



Rehna Yaseen on the Finding Our Way podcast

Content alert: In this episode Rehna, a young Muslim woman from a British Pakistani community in Manchester, talks about inequalities linked to gender and ethnic minority communities. She describes some of the pressures that women from South Asian communities can feel.

#intro music

Mary-Ann Finding Our Way is proudly sponsored by Berghaus, who are committed to sharing their passion for the outdoors with people from all backgrounds. This episode involves a conversation about inequalities linked to gender and ethnic minority communities. For more detailed information, have a look at the episode description.

Mary-Ann Hello, and welcome to Finding Our Way, a podcast from the BMC, the British Mountaineering Council. I'm Mary-Ann Ochota.

Cress And I'm Cress Allwood. This podcast is about diversifying the voices we normally hear talking about the outdoors. So in each episode we'll be chatting to someone who's usually busy climbing, mountaineering or walking...

Mary-Ann ...and instead we're going to grill them about the highs, the lows and the most surprising things they've learnt from their adventures. So expect good chat, memorable stories and hopefully bursts of inspiration from people who are making real change happen. So Cress, who's on today?

Cress Joining us today is a woman who's by day an outdoor youth and community worker, but at all times a huge advocate for facilitating outdoor experiences to engage and inspire. And she's also an ambassador for the outdoor brands Ellis Brigham and Sprayway. As an outdoor instructor, a youth worker and community leader in the Peak District and Greater Manchester, she says that young people are the future and helping them enjoy the outdoors creates happy, courageous and resilient leaders of tomorrow. This makes her smile every day. Connecting with us from Greater Manchester, welcome Rehna Yaseen!

Mary-Ann Hello!

Rehna Hi Guys!

Mary-Ann Thanks for joining us.

Cress So tell us, Rehna, you haven't always been outdoorsy, have you?

Rehna No, I haven't, actually. And this takes me on to, I guess, the story of how I was actually exposed to the outdoors. And that was within my teenage years. I was introduced to a local youth project. And I just remember thinking, oh, gosh, no, that's not for me, that's so uncool. I don't know why I had that perception of, you know, a 16 year old going to a youth project just seemed really uncool. But I think it was out of sheer boredom and I just thought, you know what? What have I got to lose? I don't really have anything else I'm doing, I've got nothing else to engage with, let me just go and I might surprise myself.

And I remember getting there and I was just in complete awe. I didn't know projects like that existed. They had all sorts of activities going on, from local youth forums to drop in sessions. And then the thing that really got my attention was the outdoor pursuits sessions. So they had regular camping trips, we had the Three Peaks challenges, we did weekly climbing clubs to Manchester Climbing Centre. And then the thing that was really exciting was an opportunity to go to Morocco and climb Mount Toubkal came about. I think most listeners will probably know that Toubkal is the highest Atlas mountain. And it was extremely, extremely exciting, the thought and the prospect of young people from Ashton-under-Lyne being able to go to Morocco and climb the highest Atlas Mountains. And it was dead exciting. Obviously, there had to be some level of fitness about you, you couldn't just go, you know, without training. And that takes me on to my first ever hill walk, which was absolutely - and I don't want to swear, I'm so bad at that - but [it was] the worst experience, my first ever hill walk was shocking! My boots didn't fit, I got blisters, didn't know if I was hot, if I was cold, my body regulation was all over. I've still got a bit of a potty mouth, but I remember just swearing at Adnan, who was my youth worker, the whole time and was like, 'No! I'm not coming to Morocco!...' We got to the top of this hill and, you know, I got my boots off, and in sheer frustration I threw them in Adnan's direction. I still apologise to this day because...I always say 'it wasn't AT you, it's just because you brought me here and I really hated it!'

I just remember sheer frustration, thinking, and I didn't say the words, but in my head all I was thinking, 'my Pakistani body isn't made to climb hills. That's why I can't see no one else like me around here at the moment! Who else would do this?!'.

He used his reverse psychology on me like he does and said, 'Rehna, just put your boots back on, if you don't ever want to come to youth club again, I completely understand. If you don't want to come to Morocco, I completely get you. We won't ever talk about this again.'

