - Nicola Sturgeon

For 25 years now, Engender has been a hugely important voice for feminism and for gender equality in our country. This organisation has been truly instrumental in helping to bring about changes in policy, in legislation, and even more important and often even more difficult, changes in attitudes. Changes that have helped women, the length and breadth of Scotland. And as a result of that, I think everybody associated with Engender can take real pride in knowing that you have contributed to making Scotland a better, fairer and a more equal nation.

[00:00:56.470]
[Jingle]

[00:01:02.370] - Amanda Stanley

Hello and welcome to the final instalment of You'll Have Had Yer Feminism, the podcast series exploring 25 years of Engender's history and the wider women's movement in Scotland. My name is Amanda Stanley. You just heard the first minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon there talking Engender 25th anniversary, which took place in the garden lobby of the Scottish Parliament. She, alongside other speakers that night, highlighted the incredible work and progress Engender has achieved in its two and a half decade history and indeed served as a reminder to all those who gathered in celebration that evening that such achievements should be celebrated and marked with such an occasion. However, as we have come to know from across this series, the work of Engender is far larger than the organisation itself. Throughout this series, we've heard from a number of women about their involvement in, or with, the organisation and indeed from women in wider activist circles in Scotland. One thing that is evident from all the interviews and research I conducted for this series, however, is that no one is ever simply involved in just one organisation or project. Many of the women mentioned and interviewed throughout the series have and continue to dedicate their entire life, careers and activism to working hard in the fight for gender equality.

[00:02:16.950] - Amanda Stanley

From hearing stories of how Engender began to tales from fellow sister organisations, so many names are mentioned and mentioned again as memories of such activism and campaigning were recalled around various tables and homes in which I met these women. Whether it was someone mentioning the names who helped create Engender first gender audit or a feminist from another organisation discussing becoming a board member whilst working elsewhere in the sector. From sifting through the archives and talking with so many feminists about their life and work, it is clear that, like its history, the sisterhood that makes up Scotland's feminist movement is strong as ever and is forever continuing to develop and grow. This series has been but only a glimpse into the story of Engender and its place within a large and lively feminist movement. And so in this final episode, I'll be continuing the trajectory of looking at Scotland's thriving feminist future as I catch up with Brenna Jessie from Rape Crisis Scotland, as well as talking with the Director of the Young Women's Movement and YWCA Scotland, Patrycja Kupiec, and later on in the episode, we hear from the Executive Director of Engender Emma Ritch. But first, my colleague Alys Mumford caught up with the Deputy Chair of the People First Scotland's Parents' Group, Joan Irons, to discuss her work with the group and her involvement in Engender's recent Our Bodies, Our Rights project. The project saw Engender speak with disabled women from across Scotland about their experiences of sex education, relationships, family planning, maternity services, amongst other issues surrounding reproductive rights. Here's Joan.

[00:03:46.140] - Joan Irons

Hello, my name is Joan Irons, I live in Fife and I have been involved with People First for over five years. I am the Deputy Chair of The Parents' Group. The Parents' Group campaigns for the rights of our parents with learning disabilities. We influence policy and provide training for professionals to help them understand how best to work with people who have learning disabilities.

[00:04:10.680] - Alys Mumford

So you've done a lot of work with Engender on women's equality, particularly the Our Bodies, Our Rights project with disabled women. Can you talk about how you got involved with that?

[00:04:19.350] - Joan Irons

Catriona Kirkpatrick, the Development Manager with Engender approached People First and the Development Worker we had at the time recommended me to be part of the project. I attended lots of meetings throughout Scotland where we could discuss and understand the discrimination faced by women today. This led to discussions where I came up with the name Our Bodies, Our Rights.

[00:04:45.750] - Alys Mumford

So that's just one thing we're doing to try and make lives better for disabled women in Scotland. What do you think needs to change to make things better for women in Scotland?

[00:04:53.940] - Joan Irons

All women need to understand their rights and know where to go for help if they need it. We need to be able to get the right help at the right time. We need to understand that there are bodies and boundaries in relationships, they are right and wrong. And we need to know that we can say no to anything that is inappropriate to make us feel uncomfortable. We are in charge of our bodies.

[00:05:20.940] - Alys Mumford

And what are you hoping for over the next 25 years?

[00:05:24.960] - Joan Irons

Still to be involved with People First, to be campaigning for the rights for disabled people. Although, I would hope that by the less campaigning we need for all women, disabled or not, to have the same rights and to understand them. For those in need to be able to ask for help without fear of losing their children, or families, for all whom to be able to live happy lives, free from fear of any type of abuse.

