

Arts Impact Chats: Lisa Alberti, Pinc College

SEVA: My name is Seva Phillips, for people just joining, and I head up the arts and culture finance team, which is currently based in Nesta. Today we have the pleasure of Lisa Alberti joining us from Pinc College. She's the founder and CEO of Pinc College, which is a specialist college for creative education for 16 to 25 year olds. It offers art, digital arts and creative studies for neurodivergent young people in cultural venues across the north of England and more recently in Wales, according to the website. Venues include the Manchester Museum, The Potteries, Museum of Stoke and the Salford Art Gallery. Lisa has been in the teaching and education world for over 20 years and in addition to leading Pinc College she's a trustee of NASEN, which is the National Association for Special Educational Needs and is also a school governor. So, welcome to the podcast. Lisa. It's a real pleasure to have you.

LISA: Thank you.

SEVA: And I would also encourage people who joined us to ask questions in the Q&A box, if you've got any questions for Lisa, and we'll try and get to those as we go on. Closed captions are available, click on enable captions at the bottom of your screen and you should see the closed captioning. And yes, we're obviously recording this and, after the conversation is over, we'll kind of re-edit and share it hopefully next week. So yeah, without further ado, let's begin. So Lisa, how has your week gone so far?

LISA: Week is going really well. It's great to be talking to you today. Hopefully I can give some valuable insight that may help or inspire someone who may be in the position I was 7 years ago.

SEVA: Great. I'm really keen to hear about your journey to starting Pinc College and your background in education. But to start with, can you sort of explain how the experience at Pinc College is different to perhaps a mainstream conventional school or further education college.

LISA: Yeah, absolutely. The college has been developed in response to student voice. You know, the needs of our students, and parent voice, their requests and listening to their parents. What's missing? What's the gap? What can we do? So Pinc College, it operates in a very different way. We have multiple small campuses that work within and in partnership with local cultural organisations and venues. So galleries and museums. These aren't short projects, these aren't one off trips, there's a permanence to what we do. These are long-term partnerships and we have permanent space, studio space within them for learning to take place. The whole team has specialised in working with neurodivergent young people and supporting their needs, and working with them towards their aspirations. And we focus, we're very niche, that's another thing that's unique about us, we focus on a creative curriculum. And it's a very simple curriculum offer but within that there's lots of depth in terms of the individuality of projects and work that we can facilitate.

SEVA: Great. And why might young people come to you in the first place? How does that relationship come about?

LISA: Well, I suppose an important thing to tell you would be the feedback we get from our students and parents on the reason why they would search for and potentially come to us. There's a growing group of young people across the UK who are feeling that they don't fit into the current offers of education systems. They have additional needs, neurodivergent needs that often lead to quite serious mental health issues. They've often experienced trauma in mainstream education settings, which means they have begun to miss out on their education and progress. And when they are looking elsewhere across their local offering for an alternative education route, they're finding there's nothing there that's suitable. There are certainly provisions, but often they're finding that the qualification outcome, if you like, is pitched too low because the young person actually wants to progress through to level 3, level 4, potentially carry on to further and higher education and to university. That pathway doesn't seem to exist. Also our parent and student feedback is that they're looking for a creative offer and they're, they're again, they're not finding that creative offer that has the support and will offer the individual approach. We provide that.

SEVA: Great. And so you provide that within Pinc. Yeah, and what's the curriculum like? You said that it's quite a straightforward curriculum.

LISA: Yeah, very simple offer. We offer art, digital art, maths and English and work experience and careers. It's very niche that we focus on the creative and cultural sector within all of that to develop an education diet if you like, that supports the aspirations of our cohort.

SEVA: Right. And, and it takes place within kind of quite well regarded, quite established heritage cultural venues. And can you tell us a bit about the venues that you work in? And how those relationships came about.

LISA: Yeah, so we've worked hard to develop really good partnerships. It's a partnership approach, absolutely, 100%. So on setting up the organisation, the idea was or the question that was to be asked was 'Why are we not harnessing and utilising our local assets for the education of young people who find the school environment, starting with the building itself, is something they cannot cope with and they won't progress within. We have so many wonderful assets in our towns and cities. Being an art teacher myself, my first go-to was the cultural venues, the galleries, the museums and you know it was quite challenging initially to try to shift the lens through which they view their education offer. You know, galleries and museums, they offer trips, visits, maybe short joint projects, but nothing with the longevity and the potential to have that repeated impact on a young person who is attending. But over the years of course, we have a model that we can show people now. Our HQ is at Manchester Museum, which is very highly regarded. They are very forward thinking in terms of their development and being future ready, widening participation, developing an inclusive workforce themselves, all of these things we feed into by being based there.