I said, 'yeah, you're right, we won't ever talk about it!' I put my boots on, marched off this hill and I remember I had the best night's sleep ever. And I always say it must be because that was the most exercise I'd ever had. And then I rang him the next day and I'm like, 'So where are we going next?' And he started laughing and he said, 'I knew you'd call!'

The only way I can describe it, is that something clicked in my head and my heart and I thought actually I'm still stood, still here, I didn't die. And in hindsight, I had a good night's sleep. It was actually all right then, wasn't it? And I've been hooked ever since. Ten years

later, I'm here doing it full time. So something I always say, it's something I had to learn to love. I wasn't born doing it. I had to learn to love the outdoors.

Mary-Ann As a youth worker, have you had that experience with young people that you've worked with, where they're throwing their boots at you now?

Rehna Well, it's not been to the extent of actually having boots thrown at me. However, not too far off, to be honest! I've had a bit of swearing I've had tantrums, tears, but do you know what's beautiful about the whole situation? I can completely empathise with them and all I've got to do is tell them my story of how I hated my first walk and they're like, 'What?! But you seem like you know what you're doing, and you seem like you're having loads of fun and you're enjoying it?!' And I'm like, 'But a few years back I wasn't!'. And I have to remind them that sometimes I still struggle and I don't always enjoy it. And that's part of it. And then, you know, we link arms, hand in hand and go up this mountain together. And to be honest, it's such a nice feeling to get to the top and they're like, 'Oh yeah, we did it!' But no, thankfully I've not had boots thrown at me!

Cress So it sounds as if your love of walking actually stemmed from those teenage years and your engagement with youth clubs rather than from many other influences. Is that right?

Rehna Yeah, that's completely correct. My exposure happened through the youth project. If it wasn't for the youth project, I wouldn't know. Growing up, I didn't know about terms like 'the great outdoors'. That had no significance to me whatsoever. Our version of the outdoors was just playing outdoors till the streetlights came on, on my scooter and bikes and stuff. Then the street lamps came on and we knew it was time to come in because it was dinner time and I was going to get in trouble if I didn't get in. And that was it. I didn't know that people went hill walking, I didn't know people went climbing and canoeing. I didn't know things like crags and climbing walls existed. Until I went to youth club, to SPY [St Peter's Youth Club], and that's when I found out there was so much local. Manchester Climbing Centre - I didn't know it existed! I didn't know the Peak District was like half an hour, 45 minutes away from me. And I was like, what? So, yeah, it was through the youth project that I had the exposure.

Mary-Ann Do you think perceptions within the community, or I guess perspectives or horizons, have changed within your community since you were a teenager to now? Is there more awareness, perhaps even fuelled from the lockdown of the last year - have more people found those outdoor resources, those places that they can go?

Rehna I've noticed that the outdoors is just a part of Ashton now. And I know that might sound crazy, but our project is not just a youth project, it's a youth and community project. So the wider community is very much at the heart of what we do. We don't just work with young people, we work with their families.

We have a thing which is known as a family residential every year - well, for the last four years. And families of our young people and the wider community of Ashton, we take them from Ashton to the Hollowford Centre, which is our outdoor centre in the Peak District in Castleton. And for some people, it's their first time away from Ashton. For some families, it's their first ever holiday because they don't have the luxury of going abroad. It's their first time with their families and their children, their parents going away, first time in the countryside. For some children it's the first time ever seeing sheep and cows - they didn't know they existed so close to Ashton. And now that's just become part of, almost like a rite

of passage, where they think, 'Oh, we know Castleton now, we know the Peak District because of Ashton Youth Club or that Lindley [Educational Trust] has taken me to these places. So, yeah, 'I very much know about them'.

Mary-Ann And that's the Lindley Educational Trust?

Rehna Yeah, that's the outdoor charity that I work for. So we've got Lindley Educational Trust, they're a 55 year old outdoor charity based in the Peak District and they run two urban youth projects: one is Ashton Youth Club, which I am the project manager of, and Pitsmoor Youth Club, which is in Sheffield. It's really niche, the work that we do, because it's incorporating and using the outdoors as the main tool of engagement with young people and through our youth work we can bring the two together, the youth work and the outdoors. And it's the best thing if you ask me.

