S10E2- The One Who Found Her Voice

It only takes one person. So not every child gets the perfect start, but every child needs one person who doesn't give up on them. We often say, and especially here at Resilient Kid, it takes a village to raise a child, and sometimes that's true, but research consistently shows something powerful. The single greatest protective factor in a child's life is one stable, supportive adult.

One person who shows up, who believes, who stays steady when things feel tricky or wobbly. Welcome to 'It Only Takes One Person', a special series on the Resilient Kid Podcast. I'll begin by sharing my own reflections and then we'll hear some powerful stories from people who had that one person — whether it was a parent, a teacher, a coach, or a mentor — and the lasting impact it had on their lives.

Because resilience isn't built through perfection, it's built through connection, and sometimes one person is enough. Let's begin.

Ashley: Hello and welcome back to the Resilient Kid Podcast with me, Ashley Costello, psychotherapist and founder here at The Resilient Kid. We have a very special guest today in Ruby O'Brien, winner of the Womanifest Future Voice Award, and she fits perfectly with the 'Only Takes One Person' series because she represents young people finding their voice. Hello, Ruby. How are you?

Ruby: Hello. I'm good, thank you. How are you?

Ashley: Really well, really well. Well, can I just say — when we met on Friday night, didn't we, at the awards — I saw Ruby and obviously when we get all the bump of who's applied, the application forms and stuff, we don't get any pictures. And it was really weird because the VIPs went into the bar before the actual awards started, and I saw you and I was like... I just knew that was you. You looked amazing in your dress, but also it was one of those moments where I was like, you are such a confident — quietly confident, but confident — young woman. And I just thought this stuff that you do, it had to be you. It absolutely had to be you. So tell me, Ruby, tell the audience a little bit about what you do, because I think they will agree you are an absolute winner. What is it that you do?

Ruby: So my role is Member of Youth Parliament, which is completely voluntary. It sounds very political and, to be completely honest, I've not got a clue about politics. So this role for me is all about empowering young people to use their voice and actively listening to them. A lot of the time young people say, 'Well, this is the problem,' but it's also for me to show them that they can also be the solution — whether it is them going and speaking to decision makers or making change in their community.

Ruby: Because a lot of the time — so I've been to the House of Commons and represented young people there, and although that does sound incredible — the change doesn't start in that room. It starts with us in our community, just really feeling like we belong and taking ownership of our community and listening to each other as well.

Ruby: A lot of the time it's like, 'Oh, well, adults aren't listening to us,' but are we supporting each other as young people in trying to make change? I'm very passionate about a lot of things, including the education system, mental health, and things like that. Sometimes topics can be hard to talk about, but I've finally found a way I can talk about them and I can also encourage other young people to speak openly and make them feel valued when they are speaking as well.

Ashley: You know what, listening to you just gave me chills. Because when I was reading your application — or the information that we had to judge the award on — you talked a lot about that, but you can see clearly that you are passionate about it. And what I love is it's not just, you know, you don't take 'no' for an answer. Like, 'Adults aren't listening to us? Make them.' Be in that room, speak to the decision makers, what can you do? I just think that's absolutely fantastic. And we aligned with the mental health and education and all that, but it's just heartwarming to hear such a young person be as passionate. Because, you know, I've got a lot of young people who are passionate, but there are some who go, 'Well, I can't really make a difference,' but...

Ruby: Yeah.

Ashley: ...you are proof that you can.

Ruby: Definitely. And I think for me, I did sit there once and think, 'Oh well, what's my voice got to do with it? I'm not making a difference and my voice doesn't matter.' And now — for me to see that I can, but also looking at other young people who do feel that way — I can say to them, 'Well, I've sat in the same assemblies you have, I've had to go through the same process, and there have been barriers in the way, absolutely.' But for me, breaking down barriers isn't for myself. It's for other young people that maybe face the same barriers as me.