SEVA: And so do you have like a, do you have a studio space? In the museum, just for our listeners maybe can you sort of paint a picture of what this looks like in practice for the young people in those institutions.

LISA: Absolutely. So we have permanent spaces. They look different in each building, because of course we have to and should be flexible in our approach to allow this to work

within different buildings and different settings. Some are very modern, some are, you know, much older historical buildings. So we really work with that, but we have permanent studios, so there's signage in the building, Pinc College is here, Pinc College students are working here. And quite often members of the public can see our students working in response to the artefacts or an artist that might be exhibiting in the gallery. Students attend with us as they would do a college. There daily in term time. You know, we have open days, parents evenings, all of that happens within a museum and gallery setting. And it's exciting, it's an exciting place to be for our young people. They are certainly gathering a lot of work based learning just by being in those buildings and walking through them day to day. There's a fluidity between our team and the team of the museums and galleries, our partnerships are that strong. You know, it's seamless.

SEVA: And what is it like for those young people? Coming to Pinc College at these venues for the first time. I think I'm making an assumption that maybe for many of those young people it would have been the first time that they were in that kind of place, that kind of venue, so what kind of reaction do you get from young people?

LISA: It absolutely is, and layer that with their anxiety, it can be a really big thing to do but you know we wanted to show that this cohort who you know have been failed quite often in our current education systems. We want to show them that they're valued, they are important. We want to help build their self esteem back. We want to throw open the doors of these buildings to them, they are theirs. And as you say, they have potentially never been in them, or their families, for so many reasons, so many reasons, you know, including potentially their sensitivities around sound, etc. Just feeling that you know these are places that aren't for them. So the response is, with their transition into coming into the building first of all I think I should point out, is very much supported. We understand anxiety and we support this. Through a very extended transition with lots of visits, familiarity cards, we have videos walking through the building etc, and there's just absolutely a sense of oh no wonder that they can study in these places, a sense of acceptance and belonging and you know let's not sort of forget here that once a safe place has been created or recognized for young people, this is a relationship that will be ongoing, you know, evenings, weekends, bringing your family, you know, certainly into adulthood. And our students will absolutely feel that other museums and galleries are safe places for them.

SEVA: And a question actually just coming in from Sian, one of our listeners here. She asks, do you have criteria for which young people can join Pinc College in terms of their neurodiversity?

LISA: We, well, when we started, we were called Project Inclusive and that is still at the core of what we do. We are an inclusive organisation so we will look at each individual and help them to decide, is this the right pathway for them. So there are no boundaries in terms of who we would accept on the course in terms of their neurodiversity. More to the point we'd be looking at, are you a creative? You know, is this the place for you? Come and have a taste today with us. As I said, we've got a very specialised team who will do an internal assessment if you like with each young person and their parents and together will decide if this is the right pathway. We have a limited number of places. We have around 20 students on roll at each campus. So we need to get those placements right.

SEVA: And have you seen from, you know, your time with Pinc College, have you seen any exciting surprising interactions between the students and the art or the artefacts in those museums? So have you seen any like, new creative discoveries, some things that the young people are getting excited by in those collections.

LISA: Absolutely, weekly, daily and you know this is why Pinc College is such a wonderful place to work. You know, we really have a happy and fulfilled team being able to facilitate and observe the interactions that you describe. One of the wonderful things that has begun to happen is that researchers at local universities have begun to contact us and we can now start to take part, our students can start to take part in research around new digital technologies, giving an autistic voice on how collections should be or could be displayed. Working alongside research, for example, And recently we joined a project that was run by Manchester University where a researcher had worked with young people who were autistic and from that had drawn out statements around how they feel about communication in life in a neurotypical world. Our students worked alongside that, selected statements that really resonated with them and created pieces of artwork which they then exhibited together at the Whitworth, which is just down the road. So many exciting opportunities like that have really begun to develop.