So I would say, outdoors has very much become part of Ashton. And people know more about the countryside because of our youth projects and the wider work that we do. And I think especially throughout Covid we've not necessarily been able to go very far out, so we've had to do local walks. And now I see the young people who we're taking on walks, now they're taking their families to places that they didn't even know existed, on our doorstep. It's just been really beautiful to see that.

Cress Wow, that's great, isn't it? So there's the ripple effect of building confidence, which is hugely empowering for everyone.

Rehna Absolutely. It's ownership, isn't it? You're giving them the ownership. It's like this is the knowledge, because I think knowledge is power. And if you don't have the knowledge, you don't feel empowered. This is the knowledge: these are the places you can go, you ARE allowed to access these lands. You know, there's this local place called Hartshead Pike, and that's just ten minutes away from my home. There's so many different routes up to the Pike and there are these open fields - people didn't even know they could go through those fields. So when I say that knowledge is power, it's people finding out, 'Oh, actually you can go through that. And then all of a sudden you feel like 'Wow, I'm in the countryside. I'm not just going up that footpath there, I'm going through the open fields. It feels like I'm in the Peak District. I don't feel like I'm in Ashton or just leaving Ashton.'

Mary-Ann Your family's British Pakistani. How diverse is the community that you work with? Are most people with Pakistani heritage or are there white families as well? What's the mix?

Rehna You know, people are always saying, 'Oh, we need people from more ethnic backgrounds'. And I'm saying 'I need some white people to join my project!'

So based on the demographics, we're in the St. Peter's Ward of Ashton-Under-Lyne, and that is predominantly South Asian - so Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian. We also have some West Africans that have recently started joining our project. And the Bhutanese community as well. There's quite a large Bhutanese population in Ashton, which if it wasn't through this project, I didn't know that the Bhutanese community existed! I didn't know the West African community existed in Ashton, to be honest. And it's through partnership work that we've been working quite closely with these other communities as well. But mostly South Asian.

Cress So do you think it makes a difference that you're South Asian and, you know, you can get to know the families and you speak the language and they know you, so you're not seen so much perhaps as an outsider? How relevant is that to you?

Rehna Extremely relevant, and I always say I don't just work with young people, I work with their families. I have to work with their families or it won't work with the young people. It's secondary, if you like. If I don't know the families, if I don't know parents, if I don't know siblings, then I don't think my work is successful. So I have to work with parents.

When parents are coming to me and they're speaking Urdu and they're saying, 'Rehna, where's my daughter going? I'm nervous, I'm worried.' And I'm speaking to them back in the mother tongue and I'm explaining to them, trying to console them and say, 'We're going to the Peak District, we're going climbing, she's going to have an amazing time. I show them pictures. And then the mum's like, 'Oh, wow, that looks really good'. And the next thing you know, two days later, she's saying, 'Can my daughter come out next time? When's the next trip?'

So that is how I'm building relationships and rapport. It has to come through that community. I have to be part of that community and I am part of that community. And that's why the work is so successful. If a white person was to come into my community, and say, 'I want to take you hill walking,' it's not going to happen! People, young people, parents are going to go, 'Er, no thanks'. Unless you've spent time building relationships within that community and they know you. Otherwise, it just doesn't work.

Mary-Ann Hmm. I'd imagine some of our listeners are those white outdoor enthusiasts or outdoor professionals who are kind of saying, you know, 'I want to be an ally, I can see there's a lack of diversity in people engaging with the outdoors. I want to be part of the solution.' What would you say that they should do? How do they find their Rehna to partner with? Because I'm assuming not every community has someone as awesome as you!

Rehna Thank you. I'll take that as a compliment! I think there are community leaders. There's always going to be community leaders. They don't necessarily have to be outdoor leaders. So I will always class myself as a community leader rather than an outdoor leader. That will come secondary. You can look at the local mosque, you've got the place of worship, you've got the community centres, you've got all these different places who HAVE community leaders.