[00:05:54.330] - Amanda Stanley

You can find out more information on Engender's research and recommendations for the Scottish Government and service providers in Engender's Our Bodies, Our Rights report, which is available on Engender's website, engender.org.uk and it's available on both an easy read format and audio too.

[00:06:10.780] - Amanda Stanley

In the last episode of You'll Have Had Yer Feminism, Suki Wan spoke to me about her interest in politics as a young woman and what she hopes to see change across the next 25 years. Continuing on from that conversation, I spoke with Patrycja Kupiec, the Director of the YWCA Young Women's Movement Scotland, about their work. The organisation has a 160 year history that advocates for young women's voices to be heard and respected and celebrated. And so I wanted to ask her about her work with the organisation and what the biggest challenges are that she's seen of young women accessing activist spaces and political participation.

[00:06:45.930] - Patrycja Kupiec

The biggest one that I think we've all suffered from is imposter syndrome. I mean, I come from an academic background and I definitely suffered with that so much. Even if you are doing way more than all your peers and especially our male peers, you always have that sort of feeling that I should be doing more, I should be taking up more space, but then without taking up so much space that you are labelled, you know, too ambitious or bossy or a bitch. Or taking up so much space to the point that you don't leave space for other women as well on that kind of journey with you. So I think that's one that keeps coming up a lot and then just being patronised, just not being treated seriously. And I think it's especially for young women that you feel like you almost have to be obnoxious about your skills and your experiences and what you're bringing to the table, because if you don't keep emphasising it all the time, people will just assume that you don't have those skills and that you don't have that experience.

[00:07:48.600] - Patrycja Kupiec

I mean, I've attended so many meetings at which people thought that I'm just there to make coffee

and then you just, like, literally have to go in - and like I have a PhD, so I would have to be like - introduce myself as a doctor, which I understand can be quite obnoxious. But it's like - you just feel like you need to assert yourself all the time. And I think that's one of the biggest barriers. And I think that's where we kind of need to have that cultural shift. So if you see a young woman attending a board meeting or if you see a young woman in a political space, you are not going to assume immediately that she is there doing an internship or she is there to take notes, but she is actually there because she deserves to be there and she's bringing skills and knowledge to the table that is unique to her and her experiences. Because I think that keeps coming up all the time and across all sectors, whether it's STEM, whether it's academia in general, whether it's politics, it's that sort of fear of not being treated seriously.

[00:08:45.750] - Amanda Stanley

And one thing you mentioned there was about politics. And that's something that caught my eye of the work that you do, because I see online everything that you go up to with young women, bring them into the Parliament and things. So I thought maybe you'd be able to expand a bit on the work that you do with your project, Young Women Lead, which is about increasing young women's participation in politics. And maybe you could expound on why that's really important?

[00:09:07.710] - Patrycja Kupiec

So this project came about from our Status of Young Women in Scotland research, where young women are telling us that they don't feel very represented in politics and then that they lack confidence to access those political spaces. So we came up with an idea of a leadership project that will take place at the Parliaments with young women setting up their own committee and getting kind of like a condensed experience of being in in a committee so that they get exactly the same support as any other parliamentary committee would get, just in a year's time. And then they, together as a group, they choose an issue that they want to focus on that year. And then they present a report at the end to the Scottish Parliament asking for a change in that area. It turned out to be really powerful to have those young women in that the political space. So it's really affecting change. And I think seeing the growth in young woman with a place, who participated in the programme, just even from like feeling confident in the committee room, which if you do it for the first time, like I've done it for the first time recently and it's terrifying with all the cameras and, you know, like it's not a particularly welcoming space. So even like bringing people there and showing them around and making them feel comfortable, we're hoping that it's going to increase participation and young women will feel like, yeah, I can give evidence to another parliamentary committee or hopefully maybe I'll stand for election or I'll be just more politically engaged. So that's the sort of entire idea behind the project. But it's also a kind of personal development and developing new leadership skills and developing confidence as well. So it's one of our, I think, flagship projects and one of my favourite ones to work on.

[00:10:52.800] - Amanda Stanley

And what would you like to see change for women in Scotland across the next 25 years? What are the key things that you want to see change?