Ashley: Absolutely. So we invited you onto the podcast because, firstly, we really wanted to give you that voice — you definitely are a voice of the future. But one of the themes of this series is the 'one person' kind of thing. It only takes one person, because research shows us that one supportive adult can completely change the path of a young person's life. Was there somebody in your life who believed in you, encouraged you, gave you an opportunity to step forward, step into that?

Ruby: Yeah. So I always speak about a youth worker called Jack, and he's part of the NOSE. He's just incredible. So in Year 10 of school, my sister was groomed and I absolutely couldn't look at any males. I wouldn't stay in the same room or anything like that. And I'm a young carer for my mum and dad, so I remember all the boys saying, 'Oh, there's this activity on, we wanna go to it.' So I was like, 'Right, okay.' So I walked them down to it and Jack was at the door.

Ruby: And when I say — he laughs now because I say he is the most tall, alpha, male, scout-type person you'd know — and I was petrified looking at him. I was actually trembling. I was like, I can't leave my boys there, but the boys wanted something to do and if I didn't take them, I'd be the worst person in the world. So I took them. And he said to me, 'You're not coming in?' And I was like, 'No, no, I can't do that.' And for me, it wasn't only about being around males, but being a young carer — you grow up so quickly. And it didn't make sense for me to be in a room of young people. Like, for me, that was never an option.

Ruby: So I left and then I came back, and the boys turned around and gave me Jack's number on a piece of paper and said, 'Can you phone this number? Jackie wants to take us on a trip.' And I thought, 'I am not letting some strange man we've just met take my two boys on a trip. It's not happening.' But again, it was what the boys wanted. They didn't really have any kind of respite, so I was like, 'Well, I need to let them go.' So I phoned Jack, literally typing the number and shaking.

Ruby: He was really lovely on the phone, but he said, 'Ruby, we've got a space. Why don't you come with us?' And in my head I was like, I can't go because of my fear, but I'd feel more safe if I was there with the boys. So I went. We went to — I think it's called Go Ape, something like that — where you're climbing really tall trees, so I was petrified anyway. And then we were on the bus on the way back. There was me, three other girls, Jack, and another youth worker, and Jack said, 'Oh, why don't you tell Ruby about the Youth Cabinet?'

Ruby: I was like, 'Youth Cabinet? I am not going to that.' I remember them telling me, and it wasn't like, 'Oh, it sounds good and there are boss opportunities.' I was like, I can't do that. I need to be in the house. And also, I'm not that clever. I remember Jack saying to me, 'Just come. It's an hour out of the house. It'll take you away from your care and responsibilities. You need this.' So I was like, 'Right, okay.' So I went — didn't speak for the first two sessions, which now is unbelievable because I don't shut up. I always speak.

Ruby: But I went and it was such a — it was weird for me. I'd never been in a group with young people my own age doing, like, kid things. And I know it sounds mad, but as a young carer you don't really get that opportunity. So I went anyway and I did enjoy it. So I went back and I started speaking. And then the Youth Parliament elections came up and I remember Jack saying to me, 'You're going for it.' And I went, 'No. Why would I go for it? I've not got a clue. I'm not clever and I'm not political.' I listed so many reasons not to go for it and not one reason to go for it.

Ruby: And Jack said to me — and I always hold these two words — 'Why not?' And I was like, 'What?' He was like, 'Why not? I don't get why you don't go for it. Even if you don't get it, it's a good opportunity, it's a good experience.' So I stumbled and stumbled, and then it came to a point where there weren't many young people in Noseley running for it. So it was either our area wasn't represented — which, in a lot of cases, Noseley is underrepresented when it comes to decision making — or I put my big girl knickers on. And I just applied.

Ruby: And I got Youth Parliament. And I just — it's still surreal now. I've been doing it for two years. I finish at the end of this month. It's been the best two years of my life. And I absolutely wouldn't have been doing any of this, or been at the awards on Friday night, if it wasn't for Jack. And I think, considering I wouldn't stay in a room with any male, for him to be the reason for my story and my journey is just incredible. I say I owe my whole life to him. He honestly made possible what have been the best two years of my life.