So the work that we're doing now with the West African groups and with the Bhutanese groups, they didn't know about the outdoors. I basically went and found their group leaders, their community leaders, and I was like, 'Oh, hi, I'm Rehna, this is the work I do. Do you have young people as part of your group? Would they like to come climbing with me?' And they were like, 'What?!' And the only way I could then introduce the outdoors was just building relationships and rapport with the community leaders first. Does that make sense?

Cress It does. I think there's some good advice here and some top tips for people who are, as Mary-Ann said, white, outdoorsy, and they're not quite sure who to connect with.

Rehna I think there's got to be that level of going in and speaking. You have to get involved. You have to find out what these people want, where they're coming from. Do they even want to go climbing?! Do they even want to go walking?! Is that even something

that they've ever done before? You have to build the interest and find out what that community actually wants.

There's a lot of work to be done. And in terms of barriers to the outdoors, there are so many barriers. So before we even look at these groups, you've got to think about, 'Well, what barriers are they facing?' as well. And it's really important to remember that each group faces different barriers. Me as a South Asian woman and my South Asian young people, they will face different barriers to a group of young black kids.

Cress Yeah, of course.

Rehna Or a group of young Bhutanese kids. And it's important to remember that not everyone from an ethnic minority group faces the same barriers and issues.

Mary-Ann That's one of the things, isn't it? That takes us to the problem of language and these terms like BAME, 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' groups, because it's kind of a catch-all, isn't it? It just becomes 'Anyone Who's Not White'. Does that frustrate you?

Rehna So much! So frustrating! But the thing is, you have to have conversations about these things. I think.

There are two arguments about this, aren't there? The word BAME - at least that word is helping to address issues and really important topics of conversations that need to be had. So at this moment, I'm bearing it. I'm gritting my teeth and bearing it to some extent, because I think at least that term is helping really important discussions take place. However, like you said, we all just get lumped into one category. "All those BAME people, all the people from minority groups, we'll just put them under one roof. There are all those BAME people." Right?

Coming from a South Asian background within the South Asian community, we already have our own differences: Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indians, even within our South Asian community, there are so many different people in different groups. So how can you then go and put everyone from a different minority group in one category?! It baffles me. It just baffles me, I think it's lazy. I think it's an easy way out for people. I think people are seen to do the right thing and it's ticking boxes by just using that word. And that really infuriates me.

So now, even with my own people, with people I work with, with my friends, they're like 'oh-oh, Rehna's here, we are not going to use that word! Rehna, what's the better word? What shall we say instead?' And I'm like, 'good question'.

Mary-Ann What is the better word? What do we say?

Rehna I don't have the answers! Because then it's like, 'Are we still missing certain groups out? Are other groups still marginalised by using a different term?' I don't know. So I just say 'people from different ethnic backgrounds', or 'different minority groups'. I don't know if it's the right term, but I know it's a bit more of a broader term rather than saying 'BAME'. I don't have all the answers at all, by any means. I'm always learning.

Mary-Ann The different groups that you're engaging with, the kids from a West African background, the kids from the Bhutanese families, do you see that they have different

support needs, or that there are different barriers, different interests? And how do you work out the geography of all that?

Rehna Do you know what? It's been very, very, very hard. Very hard. And they've actually really been difficult to engage with. And I think I know the reason behind that. It's because I'm not Bhutanese and because I'm not West African. And that's the answer. The engagement I get from my South Asian groups compared to the engagement I get with the Bhutanese and the West African groups, there's a massive difference. The turnout, the wanting to do it, the willingness, the eagerness, all of that is very different. And it's going to be a long term piece of work to work with these other groups that are not the groups that I generally work with, and that's completely fine. And I've got to understand that that's normal. And I should be expecting that.

Cress I guess it leads on perhaps to the topic of role models. What you're implying is that if you were from the same ethnic background and the same heritage, should we say, that the trust and the relationship would perhaps be easier to navigate? Is that fair?