[00:10:59.580] - Patrycja Kupiec

I think the biggest one is probably, and it's kind of like a vague answer, I guess, but it's that sort of cultural shift, that sort of not being surprised when you see a young woman claiming their seat at the table and not assuming that they've done it at someone else's expense or they had to - I don't know, that's through their connections. But just understanding that it's because of their skills and it's because of their knowledge, I think for me that would be the biggest thing if we can get away from that sort of attitude that someone young is definitely unexperienced and there is nothing interesting that they can bring to the table. And it's the same for women as well. So I would really like to see, you know, more women being head of departments across Scottish universities, because in some disciplines, like it's literally zero or it's like maybe one. More women having access to those political spaces and standing for election and having confidence to stand for election and actually being elected as well. So it's just seeing more women in those positions of leadership. And I think that could come about from a 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's 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.

[00:12:39.070] - Amanda Stanley

This series has highlighted the tireless and selfless work of feminists as they try to create change for an easier, more equal future. And I'm sure Patrycja expressing her hopes for her daughter to live in a society where she does not suffer the same challenges that she has will resonate with many. There is still so much work to be done in the fight for equality, and this job is made even harder when the UK government continues to bring out damaging policies that impact women disproportionately. It has now been three years since the introduction of the UK government's horrific family cap and rape clause, and the fight against it continues on today. One feminist who is leading the charge on this is Brenna Jessie. Brenna has campaigned tirelessly on a number of issues over her years as an activist. And so I caught up with her in a café in Glasgow as she explains what the UK government's family cap is and to discuss the protests she helped organise with a number of other prominent feminists in Scotland in response to the government's announcement of such a policy three years ago. To begin, here Brenna talks about being thrown in at the deep end with campaigning when she helped contribute to the No More Page Three campaign and how such work helped her gain confidence, which can be felt through the campaign work she does today.

[00:13:48.300] - Brenna Jessie

There was a really lovely point, actually, when I attended my first ever cross-party group for ending men's violence against women and children. And Malcolm Chisholm, the former MSP, had invited us along and I thought we were going along to observe. And then - so I turned up with a gang in our T-shirts and then he was like, so you'll be on second. And I was like, oh, so I'm presenting! And as someone that was absolutely phobic of public speaking, I was utterly terrified by this prospect. But what I realised with campaigning, is that it also turns you into a massive opportunist. And so it is really about taking any opportunity that you can because there's something that you believe that is bigger and more important than your own fears. And so, yeah, I ended up speaking and I stuttered my way through it and I was apologetic. I was overly apologetic and apologising for my presence and for the campaign, which felt horrible. But Lily Greenan, the former CEO of Scottish Women's Aid turned to me straight after I'd finished and said, I need you to stop apologising. What you're doing is important. We need you to keep going. And that was transformative for me in realising that there was value in what I was doing. And that validation was really important to me, grounding myself in what I want to do and what I want to use my voice for. And then the UK government brought out a toxic policy called the Two Child Cap and Rape Clause in 2017. This policy was picked up by Alison Thewliss MP, who did a tremendous job of raising awareness about it and of speaking out about it and utterly dogged in their determination to bring this to the public eye.

[00:15:25.180] - Brenna Jessie

And in Scotland, the women's sector basically agreed that we wouldn't be colluding in a policy that we saw as toxic and that would utterly change the relationship the local services would have with the people who come to them and who rely on them. The Two Child Cap, I suppose going back briefly, the Two Child Cap, is a policy that limits child tax credits to two children. So a third or subsequent child is eligible, but only if it's a multiple birth or as something that's more commonly known as the rape clause, which is where the child - it can be proved and verified that the child is born through non-consensual sex. This policy is utterly horrific and I think the Rape Clause got such attention, we managed to bring such attention to that. But I think we also really need to be looking at the Two Child Cap as a policy that is absolutely disgusting and that is knowingly pushing women and children in particular into poverty, so when I found out about this policy, I was angry. I was utterly, utterly enraged. And I tweeted about it and I tweeted about how unfair it was, about how unpredictable life is and how it is utterly, utterly impossible to be able to predict your finances for 18 years before you have a child. Like it is a completely unrealistic, unworkable policy that punishes the poor for their poverty when we know that poverty is something that is structural.