Ashley: Do you know what? How lovely. And not only has he — just with those two words, 'Why not?' Like, if not you, then who?

Ruby: Yeah.

Ashley: Ruby, you have absolutely smashed it. But also, he saw you just as a young person — not as a carer, not as somebody looking after the boys. And I love that. So one of my besties is from Liverpool and we always talk — we always say 'our kid,' 'our part,' 'our whatever.' And she's the same. So I loved, it was dead heartwarming, listening to you say 'my boys.' Absolutely. But yeah — how do you think Jack knew what an impact he was having at the time?

Ruby: No, I don't think so. And even now — so I used to, obviously, not go to college or straight into work or anything, because college isn't for me and I know that. But also I thought, I've been given this title. I want to prove to young people that I can do it, and okay, it doesn't pay the bills or gain me a qualification, but it gains me experience.

Ruby: So I was writing some little report for the staff that commission the youth service. And I remember writing a report once and saying, 'That summer obviously changed my life.' I think he does know now, but I was too shy to say it to his face. He honestly — I feel like he should know how much of an impact he's had. And I'm just one person he works with, so imagine how many young people he's had such a big impact on.

Ruby: I want to be a youth worker when I'm older because of people like Jack. All the youth workers in our service are just incredible. I think I surround myself with them because I saw a quote that said, 'Surround yourself with people that you want to grow up to be like.' So I am absolutely endorsing every second of that and trying to be around them. I can learn from them, see what they do, and I think if I can have an impact on a young person's life the way Jack has had on me, then my job's done. That would fulfil me, really.

Ashley: Oh, that is amazing. Do you know what — maybe we'll send Jack the podcast. Go on, Jack! And it sounds to me like he helped you develop, because I was going to say you were the average kid, but you weren't, because I think the role that a carer takes is huge. Like you say, you grow up so quickly. You're thinking about everything — when you go to school, you're still thinking about what's for dinner, if you've got the washing in, how is everybody you care for. That's constant. You're not thinking about Snapchat or meeting up with mates. You're thinking about the other kids in the family, all that kind of stuff.

Ashley: But it sounds like, at that time, you were in school — probably sitting through some boring assemblies, getting on with the work of school and stuff. How did you develop the confidence to speak up the way you do? You are very articulate. Did that come about suddenly — you becoming the speaker for young people?

Ruby: You know, it was amazing. I think for me it definitely took time. My thing was always seeing injustice, and if something isn't right, I'm doing something about it. Because if not me, when? But also, young people had seen that I'd been elected for this area and I thought, that's a lot of young people looking to me and going, 'Well, you're here in decision-making meetings, you're doing this.' And I didn't want to let anyone down. I am a yes person and I am a people pleaser, but that's not necessarily always a bad thing because I think it gives me the drive.

Ruby: And I think when I see other young people — going into schools was the big yes-mark for me. I remember going into a school literally at the back of my house and the kids were asking for pictures and signatures, and I was like, 'I'm just a girl from Kirby, what's going on?' I couldn't believe it. They were like, 'Oh, the teacher's been showing us videos and you've been in the House of Commons and you've done this and you've done that.' And I was just star-struck.

Ruby: And I remember saying to the kids — one of them said, 'I wish I could be like you,' and I said, 'You absolutely can.' I said, 'I can touch my bedroom window from this school. There is absolutely no reason why you can't do this.' I said, 'A lot of the barriers and challenges you're thinking of, I've more than likely been through and overcome.' And I don't say that to be like, 'Yes, look at me.' I say that to show other young people that it really doesn't matter the area you're from, your family situation, or anything like that. It is so, so important that you have the self-belief.

Ruby: You have this one person who's made a difference. And if I can be that one person for any other young person, that's what gives me the confidence and the motivation to keep going and to stand up and to speak. And when I'm having a hard day and I have to go into a meeting, I don't sit there and think, 'Oh, it's a really rubbish day.' I sit there and think, think about those kids in that school, or think about the kids who are struggling from this injustice. Knowing that I'm helping other young people is my healer, really.