SEVA: Yeah, not many artists I think can say that they've displayed work at the Whitworth, that's a pretty good opportunity for your young people.

LISA: Yeah, exactly. Yes.

SEVA: Great. And just to take a step back, can you tell us a bit about your professional journey? So I know that you were a teacher for a while. How did you go from a kind of you know sense of what you wanted to do but also, I guess, what I'm trying to say is that there's a risk associated with starting a new business, right?

LISA: Yeah.

SEVA: And how did you begin that journey? How did you decide to take the plunge? With something like this, which is, it's not just any old business, it's actually quite an innovative novel idea. So yeah, just curious about how it started and your thought process there and how you were inspired to do it.

LISA: Yes. Yeah, okay, so I didn't ever plan in my wildest dreams to open and run a college. Let me start there. I was a teacher for 15 years. Absolutely loved my role, loved the students, loved the staff team. But increasingly, I became a senior leader, and increasingly I became as disengaged and disaffected as some of my students, seeing the change in the landscape in education in the UK, feeling it, experiencing it, you know, being at the heart of it. And what I was observing in an inner city Manchester school was that increasing groups of marginalised young people were being failed in my opinion. So I decided that, you know, quite a senior level, great job, great salary, but I couldn't continue anymore as I didn't believe in what we were doing. So I left my role and had an idea so I, I'm an art and design teacher that's my go-to,, you know, my expertise and my interest or education, art and culture. So that was in my head and I like to question everything and it was a why not? And what if, you know, what if every town and city has a learning museum and gallery? What if this was a

permanent place of learning for people every day? So I'm a teacher with an idea. Nothing more. I had never planned to open a creative college, you know, I didn't. So I had a, I'm a teacher with an idea and I set up small. I noticed that my local museum, which is in Macclesfield where we still have a campus, had an art studio and it didn't appear to be used. So I phoned the director and asked if I could rent it, gave her a garbled explanation of what it was I was trying to do when she looked at me as if I was crazy and said, okay. And you know, she took a chance and it started to grow, it started to work, young people were being referred to myself and a small team to deliver an art education.

SEVA: Did you have to, sorry to interrupt, did you have to reach out to the schools to get the referrals of the young people? How did you build that initial trust? With the school, you know, as a new provider of alternative education.

LISA: Yeah, yeah, absolutely lots and lots of hard work. You know, 5am starts, 14 hour days, working weekends, which I actually probably still do to be honest. You know, commitment, drive and hard work, but yes, I started - we weren't post 16 back then per se - so I started to contact local authorities, schools. I'd go to speak to them myself, you know, I do have lots of experience. So once they recognize those trusted professionals that kind of opened those doors. But also at the time I did a lot of bid writing so I would pull in little pots of funding so I could offer experiences out, like an arts award course for, you know, 6 students at no cost to the school. So it worked both ways.

SEVA: Great. And can you tell us a bit more about some of the challenges that you experienced as basically an entrepreneur and a manager now of an organisation and in your new role, you know, starting up the business.

LISA: Yeah, yeah, so the challenges are and I feel this may be for a lot of people who are starting not not profits, social enterprise, community interest companies, you are passionate about something and passionate about helping a certain group of people. But I would suggest that most times you're not, you don't have a business background. So that's where the challenge is. HR, finance, legalities. Absolutely. You know nothing about that. You know, I worked in a school, I've been institutionalised for 15 years and it's almost like crawling out from under a rock and hello world, you know, what happens here, so there was so much to find out and some reaching out that had to be done. But what I can say is I have reached out, you know, to ask people and so many wonderful people have given me their time. You know, even if it was an hour to chat something through or to show me what a cash flow forecast spreadsheet looks like, etc.

SEVA: Great, and along the way, I know that you've got a successful track record of taking on and repaying social investment actually to help grow the business and you took on a loan from the Arts Impact Fund, which is one of the funds that Arts and Culture Finance manages, but also GMCVO and more recently, Sumerian partners.

LISA: Yes. Yeah.

SEVA: What has that investment enabled you to achieve with Pinc College?

LISA: Growth. You know, I could have stayed as myself and 2 team members in that small studio, in the first one we set up in Macclesfield, we would have run a wonderful offering. We'd be happy in our roles. But I recognise that, you know, and sort of had to question myself, what is the mission here? This needs to reach more young people and if we're to reach as many young people as possible we have to grow. I've got to take a leap. So within that I started to reach out and research, you know, I don't know anything about social investment funds at all. But you know, we've all got Google. And everything's out there, so yeah, it was that that's enabled growth.