[00:16:43.540] - Brenna Jessie

And so tons of people just shared their experiences with me afterwards and that just really lit a fire

within me where I just really felt like, oh god, we've got to do something like it's got to - people are angry about this. At that moment, it didn't feel like there was anywhere for that anger to go. And so, I got together a little gang and we organised a protest and with four incredible women, I mean three incredible women and me, we organised this protest and we organised it because we were angry and it felt like a really useful, brilliant place for that anger to go. And it was an epic protest, actually. I'm incredibly proud of it. We had the most phenomenal line up of speakers, Mridul Wadhwa, Talat Yaqoob, Sandy Brindley of Rape Crisis Scotland. Mhairi Black was there and spoke, Alison Thewliss spoke, and Nicola Sturgeon wrote a letter for us to read out. And it was a truly brilliant protest. And I think what I'm most proud about is the fact that it made it an election issue. So just due to our timing, this then became an issue that politicians were questioned on and held to account on, and that needed to happen.

[00:17:53.860]
[Applause]

[00:17:56.940] - Alison Thewliss

Thank you so much, everybody, for coming along here tonight, though I want to give a special thanks to Brenna, Sarah, Michelle and Ceris for organising this event tonight. [Applause]. You've done a phenomenal job. I also want to thank, Engender, Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland, Rape Crisis Glasgow, Say Women, and all the women's organisations who have given so much support to me over the past 21 months.

[00:18:21.030] - Amanda Stanley

This is SNP MP Alison Thewliss talking at the protest against the Rape Clause in George Square, Glasgow, 2017.

[00:18:28.140] - Alison Thewliss

It's 21 months everybody, since the UK government snuck out in the summer budget that they were going to limit tax credits to the first two children and then they were going to make women who've been raped prove that, in order to claim tax credits. Over the past 21 months, I have raised this again and again. I asked David Cameron, I asked George Osborne, I asked Ian Duncan Smith. I asked Theresa May, I asked Phil Hammond, Damian Green, Damian Hinds, Caroline Nokes. Every single one of them has been unable to answer why this policy is justified, why women should have to prove that their child was born as a result of rape. It is a policy they cannot justify. It's vile, it's cruel and it stigmatises not just the women, but those children too. The government has no right to do that to children in this country. It is appalling.

[00:19:23.000]
[Applause]

[00:19:25.830] - Brenna Jessie

The fight is still very much on with the Two Child Cap and the Rape Clause. Like, yeah, we protested. Yeah, we made it an election issue. Yes, 600 people turned up at George Square and were angry, but we didn't win. Do 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. This is part of a bigger struggle and a much bigger picture than any one of us can even imagine. And actually, in relation to what we've just said, in terms of activism and getting into activism, a really critically important part of that is listening to people who are more marginalised than you. Whose experiences are far worse than your own, and to find ways of acting in solidarity and the most appropriate ways of doing that. There is so much to do and every piece of that is important. This is a huge mission. It is a marathon, not a sprint, which I regularly have to be reminded of. And I'm not saying be patient, be impatient, be angry, but know that what you're doing is important. And being a part of this is important, and hope that one day we will get there.

[00:20:46.110] - Amanda Stanley

Thank you to Brenna Jessie and also to Alison Thewliss, Patrycja Kupiec and Joan Irons. As the producer of this series, I find myself looking back to the very beginning of this project when I was sitting among Engender's archives making lists of names of people who came up again and again and considering how I could hunt them down and talk to them, I keep thinking about how many of those names I ended up getting to talk to and of those whose stories I didn't get to, or won't get to, record. So often, it is hard to find time to pause and reflect on how much progress has been made when the fight for equality is never ending. As Brenna said, this is indeed a marathon, and not a sprint, which is why it is so important to take the opportunity, such as this anniversary of Engender to pause and reflect and capture the voices of women who have done, and who continue to do, inspiring work around women's rights. You'll Have Had Yer Feminism is but only a glimpse into this work, but it feels so special to have been able to take a moment to capture such a snapshot. And once again, thank you to all who came forward and offered their time to be a part of this project. I want to end this episode and the series by returning to the garden lobby of the Scottish Parliament and to the evening of celebration that was had for Engender's 25th anniversary. That evening at the Parliament, surrounded by feminists spanning multiple generations, was truly special. Engender's Executive Director Emma Ritch spoke so eloquently about the achievements and the impact our feminist sisters who have gone before us have made on women's lives today. And indeed, as I'll end with Emma discussing now, the vision feminists in Scotland have for the future and just how much work there still is to be done.