Ashley: It's amazing. And you know, you've probably come up against more barriers than most as well, being a young carer. Tell me — you've just launched a new campaign this week, haven't you. Tell us a little bit about that.

Ruby: Yes. So the campaign is to raise £20,000 to get an accessible lift into the Epstein Theatre. So I hosted the Nile Festival in there — which is a children's mental health festival run by the NYA team in Liverpool — and they asked, 'Will you host it?' And I was like, 'Yes, amazing, I'd love to.'

Ruby: And there was this girl from Sandfield Park — just an incredible school — and a lot of them are wheelchair users. There was a group from Noseley with a wheelchair user, and my most amazing little friend Tilly, she's also a wheelchair user. They couldn't get onto the stage. So Tilly's video was about accessibility, and — I'll say 'luckily' in inverted commas — her dad managed to lift her onto the stage. But for the other young people, that wasn't possible.

Ruby: The stage gives me this passion, this drive, this feeling of being valued. I can't tell you — I've got goosebumps thinking about it — but the feeling you get when you're on stage and people are looking at you and listening to you and clapping and applauding you, that is just insane. You can't buy that feeling. So for those young people not to experience that broke my heart. And their messages — by the way — were absolutely powerful, no matter if they were on the floor, on the stage, or in the streets. But it didn't feel right that I had the opportunity to go on stage and other young people didn't, because of their access needs.

Ruby: So I went to the management and I was a little bit cross. I said, 'Look, this isn't good. We speak about accessibility and this isn't happening for young people. What is going on?' Truthfully, the Epstein were a little bit upset and they said, 'Look, we're privately owned now, which means the

council don't fund any of it.' They are genuinely the most gorgeous team. They are really trying, but money is the struggle. So I thought, look — they are the People's Theatre in Liverpool. If you ask anyone about a theatre in Liverpool that belongs to the people, it's the Epstein. So for me, I was like, I need to do something to help.

Ruby: So I launched this campaign. I had a video on my phone and I was like, 'Yes or no, do a press launch?' And I did a press launch. Why not? The response and the support have been incredible. I've got meetings later today about fundraising. And for me, it's not my campaign. Yes, I've launched it. Yes, my name's on it. But it's the city's campaign. It's about accessibility, because accessibility is a right — it's not an option. It shouldn't be an afterthought. It should have been a thought when everything was being put into place.

Ruby: But it's also about two other things that really strike home for me. The first one is Liverpool and even the wider community coming together and making a difference — showing that when we all unite in this belief that everyone deserves the same rights and the same access, we can make a change and we can make it happen. But young people are at my heart. I eat, sleep, drink, breathe empowering young people. So I want to show that young people often get a negative press, but it's not like this. Look at all of these young people — youth groups, dance groups — making a change, fundraising, and shouting, 'Yeah, we are young people and we are making a change.' So absolutely it's about accessibility, and we will get that lift for our young people, performers, and creatives, no matter their age or mobility needs. But we will also shine a positive light on young people.

Ashley: Absolutely. And I think the thing is, Ruby — you know, we can sit here today and say the world is a bit of a mess, and it is a bit of a mess. But that's the adults that have messed it up. I'm really passionate that young voices and young people are going to make the change that we need, and it's not going to be adults — apart from putting their hands in their pockets. You know, contributing to this. Absolutely everybody should have a space on that stage, irrespective of who they are. What do you think young people most need from adults around them right now, as well as donations?

Ruby: I think support, in the sense of — looking at the campaign side of it — supporting young people to empower them and to show them that they can fundraise. Because if someone had said to me two years ago, 'You are going to be sat in your living room launching a £20,000 campaign,' I'd have said, 'Absolutely not.' For me to do that now feels surreal saying it.