SEVA: Great. And your team has grown. I guess that's partly what you mean. I suppose you also mean that you've grown the number of campuses that you're operating across.

LISA: Yeah, yes.

SEVA: You started off, you know, in Macclesfield and you grew throughout the Northwest, but are now operating in Yorkshire and recently in Cardiff as well. What's that been like? So can you sort of illustrate like in terms of team size, how that's changed and the things that you now need to do differently compared to when you first started?

LISA: Yeah, so we have grown. We now have 13 campuses, but on top of that we have sort of virtual campuses if you like, where we have cohorts in supported internships in the workplace. We are, as you say, in Yorkshire, also the Midlands and we have a campus at Cardiff National Museum which has just opened, it's a phenomenal setting. It's going to be very successful. So we have 120 employees.

SEVA: Wow. And that's in 7 years. That's pretty astronomical, particularly for essentially a not-for-profit organisation. But you don't really hear that kind of success story I guess in this sector.

LISA: Yeah, we have, we will be offering full time education, full time post 16 education for around 200 students this year, phenomenal growth potentially and, you know, I picked up on that you say we don't normally hear this for not for profits and isn't that a shame. I feel there is some stigma around growth and I feel there is some stigma around finances and borrowing and pushing growth. Do you lose your grassroots feel the bigger you become? Do you, does your culture get phased out slightly? Well, that's the challenge, isn't it, as a leader to keep that, to keep that central and to keep that focus that you don't lose that grassroots, why you're operating, you don't lose those connections and that you keep your culture strong and focused and you don't have mission drift. But yeah, to get there it takes a lot. It takes a lot of drive. I have a wonderful team. You know, this isn't just me. It's that small ball rolling that gathered moss. We gathered amazing people, that is what propelled this forward. So we are now, I would say, a collective of people with similar beliefs around what should and could happen in education for young people. So it's that collective energy that's really driving this forward. The social investment along the way came through careful cash forecasting, realising to make the leaps we needed a little bridge at a few points, you know, of cash. But also it gave us additional expertise, training. Really pushed my focus to where it should be and helped to develop me to become you know a chief executive running an organisation.

SEVA: And what's the income model for Project Inc? Because I suspect that a lot of it is effectively earned income so you know is it schools that your contracting with, I mean if you could just tell us a bit more about the income model that'd be great

LISA: Yeah. Yeah, we are, I suppose, 100% now funded by central government or local authorities. We don't do any bid writing anymore. That's something I would like to bring back in, our team are suggesting and really wanting to push our offer and layer it so that we can support young people. Maybe things at the weekend, school holidays, activities for parents. Helping students to set up as self-employed creatives, you know with studios etc there are all of these ideas and suggestions. So at some point I think we need to develop, almost go back and develop an arm again that does start to bring in other funding, to support that wider enrichment and enhancement.

SEVA: I suspect though that the reason that you've been able to grow at this pace is because you're not reliant on project-based grant funding like so many social enterprise and charity organisations are and I think they're often hamstrung by the lack of that sufficient kind of paying market, that they can basically trade from and perhaps that's one of the reasons why we don't see more growth stories in the sector.

LISA: That's really interesting. I think we need to challenge our local authorities actually to pay fairly for services. One thing I have found and I absolutely can reflect on this, there was almost a feeling as I wanted to push and grow and become a very commercially viable organisation, that local authorities who had supported us thus far didn't want that, they kind of wanted to keep us where we were and in our box, so that, you know, I'm taking no salary, the team are on a very low salary, or we're doing things at no cost at all, you know. There is almost a desire to keep you there doing that. But that organisation won't carry on because there's a point where you think, you know, I need to earn a salary now, you know, we can't carry on doing this. So I think so many wonderful organisations may fail at that point. Because they can't find that right income stream and make the shift. But also because there's some negativity towards them doing that.

SEVA: Hmm, I see. And it's true that Pinc College is still a not for profit technically, right?