Rehna Yeah, I think so. I don't know if many people agree with me or if people have different opinions on that. But I think that's what happened with me, as a young person. I saw someone that looked like me, that was enjoying the outdoors, and I was like, 'Hey, you're getting paid to do this?! You're having fun? How can I get there?!' And here I am doing it because I was thinking, 'Whoa, someone that looks like me, comes from the same background as me, same socio-economic status as me. Same language, we eat the same food. That's pretty cool, isn't it?'

And I think that other young people are looking at me and I don't really like the word 'inspiration', but I do feel like other young people can look up to me and think, 'Oh, you know what? If Rehna's done X, Y and Z, then why can't I?' Coming from the same background, coming from the same culture, we speak the same language, the same religion. So many different things there. We can relate to each other, and that role modelling is there.

Cress But it's interesting for me that obviously Adnam who we've spoken about before, a lovely guy. But he's not quite the same is he, if we talk about gender? I know that's something you're passionate about in terms of role models.

Rehna Adnam was a really, really great role model for me, a massive inspiration. And I always say he was the best male role model I've had in my life. And still to this day, that's the way it is. In terms of female role models, you know I have my mum and she's just an amazing inspiration for me. She was a woman that faced many barriers and challenges growing up. And then she decided, that's it, she'd had enough of pleasing people and she's now a self-taught musician. And she gets about with a guitar on her back. And she's really controversial in my community, which I love! But for me, she is a really positive female role model. And I think having that female role model is really important. And within my community and within the outdoors, I don't see that very often at all. Especially within the South Asian community. I don't see...I mean, there are there are a few, don't get me wrong.

I think that's really important. Young women can look at you and think, 'Wow, look, there's someone else'. I've been told that "our women are not supposed to do stuff like that." And I've been told from X, Y and Z in my own family that I shouldn't go hill walking and that I can't go hill walking and ooh, it's getting dark now, I should be returning home. Or I've got

to look after my siblings and my family. Don't get me wrong, all these things happen. It's a cultural norm. I'm not saying that this happens for everyone, I don't want to put everyone from a South Asian background in one category. But in my experience, working with different young people, this has generally been the case. We get taught how to look after your family. We get taught life skills such as cooking and cleaning, and looking after your siblings, and looking after your parents, and putting everyone else first, before yourself. And oh, it's just crazy.

When other young women or young people can say, 'Oh, look, I don't have to...' Or, 'I can still do all that for my family, but I can still make time for me. And I can still do what's going to make me happy. And if so and so has done that, she's from the same community as me, then maybe it's not really controversial if I go out hill walking or doing something that's going to make me happy, even if my culture says that I'm really crazy for doing so'.

Mary-Ann So how do you respond when a family member or someone from the community says, 'Oh Rehna, you're a Wrong 'Un with your goretex and your hill walking urges?'

Rehna Well, to be honest, I got called a Wrong 'Un when I'm going to family parties in outdoor gear, let's put it that way! 'Rehna! That's not right! Do you ever get out of your outdoor clothes and your crocs?!' And I'm like, 'Erm, sometimes'. It makes me laugh.

I do get it. But again, it's long term work. Nothing happens overnight. Where we have got to now, where Ashton Youth Club, where Lindley, the position we're at now, it has taken nearly seven years of work. Working with community members, working with the local mosque, working with the police, working with the local authority. It has taken a lot of work, a lot of partnership, a lot of rapport building. And that is where we're at now.

The family residential that I mentioned to you before, as soon as I put the word out for that family residential, within two hours, 150 beds are filled. And I've got a reserve list, no exaggeration. We come back on Sunday evening, we're back in Ashton, and I've got text messages from families saying 'Where are we going next?', 'When can we go again?', 'When's the next family residential?', 'When can my child or my daughter get involved in the next activity?' And that's because of seven years of work. It's got to be long term. That's the only way sustainable. So now I don't get many questions or many people saying I'm a Wrong 'Un, because they know how important it is. But it's not been an easy ride. It's taken a lot of years and a lot of effort and a lot of work.