Ruby: I've set up this Community Champions scheme, so if you're doing your own fundraiser you can become a Community Champion and we will get you positive press coverage. You'll also be highlighted on the day of our finale fundraiser. If you know businesses or organisations that can donate or run a spot prize ball or anything like that, they can. But I think for young people specifically — be present, be active. We know that a lot of young people are on social media. It takes three seconds to like, comment, and share, and I can't tell you the impact that's been having.

Ruby: The first video I put out — my average views was literally about a thousand. That video has had over 55,000 views, and that is just incredible to think about. I'm just a girl from Kirby. People are noticing the impact it's having. So for other young people to share it — you absolutely do not need

to put your hand in your pocket. I'll say openly now: if someone said to me, 'Ruby, I need you to donate to this campaign,' it wouldn't be possible. I haven't got the money. But what I am doing is making a change wherever I can. So take away finance — what I am doing is sharing the message on social media, speaking about it in public, word of mouth.

Ruby: Yesterday I was out on the bus and someone said, 'Are you all right, girl?' And I thought, this is my opportunity. I said, 'I've been really busy recently.' 'Why have you been busy?' 'Well, I'm running this campaign.' And they actually went and donated. And that is just incredible. So I'm not asking you to put your hands in your pockets if you can't afford it, because I get it. I've been there. It's not always possible financially. But spread the positive message and let's get this to a national campaign.

Ruby: I had someone from Pennsylvania message me and say, 'I've seen it. I used to live in Liverpool and it's amazing what you're doing.' So they donated all the way from Pennsylvania. Like, what is going on? This girl who was on free school meals and lives in a council house. You just wouldn't expect something like this to happen. The Liverpool Echo posted an article the other day and I was sat here like, 'What?' I literally just posted a video saying I want this to happen, and it's happening. Change is being made.

Ruby: So I think my message to any young people out there is: go for it. Don't quit. There's a song that says, 'Darling, don't quit your daydream,' and I live by that. If you've got a dream, go for it. If you've failed — I made up that you're failing. Like, you've had a go and you're trying again. People see failure as this negative thing. No. Failure is positive. Rounds of applause if you are failing, because that means you've taken a step to try.

Ashley: Absolutely. I love that. And one of the phrases we always say is, 'But what if you fly?'

Ruby: Yeah.

Ashley: What if? Okay, what if I fail? But what if you don't? What if you fly at this? I really love that. So you've got about three weeks left of your current role. What's next for Ruby O'Brien? Because I'm expecting big things, Ruby.

Ruby: So I'll be really honest — I've been sat awake a few nights, obsessing. As I say, NYP has been my whole two years. I didn't go to college. I do work now, but I didn't go straight into work. So I wake up and the first thing I'm thinking is NYP. I go to sleep and it's still in my head — what change can I make? To not have that was something I was a little bit worried about.

Ruby: But I remember sitting there at this event that Sharon from Ladies That Lead was running, and there was this woman called Angela there. I've seen Angela in previous meetings, but I've always looked up to her and thought, 'You are a powerhouse, you are just an amazing woman.' And she asked this question. She said, 'Who in this room could answer — who is Ruby? Who is Angela?' And I was like, 'Yeah, well, Ruby is the Member of Youth Parliament for Noseley. She's a young carer.' And she was like, 'No, like that isn't you. Take away your roles. Who are you?'

Ruby: And now I'm starting to realise that I'm driven, I'm motivated, and I'm passionate. So I am working on a whole new marketing and branding at the moment, and my line is 'just the girl from

Kirby.' I will be just the girl from Kirby making change — but change without the title. And I think if I can show young people that, then that's important.

Ruby: So Bootle and Liverpool don't have a Member of Youth Parliament — that's three seats in the House of Commons that are underrepresented on Merseyside. Young people, absolutely not. And again, it comes down to funding. So I'm going to finish my campaign in May. We're having our big finale fundraiser on the 2nd of May, which is a little bit nerve-wracking because I know it is quite soon. But I do believe that we can do it. And then once the 2nd of May comes, I'll give myself the 3rd of May to just have a little breather and go, 'Wow, you've done it.' And then I'll be straight back onto making sure that Merseyside young people are being heard and are having seats in there.