LISA: Absolutely. It is. It's a company limited by guarantee, yes. Yeah, and I think that's pretty crucial. You know, I think one of the advantages of this sector is that through asset locked legal structures and sometimes charity designations or social enterprise designations, I would hope that that allows them to build trust with organisations like local authorities, governments and other organisations in the sector that, you know, you're in it not to make lots of money but effectively all of the money you make gets reinvested back into the business.

SEVA: Yeah, and that helps.

LISA: Yes. Yeah, it is well received, you're correct. It does make a difference and I do still mention it. Most schools, colleges, multi-academy trusts are, you know, an interesting blend of not-for-profit and charity elements. There are some that are private limited companies but very few and it does make a difference. Yeah, absolutely. And I think at the core of what we

do, it's something that our team know very clearly, local authorities know very clearly and it does sit well, yes.

SEVA: I'm just going to change gears a little bit and go into a slightly more philosophical discussion, but I read a quote from Tristram Hunt, the director of the V&A Museum, I think at the launch of the Young V&A in Bethnal Green, he spoke about the disparity that's opening up between state and private schools and the provision of creative education. How can we get creativity back into mainstream state schools?

LISA: First of all, Tristram Hunt, I will be contacting you and, and challenging you and asking why there isn't a Pinc College at the V&A, maybe there will be now following that comment. It's a perfect opening.

SEVA: Yeah, that's going to be your first base in London.

LISA: That's the first thing I've scribbled down on my pad, yes. Absolutely, shouldn't they? Okay, so one of the reasons I left mainstream education was just that. So creativity is being squeezed out. We are a data driven sector. Gosh, I mean schools, we put children in we get data out that's my feeling on it. Budgets were squashed for creative work across schools and colleges. Often the press around creative subject areas, study, career prospects is very negative. And it's completely untrue, it's you know our biggest growing industry. And an industry that wants to be inclusive, that will welcome you know people who think in a different way with open arms. In fact, it needs people who think in a different way. So yeah, Tristram's absolutely correct, this is happening. There's probably a huge disparity therefore between private schools, and what we're calling state schools. Yeah, and I think if we run that alongside the nose that because we're driven towards data, any young people who may be struggling will not help those stats at the end of the year. Maybe on the sidelines, you know, there's a leaning towards requesting that parents homeschool their children. There's a lot going on. There are a lot of factors. This is a sum of many parts and it's not painting a good picture.

SEVA: Do you think though that there's a way that perhaps you can take some of what's special about your model and apply it to non-neurodiverse young people, young people in the mainstream sector? I appreciate there's probably challenges around scale, right? There are, you have 20 places per venue, there are thousands of young people, you know, in any kind of local authority area. But I guess the question is, yeah, is there anything that can be replicated in state schools?

LISA: Yeah, I would say that, you know, build roles that are there to be outreach workers, you know, we have team members called cultural connectors. Why don't every school have cultural connectors that find out what's going on locally? Which cohorts can link into this? How do we enhance the learning experience? Get the children out of the school building to these venues. I know a lot of museums and galleries have put focus on bringing their collections to the schools and how can we do this, but you know there's just magic around seeing the collections in the setting they're meant to be in and the whole experience walking through the building. We can certainly build, you know, at careers fairs at schools and colleges. You will never see a stand for the cultural sector.

SEVA: That's true.

LISA: You never see a 'museums and galleries' stand. That needs to be developed. So I say you can take elements of our model, certainly the careers and pathways, then enhance that in schools. And I also would add that experiences, trips and visits, as they're probably called in schools and colleges, build on them. It's a one-off, you know, it's probably a good memory, a great experience, but for some young people, some cohorts, if they could do that activity or attend, you know, once or twice a month, you would see that impact over time is so great. So maybe it's not looking at a numbers game, you know, or a thousand of our young people have done a visit. What about if 20 of them did repeated visits? I just think the impact would be greater. So that possibly needs looking at but certainly careers, our careers information into the cultural and creative sector, that's pretty much nonexistent.

SEVA: I was also just thinking that - why have I never seen a flyer for a local museum or art gallery in a school? Just having that exposure to what's available in the local community sounds like a really simple cost-effective way to do it.

LISA: Yeah, yeah, and maybe an instruction to parents too, you know, this is yours. You know, it's free to walk around, go on, on a weekend, it's got a cute little cafe, you know. These are safe places and we need to break down the barriers and we do still have, we've got class barriers there as well still you know that does exist.