Mary-Ann I think that's one of the things that comes up a lot, isn't it? When you've got big organisations having a long, hard look at themselves and going, 'Ooh, hang on a minute,' - for example, the national parks - 'We don't have the diversity of people coming to these national landscapes as we should have. Let's have a project!' But a project is never funded for a decade of investment in a community. It's a short term thing where they might take a group out, you know, for a couple of events. And then what does that group do? They've got nowhere to build that journey.

Rehna I know, it's true. I keep going back to it, but once it's become embedded in the community, you're on a winner then. Having people within that community getting upskilled, getting trained, you know, going on all these different CPD days and building rapport and building networks, that's when it becomes sustainable. Because then they become a leader within their community so they can then take their families out.

I'll give you an example. So: we have done this 18 month project. Should have been a 12 month project but because of Covid, it's kind of been stretched out. That was in partnership with the North Face and the Outward Bound Trust and Shadwell Basin in London. And the idea was, we wanted to create six diverse young leaders within the outdoors. And we picked six young people who we had already worked with for the last four or five years. They had come to our general drop in sessions, then they started coming to our sport sessions and they started coming to our outdoor sessions and thought, 'Oh, this is pretty cool. Didn't know people went rock-climbing!' We started whetting their appetite a bit, and then they started coming to all the outdoor sessions. They started coming on our winter mountaineering expedition course. And now they've gotten to a point where they're becoming resilient, they're becoming self-confident, they're becoming aware of themselves and realising that 'Actually, the outdoors is something that I do want to pursue'.

So they're the types of young people that we've worked with over the last 18 months. We've got them to a point, they've been on a leadership residential, they've done some work experience and they've been shadowing. And last August, we put all six of those young people on our books. So they've been working on our sessions, shadowing other instructors, helping out, putting harnesses on, putting helmets on, belaying, and making sure the rest of the group's fine.

They've come such a long way. And for me, that's what it's about. Now, they've become ambassadors within our community. Other young people can look at them, and they DO look at them and say, 'Ey up, they've got North Face kit on, they've got Sprayway kit on! Where've they got that from? That looks cool, how can we do what they're doing? How come they're getting paid to go climbing?!' That's what happened to me. And that's what's happened to these six young leaders. And thankfully, we're doing it again with another six.

It has to come from within that community. If you build on a few people within that community to become ambassadors and to become positive role models, you're onto a winner.

Mary-Ann Oh, I feel inspired. Well, what do I do? So I'm a woman, mixed race, but I know that I've got a lot of privilege. What is it that you would want an individual like me to do, in order to support your work in your community?

Rehna I think have conversations. That's a big one for me. People are like, 'Oh, what do we do when it comes to diversity and inclusion? It's so scary, so daunting. There's too much that I've got to do, I don't know where to start.' And I'm like, well, awareness is the first step.

Have a conversation with someone. Find out why it is that their community is not accessing the outdoors. Find out what it is that they would like to do. Do they even want to access the outdoors? More often than not, they'll say yes, but they don't know where to start. So someone in a place of privilege needs to be having conversations. That's the initial step. Have conversations, make yourself aware of people and differences. You know, I had a conversation with someone yesterday and they go, 'Oh, I don't even look at colour. I don't see colour. I just see a person.' I'm like, 'Well, you should see colour, because I'm brown!! That's what makes me different! I'm brown, it's because of my colour that I'm in certain situations or not in certain situations...!'

Mary-Ann She just gave a silent scream, dear listeners.

Cress Rehna, I wanted to ask you, is it a pain, really a pain in the backside, being a spokesperson for, let's say, South Asian women?

Rehna I won't even lie to you, sometimes I feel that Rehna's the token brown girl, 'She can talk to us about diversity and inclusion', or 'She can talk to us about the wonderful work she does with other South Asian kids'. And sometimes it is really frustrating. I think, oh gosh, can you not find someone else to do this job for you?

But more often than not, I feel like by being this token Brown Girl has worked in my favour. I have helped shape the lives, the outdoor lives, of so many other brown girls because of my position. I feel like I'm in a privileged position right now. You mentioned that I'm an ambassador for Ellis Brigham, and I'm an ambassador for Sprayway. That puts me in such a privileged position. Kit's not a barrier for me anymore. When I first got into the outdoors, I had an outdoor jacket from a charity shop that wasn't even waterproof. I had Youth Centre boots that didn't fit me. So I know. When people say 'You don't always need the right kit, you can just go out. Why do people make kit a barrier? It doesn't need to be a barrier.'