[00:22:21.030] - Emma Ritch

It's a pleasure to be here in the Scottish Parliament to celebrate Engender's birthday and to mark a quarter century of the advocacy and activism that has tried to bring the reality of women's experience into the heart of decision making and into this place. One of the questions I get asked most frequently about Engender is, is there still a need for you? Do you still need to exist? And I have some bad news to go along with the good news about women's equality we've heard tonight already. 25 years on from the beginning of Engender's work, we still see stark differences in women's and men's experiences of life in Scotland. Some are biological, women do face different health issues, including being pregnant and giving birth. But most are to do with gender, that bundle of stereotypes, expectations and assumptions that shape our lives so profoundly, and so we see women using public transport differently and public space differently. We see girls and women studying different subjects at school, college and university. We see women experiencing men's violence, including rape, domestic abuse, honour killings, stalking. Women being unequally responsible for caring for children, for disabled people, for older people and for housework, for putting together P.E. kits and planning Christmas and changing beds and cooking dinners. And we don't see ourselves represented equally in the Houses of Parliament, even, unfortunately, in this place or in our local council chambers. And the pay gap that the First Minister referred to, we still see women in Scotland earning less than men, depending more on a shrinking pot of social security, more likely than men to be members of the swelling precariat. We still see women's work being done in different occupational sectors. Women are more likely than men to work as cleaners, carers, caterers and in clerical and retail jobs. We're less likely to be promoted, much more likely to be found in the photocopy room or the mail room than in the boardroom. And are persistently and routinely discriminated against when we're pregnant and when we return from maternity leave. But against all the backdrop of this routine sexism, Engender's vision has always been and stays for a different Scotland, for a different world, for women and for girls.

[00:24:51.760] - Emma Ritch

For many of us in this room, it's an everyday honour to be in the Scottish Parliament. And I often think as I visit this beautiful building, how much its history tracks with that of Engender. Led by the STUC Women's Committee, self-organised groups of women and women's groups were part of the Civic Society Coalition that campaigned and agitated for a parliament that would have 50/50 representation. Fiona Forsyth was nice enough to give me a badge from that movement this evening. Women lobbied for equality to be part of the foundational principles of the Parliament, for an equal opportunities committee that was dedicated to integrating equality into its work. And we were born, Engender was born, during that campaign for devolution. And our work during those 25 years has built on the notion that our foremothers and big sisters had that if decision making could be brought closer to the people of Scotland than we could work with this revived democratic institution to make change happen for women. We have three of Engender's founders here tonight, Professor Alice

Brown, Esther Breitenbach, Leslie Hills, as well as tens of women who have contributed to our activities over two and a half decades. Like all women working and living our feminism today, the staff team and board of Engender, 12 amazing creative women, stand on the shoulders of giants. Our work, our analysis, our thinking and our willingness to challenge those with power is deeply rooted in the lives of women, of substance and of courage.

[00:26:37.250] - Emma Ritch

Despite the places of resistance to the feminist project that so many in this room share, our vision remains a positive one. We want to see an end to the gender pay gap. We want to see an end to rooms full of straight, white, non-disabled men deciding how things should be for the rest of us. We want to see an end to female politicians being judged for their shoes and not their views, and to children's books that feature girls as ballerinas and princesses and boys as engineers, firefighters, doctors, and adventurers. We want positive things. We want to see women's unpaid care work counted and recognised. We want to see more clever, bold, imaginative women in our parliament and in our council chambers and around the boardroom tables of Scotland. We want to see women given the freedom to make their communities a better place. We want to see universal childcare, a media full of women's voices, a safe, dry, comfortable place for every woman and her children to sleep at night, and women with enough money in their pockets to buy the things they need for themselves and their families. We want to see a good life for women in Scotland free from the threat of violence, free from violence. And Engender believes that women's equality is possible. We couldn't do our work if we didn't. And I believe that by acting together across Scotland, we can bring it closer into our grasp.

[00:28:05.500]

[Applause]

[00:28:19.220] - Amanda Stanley

You'll Have Had Yer Feminism was 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 to find out more about Engender's heritage project, head to youllhavehadyerfeminism.com

[00:28:36.670]

[Jingle]

[00:28:46.630] - Alys Mumford

On the Engender is coming back for a second season with me, Alys Mumford. Make sure you subscribe for your monthly fix of feminist policy discussion, where I'll be joined each episode by amazing people working for women's equality in Scotland. We'll be talking about everything from healthcare to housing strategy and also bringing you short blasts of news with our new podcast, The Briefing. Subscribe to On the Engender wherever you get your podcasts and make sure you're following @EngenderScot on Twitter or Facebook so you don't miss out.

[00:29:14.370]

[Jingle]