SEVA: I suppose on that, on that note. The cultural venues themselves, the organisations themselves are presumably excited to have different audiences or you know to expand that audience through your students and their families. Is that true?

LISA: It's absolutely true. You know, we're approaching venues now or we have done as we grow and it's got easier and easier. They can look at our model and how it exists in other venues and see it's successful but also you know when approaching them it's "we can deliver part of your development plan". You know, museum and gallery teams with the best will in the world aren't specialised in, you know, engaging neurodivergent teenagers, you know, this is a cohort that's missing that gallery or museum experience and we can deliver that for them. So there are huge benefits to the partnership on both sides.

SEVA: Just coming back to the question of neurodivergence. We actually had a question in advance from someone who signed up to this recording from Botswana of all places. I hope they've managed to join the webinar. But the question was, where can people find resources or information for neurodivergent students? To what extent is neurodivergence kind of an internationally recognized issue? Are there international resources for this? But maybe starting with the UK first.

LISA: Yeah, in the UK we've got some amazing, amazing organisations and again, you know, information is just a Google away. We potentially are very forward thinking here, some countries, you know, and there will be cultural aspects that affect this, won't be recognising autism or ADHD as much and won't be supporting it as much, they might be a little bit behind. But you know, there are so many organisations that have information. For neurodivergent students, parents. Not forgetting organisations that support mental health,

because the 2 now are becoming intrinsically linked due to the support not being there previously.

SEVA: Lisa, I'm actually curious. I've never asked you this before, but it's something that we have asked previous guests here on the show. What was your creative practice in the beginning? I mean, why were you kind of inspired to become an art teacher or art and design teacher? Did you want to go into, I don't know, painting or design or something?

LISA: So, so yeah, I love drawing, painting, textiles. Is a huge huge love of mine, but as soon as I trained to be a teacher I just absolutely loved the interaction with young people. You know, I know I can look back on my career as a teacher and as much as I taught students, I've learnt more from them than I could ever have taught them, you know, in terms of empathy, acceptance, tolerance. You know, those human interactions. So I think from there my aspirations and my passions have been about supporting young people. Particularly those that are marginalised.

SEVA: And now that Pinc College has been running for 7 years or so, you've had various waves, cohorts of young people. Do you know what those young people then go on to do after their experience with you? And what are some of their pathways to further education or employment?

LISA: Yeah, we're finding that there were kind of 2 routes that young people are taking and that is that they feel able, one of them is that they feel able, because a lot of what we do is personal and social development. You know, it's hooked on this framework of an art course, but actually being in the spaces we are with the partnerships we have with the museum and galleries, you know, it takes away lots of barriers, it doesn't look or feel like a school or college. It boosts self-esteem. So a lot of what we do then can be around personal and social development. So students are finding on leaving us that they are ready and can go back into the mainstream. So further and higher education, we've got students studying creative studies at university. Young people leaving us and wanting to set up their own businesses and become creatives also, there are those aspirations into the world of work. So we have 2 students starting paid traineeships at Manchester Museum this year. And we're developing even further our own supported internship programs so that we can continue to support young people while they're in the workplace in museums and galleries.

SEVA: Do you think you could have a sideline in the future in social entrepreneurship studies for these young people? So I guess equipping them with the skills to set up their own social enterprise?

LISA: That's really interesting. I'll note that one down as well. You know, our young people really do have a passion to impact society and to help others. The two do really run in parallel. So lots of times, you know, young people say, I want to go and I'd like to tutor art to young people, other young people that are really struggling. So I find that, you know, our students are really, really socially focused and it's a key part of our study programs as well, and that they do projects around what matters to them. They certainly are caring and connected to what's happening in the world. Whether it be environmental or any impacts on, you know, humans, they really do care and really do have a social focus. So yeah, could be, that's an interesting one.

SEVA: Do you see, do you think that young people these days are more aware of social issues, environmental issues than perhaps when you were a student you know, because we live in obviously a very different world now where I'd say we're hyper-connected, there's so much information. And a lot of that information from the news is not the most, I don't know, inspiring I guess, a lot of it is quite you know worrying and and possibly quite scary so how do you see young people relating to that?