But actually, I had first hand experience of not having the right kit and it hindered my experience. Whereas as soon as I've got a proper waterproof jacket on, I've got mittens on because I've got Raynaud's and I know when the blood circulation is about to stop and I know I need to put my gloves on, I've got my proper boots on, you know, and I'm keeping warm and I know what to do. So if I do get cold, I'm stopping for lunch, put an extra layer on. I've got all this stuff that, you know, kit's not a barrier for me. So that's put me in a place of privilege already.

Our project is actually sponsored by Sprayway, so I always say, we might come from one of the top 10 percent deprived wards in the UK, but when we go to Scotland, our kids look proper kitted out and I love it! They've all got top of the range waterproofs on and they look the bee's knees, and I love it.

Mary-Ann What would you say are the things that make or break an experience in the hills?

Rehna I think you've definitely got to have good walking boots or walking shoes, whatever you prefer, waterproof jacket and trousers. How often do you go on the hill and you don't have to put your waterproofs on?! Even if it's to keep you warmer? Waterproofs don't need to be expensive top notch as long as they keep you dry, I think. And then a warmer jacket. That's what I think. Three pieces, waterproofs - jacket and trousers, boots, and a warmer insulation layer. Perfect. And then if you're someone like me, obviously, you need mittens to keep your hands warm!

Cress So Rehna – Everest, that never was. Tell us about this!

Rehna That never was. But will be! It will be!! It will happen. Gosh, I've lost track of time, but I think it takes us to nearly two years ago now, I had secured £20,000 to take a group of young women from minority backgrounds, from Ashton, from our community, to Nepal for two weeks and do the Everest base camp trek. Someone just asked me, 'Rehna, what would you love to see in your community?' And I said, 'I would love to do something that no one would ever think would ever happen.' And women from Ashton...Like I said to you, when the opportunity to go to Morocco came about and we were like, 'What?! Kids from Ashton are going to climb in Morocco?!' It's the same thing - young women from Ashton

going to Nepal to do a trek like that is unheard of. I don't think I know of one person in my community, from Ashton, that's ever gone to Nepal, to be honest. So that's what I secured funding for, for eight young women to go to Nepal, climb to Everest base camp. And it was just going to be absolutely amazing. That was supposed to happen last October. But due to Covid, it's been postponed. And we had all sorts of different ideas. We thought, oh, gosh, we've got the funding - maybe we can try and do some different expeditions that won't include overseas travel. We thought maybe we can do a coast-to-coast cycle trip. Maybe we can do a wild canoe expedition. But it just wasn't hitting the spot for me. I'm like 'Please! I can't!'

Once something's in my head or my heart, I can't let go of it. And I'm like, 'Yeah, but Nepal's calling us. Nepal's calling us! What can we do?' I had some conversations with who we secured the funding from and they were like, 'No, Rehna, I want you to hold on to that funding. You told me that this would be a once in a lifetime opportunity. And if that's the case, you need to hold onto it till you can make it happen.'

So hopefully this time next year [2022] is what we're aiming for. Fingers crossed, should it be safe to travel, we're going to get there. We're going to get those eight young women there and we're going to have an experience of a lifetime.

Cress That sounds amazing. And I'm sure in your training for that, you'll come up to, say, the Lake District and you must...I look forward to meeting you all and we'll go on the hill and, you know, get some days in!

Rehna Definitely. We've got our first walking trip with them again, so it's just going to be a day walk, just to get the group together and meet them in a couple of weeks, fingers crossed, which I'm really looking forward to. But, yeah, definitely if we're in the Lakes I'll give you a shout.

Mary-Ann I guess you say it'll be a once in a lifetime experience, but the way you work, it sounds like actually that could be a springboard for a lifetime of experiences.