Ruby: But also, not all young people want to go into formal youth voice structures, and that's okay. So how are we hearing the voice of the young people on the streets? How are we hearing the voices of young people that we don't always have access to? How do we make sure that they're listened to? I think that's something I'm very passionate about. Because yeah, I was in school, and I wasn't necessarily in a youth club — I dropped my brothers off at one, but I was a child who maybe didn't always get listened to or asked what my opinion was. So I want to make sure that's happening for all young people as well.

Ashley: Do you know what? It's so powerful to sit here. I've got goosebumps on goosebumps listening to you, because of what you represent. You say, 'I'm just a girl from Kirby.' You are a powerhouse from Kirby, let me tell you, Ruby. But also, as an older woman sitting here — everything that you represent, yes, it's accessibility, yes, it's mental health, yes, it's education and young people, but actually you represent hope, Ruby. You really do.

Ashley: And I think anything that we can do to support you — from the Resilient Kid to the audience listening — we will absolutely get behind you. And I love the fact that you gave yourself a day to take a breather. I'm like, 'My God, you've got this massive campaign and you've given yourself one day off!' Ruby, before we finish, I just want to say thank you for everything that you're doing — not just for Kirby, not just for Liverpool, but for young people.

Ashley: And to everyone listening — we have people all over the world listening to this podcast. One: put your hand in your pocket and help this campaign. Two: if you can't put your hand in your pocket because there's nothing there, share, like, comment, just spread the word please. It's really important what Ruby's doing. And also check out her socials, because I think it's really important that you've got that support from people, because it does — we always talk about it taking a village, but you can't do all this on your own.

Ashley: So please support Ruby, and really get behind not only the campaign but all the other stuff that I know you're going to do in the future. And thank you for representing Youth Parliament. I just think it's absolutely incredible and I think it's an opportunity most young people think is out of their reach, and it isn't. You've proven that. You've overcome obstacles to do this, and I just think it's brilliant.

Ashley: I kind of wanted to finish on a few words from you to people like Jack — because I often think, as a psychotherapist, my big thing is just listen.

Ruby: Yeah.

Ashley: Just see and listen. Because sometimes that's all young people need. Yes, of course they need support and help and things like that. But actually to be heard and to be seen, I think, is a really valuable thing — whether it's on big stages or whether it's just sat in somebody's office or on the bus. It really does not matter. So what would you say to people like Jack, who have been that person for a young person in this world that's kind of bobbing along and thinks nobody cares?

Ruby: I don't think there are any words that could express the amount of gratitude that I have for people like Jack. But I just think — obviously, thank you. I couldn't thank Jack enough. But know that you are making an impact. These people who are making an impact don't give themselves credit. They absolutely empower me and empower other young people and say, 'Yes, well done, you're doing it.' But for them to know that they're doing it as well, and that they've made an impact — I think: stop and reflect, and look at this kid who wouldn't speak, who wouldn't even go into a room to sign a consent form, who is now there every day, seeing people like Jack and wanting to spend that time.

Ruby: And I think young people vote with their feet, don't they? And the fact that he's got young people going back — yeah. So I just think: if you are the Jack in the world and you are helping young people, thank you. But also thank yourself. It's really important that you see the impact that you are having.

Ashley: Ruby, I just want to say — thank you to you, because you are having a huge impact. Not only on young people, but on people my age who are listening to you and are really inspired. You are absolutely a voice of the future. So, listeners, please look out for Ruby O'Brien. Go and find her on the socials — we'll put it in the show notes. She is absolutely a powerhouse and brings lots of hope to what is, sometimes, quite a tricky world to navigate.

Ashley: So Ruby, thanks very much for joining us. And come and see her — she's just agreed before I could say this out loud — come and see her at the Teen Tent at Womanifest, because she's going to host a little talk or maybe a little workshop there. Bring the teens and come and meet Ruby in person. Thanks very much, Ruby, for joining the Resilient Kid Podcast. You are very welcome.