LISA: Yeah, it's definitely affecting our young people and can impact their mental health and well-being because as you say they're so, we're so, connected, you know social media it's all there isn't it but I suppose the flip side of that is that our students also get to see positivity, you know, the strengthening numbers, you know, that groups of people can work together as a collective and affect change, you know, make change. It can happen. So the flip side is they get to see that also, which is a real positive.

SEVA: And do you think that's winning?

LISA: I hope that's winning. I hope that's winning.

SEVA: Me, me too. What are your plans for the future? So with Pinc College, what's next for you?

LISA: So we are focusing on our pathways to work. We're really putting a lot of work into developing and strengthening and making sure we can support our young people for the full journey. You know, our students want to have fulfilling careers and to contribute to society and we feel we're well-placed to help get them there. So we're working on building those pathways. Also, of course, cautiously looking at growth into new geographical areas. While keeping things simple, you know, let's not lose what's at the core of what and why we do what we do.

SEVA: And last question for me today, thank you for coming on the show, by the way. It's been really great to have you. If you could design a utopian education system, the perfect education system. What would that look like?

LISA: Yeah, that's, you know, a great question. There's so many wonderful think tanks that have been happening over the years, but we're still stuck with this same model. And it's, people are so diverse, but this model is so same-y, you know, it can't work, it absolutely can't work and we talk so much in the education sector about how can we make schools inclusive, how can we make colleges inclusive and I feel you can't, for some young people that will never be the best place for them to flourish. And we're always talking about how do you make it work in school, in college and I always am the one to raise my hands and say, what about out of school? Out of college. What's this fixation with that huge concrete building, you know, that we're calling a school or a place of learning. So. For me, we've got to start from scratch. The school buildings and college buildings we have now demand that high level of logistics to make it work. And you know, there are some points where I felt as a senior leader that the whole learning day is built around 'how do we get 1,000 children into the canteen'. You know, it's a logistics game. It's not about what's right for the young people at all. And we need to flip that right on its head.

LISA: And so the utopia for me would be outside of that building. It would be harnessing, as we've done with the cultural organisations at Pinc College, harnessing our local assets as places of learning. Why can't we have my learning town, my learning city, my learning village, why can't I study sports at the, you know, Olympic grade sports stadium in Manchester? Why can't I then go to study my drama at the Royal Exchange Theatre on another day of the week. Why can't I then go and study arts at Manchester Art Gallery when it's my turn for art. You know.

SEVA: That's really interesting. So actually having learning spaces. Different organisations in the community. So it could be businesses, for example, or sports centres. Cultural institutions. And young people can move around, you know, the whole town. And kind of, it's not about necessarily work experience is what I'm hearing, because it's about having the curriculum and the education and you know maybe a kind of a classroom, but the key thing is to have it alongside the real world. Alongside diversity of people, young, old, from different backgrounds. Yes. So your peripheral learning about the world of work and preparation for adulthood is happening all the time just as a byproduct of your curriculum and also what that would allow us is to create individual timetables to meet a young person's aspirations as they move around.

LISA: Yeah. So that's my utopia.

SEVA: That's a really interesting idea. I'm really fascinated by that. Do you know if anyone is doing any kind of work on that or research or advocating for it.

LISA: Yeah, I forget her name. I think she used to be, she was either MMU, I believe, or the University of Manchester. We've certainly been to talks and there was a researcher who was doing some research around something along those lines. But It's action, isn't it? Someone's got to actually do it. You know, there's so many think tanks that suggest so many amazing things and, you know, it's people who start small social enterprises that are actually doing it that put themselves out there that give up their job that put themselves at risk and put themselves on the line. So if we can support those small grassroots organisations to grow, linked together, you know, we're going to create something, we could create something wonderful.

SEVA: Yeah, and I think it's great that Pinc College is this like living case study of what that alternative education system might look like. So yeah, I'm excited to explore that further. Lisa, I don't want to take up too much more of your time, but thank you so much for speaking with me today. It's been really great to have you on and yeah best of luck with the expansion of Pinc College and the addition of more great cultural venues to your portfolio.

LISA: Thank you. And if we do get any listeners that want to link in to myself, please feel free to contact me. They can go via the website, connect@ email address and get in touch and I can absolutely respond and support in any way I can.

SEVA: Yeah, and that website is Pinc College. That's pinccollege.co.uk, where you can learn more about their work. Great. Well, thanks everyone for tuning in.