Rehna Yeah, you're right! You know, hopefully, even if one of those women think, 'You know what, I'm going to take the next year out and I'm going to go and travel. I'm going to go to places that I've been told I can never go to.' And that *can* happen, because I know that being exposed to the outdoors has taken me to places I never thought I could ever go, someone like me would never go to these places. And here I am, facilitating these same experiences for other people. You don't understand how excited it makes me!

So you know what? Hopefully that will just be the initial push and people will start doing it. And, you know, I am hoping to go on a test run! And try and get myself out there later this year. I know, I think I'm being optimistic, but I'm going to try. If I can get there, get to Nepal later on this year myself...because I need to make sure it's safe for my young women next year!

Mary-Ann Yeah, you've got to do a recce! Cress and I will carry your bags.

Cress Yeah. I'll go back! Any excuse to go back to Nepal, for sure.

Mary-Ann I've never been. I'd love to go.

Cress You've got to go. There are loads of great places...But we digress! We'll put some links after the podcast of some training courses that people can do that Mountain Training runs. So nationally qualified skills and confidence-boosting courses and awards that might be helpful. And there are some bursaries as well. So it's useful for people to know about those.

Rehna Yeah, absolutely. I got my Mountain Leader training subsidised and that was really, really helpful for someone like me. And I think people should really tap into all that. And if there's a way that you can get it subsidised, because you think, 'Oh, I can't afford the full qualification!' or whatever, then people should tap into that and take full use of it.

Mary-Ann [to listeners] Reach out to those organisations because they might know about pots of grant funding or bursaries that otherwise it will be hard to find online. But, you know - don't be shy and ask.

Rehna Oh, I'm not shy! There's a lot of ML's that have been trained in Ashton now...

Cress ML is 'Mountain Leader'.

Rehna Yes, Mountain Leaders. And a lot of them had their training subsidised. I know how helpful that is, and for their assessment.

Mary-Ann Great. All right, Rehna, we're going to finish off with our Quickfire questions. These are 10 questions we ask every guest on Finding Our Way.

Cress Ok Rehna, describe yourself in three words.

Rehna Enthusiastic, passionate and ambitious.

Mary-Ann Your favourite mountain snack?

Rehna Hot Vimto and Starbursts.

Cress Best mountain memory?

Rehna Going up Crib Goch after five years, after a failed attempt the first time

Mary-Ann Bucket list destination?

Rehna Nepal!

Cress How often do you get lost?

Rehna I usually start off lost, to be honest!

Mary-Ann Are you funny?

Rehna No. [laughs]

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

Rehna I don't know if it's cliché, but a bird. Then I could go to Nepal with no problems.

Mary-Ann One thing you always carry when you're out on the hill?

Rehna Hot Vimto!

Cress What does climbing, walking mean to you?

Rehna The World.

Mary-Ann Lastly, we want more of you and your work. Where do we go?

Rehna So if you want to check the work out of the wider trust, you can go in the Lindley Educational Trust website. We also have a Facebook page for Lindley and Ashton Youth Club. We have an Instagram page for Ashton Youth Club, and my personal page is @outdoors_with_Rehna.

Mary-Ann And those links will be in the podcast description as well.

Cress Thanks so much.

Mary-Ann Yeah, thank you so much. Good luck with the work - fingers crossed for Nepal!

Cress And let us know about Everest.

Rehna I will do! Thanks for having me, guys.

Mary-Ann Thank you for listening. We want Finding Our Way to find its way to as many people as possible because important conversations like these need to be heard. So subscribe, share the podcast with friends and your networks, and also get in touch with us. Tell us what you think! Use @TeamBMC on Instagram and Twitter and the hashtag #FindingOurWay.

Cress See you on the next one!

Mary-Ann Bye Bye!

#outro music

Mary-Ann Finding Our Way is brought to you by the British Mountaineering Council and is proudly supported by Berghaus. It's produced and presented by Cress Allwood and me, Mary-Ann Ochota. It's edited by Chris Stone. The artwork was designed by Neil Arch. Follow us on your podcast app so you don't miss an episode, and join the conversation on social with the hashtag #FindingOurWay.