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The Resilient Kid Podcast

Season 8 – Episode 4

From Chaos to Care with Maura Jackson

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Today we have a special guest. We are gonna have laughs. There is gonna be some swearing, just letting you know. But actually we're gonna talk about something that's really serious as well. Kinship, special guardianship for our kids. So I would love to welcome the very funny, the very lovely and the very talented Maura Jackson. Hello. How are you?

Maura Jackson : Hello, Ashley. I am very well, thanks. How are you?

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Really good. I am so pleased to have you here. So before I get you to introduce yourself, we've kind of known each other a little bit around the circuit, especially kind of speaking circuits. So Womanifest, I first seen you and I remember it being a really crappy, rainy day I was in with our mutual friend Catherine Sandland.

We were both hungover from TEDx the night before and both had to come on and do a talk. And we thought, right, let's just get ourself a little bit of something bubbly, went and sat in this outside tent and we were like, oh, Maura's on, let's go. Now I am not gonna give it away. But we sat laughing for about 40 minutes and it was just what we needed to pick us up. And before we had then had to go and do our talks. But I also know you are other mutual friends. Pink Spaghetti. I know you've just done their conference. Caroline and all the ladies at Pink Spaghetti and also, we had the lovely pleasure of working together at phenomenal woman a few weeks ago. So, Maura, tell us a little bit about yourself, what do you do? Things like that.

Maura Jackson: Okay, well thanks for that. I hadn't really described myself previously as a cure for hangover, but that might be my new strap line now. You know, you need every bit of magazine you can get, so thanks for that. Yeah. So my name is Maura Jackson. I am a full-time chief exec of a charity called Back Up Northwest, which is a service for young people who are homeless in Bolton.

And what we do there is we provide accommodation, flats, bedsits, which are kitted out, furnished, decorated, and the young people move in. And then we have got teams of staff that provide like specialist support room, whatever they need to be able to live independently. So the charity itself has been running for 33 years, and I have been the chief exec here for the last 13.

I'm just starting the 14th year here. I absolutely love it. And I did work here in the nineties when the organization was tiny. And there were only five staff, and I was one of two support workers. And we've supported 20 young people between us. I did that for two and a half years. So when the post came up as the chief executive I just thought, yep, that is the job for me.

I already know that I love the organization and that you know, the mission and everything is absolutely something I can get behind. So that, you know, the rest is state is history, but as a bit of a side hustle, as you know, Ashley I've set up a company called the Feather Fixer, which is two bits to it really.

One is the keynote speaking, which you've mentioned. So keynote speaking around leadership, resilience, just life really. So issues sometimes. I've done keynote speech on the menopause. I'm not an expert, but, you know, sometimes it's good to talk about stuff that you experience and yeah, anything around business and charity.

I've done loads, spoken loads of different venues for different sort of audiences. And then the other side of the Feather Fixer is standup comedian, event host and sort of generally arsen around, Arsen around and getting paid for it is ace. So yeah, the, the comedian stuff started fairly recently. I'm in the third year of doing that properly.

And that, that's been crazy. Absolutely crazy, but that's what I do. But in the middle of all this, and the thing that kind of caught my eye when you were explaining what you were doing with The Resilient Kid was actually behind all this, my most important role is as a special guardian to both my grandchildren.

So Ruby is 14 and Louis is seven, and they have lived with me for five and a half years full-time. So in the middle of all that. As I approach 50, it would appear that I've gone back to being a full-time parent, which initially was really fucking difficult. But now you know, we're in a routine. Life's good, they're settled, they're safe, everything's okay.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Do you know what I have met Ruby. When you were doing the standup app for Manifest that we were talking about before, and she is a cracking young girl. In fact, I think I've met her a couple of times. She's a typical teen, embarrassed about, you know, what's happening, just leave me alone, kind of thing. But really polite, really lovely. And you know, to think that, 'cause my guess is Maura, you were getting to a point in your life where things were settling down. You've got a really good job, you know, professionally, you've got this very, you know successful side hustle as well, where you are being asked to do keynote speaks, speeches, stuff like that. And then all of a sudden, you're back to parenting. Like, you know, the bit that you thought was done, your bit was done, and you could just be, you know, nana or grandma and, and they just come for visits on Sundays and things like that. Your life must have been upside down.

Maura Jackson: It was absolutely crazy because it literally was one day. So on a Thursday tea time, I was in a meeting, we had a board meeting here at Backup, my mom texted me and said I don't know the full story, but Louie is in hospital. He's had an accident, and I'm just going to go and pick them up. I'll let you know when I come out.

What's gone on. So I thought, you know, shit, what is this? But I thought my mum's there and, and she said he was okay. So, I finished the meeting and it finished at half past seven. And then my mom text about five minutes later and said, I'm on my way to your house. I'll explain everything when I get there.

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So that was fine. So she arrived about half an hour later with the two grandchildren, but not my daughter and I. 'cause I was expecting all three of 'em. And I said, well, what's happened? Louie had black eyes and sort of bruising on his face and his neck scratches on his face, his ears, you know he was one and a half.

So his tiny little ears ear was black at the top and inside they were, I thought, what the hell? Both of them, both his ears and anyway, my mum just was crying her eyes out. I've always seen her cry twice in my entire life and she crying her eyes out and just said, basically that she, my daughter had asked her to go and pick the children up and give her a lift.

But when she got there, really it was an absolute shit show. So, long story short, Louie had gone to nursery with some marks on his face, and the nursery staff wondered whether it was meningitis, 'cause it was like dots on his face. So they tried to contact my daughter. She didn't answer the phone because she was at work, and so they, they just got medical advice themselves.

And a mobile paramedic came out and said, no, it's not meningitis. However, what it is, it's bruising and it's just form and it's new bruising. So obviously they, they did what they had to do, which was a safeguarding referral. And that led to a trip to A&E. My daughter met them though with her partner.

And basically, they explained that he'd had a, a fight the previous day with the partner's son who was three they'd been fighting over toys and had this scrap or whatever. And so basically the people at A&E said, no, this bruising, there's no way has it been caused by a three-year-old. It's been caused by an adult.

So they then contacted the police and then my daughter's partner's story, like she was looking after the children the previous day and it just didn't add up. So that led to them saying, look, we're gonna just do a bit of an investigation. Can the children stay somewhere else? And of, of course, you know, I said, yeah.

So my mum brought them to me. I went to a meeting the following morning at nine o'clock to find out what was going on. I had to take the children with me to social services who basically explained the story and then said, until we are satisfied with the explanation, we're treating it as a non-accidental injury.

And can you look after them? Well, absolutely. But that then it unfolded into a voluntary arrangement, which my daughter obviously agreed to. 'cause she wasn't around when these injuries occurred. She was at work. Her partner had been looking after him. And, you know, then it very quickly became hostile because my daughter believed the partner's explanation and accepted that and, and defended it to a point.

And it got to a stage where she was defending the indefensible and she just didn't see it. So it turned into a three-week emergency care order. And I was trying to plead with daughter to say, listen, you know, for God's sake, you've got to engage with, with social care. You know, this is ridiculous. And so she just shut down then. Clutters off.

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So I was at a point there, Ashley, where the children were dropped off. I didn't have any of the clothes, I didn't have school uniforms, I didn't have a car seat. I had nothing. So I had to start that weekend and buy everything. Obviously dealing with the emotional side of things, Louie was just puff, he didn't really know what was going on.

And, and he wasn't able to articulate what had gone on. And when I said to him, oh, what's happened to your face? He just kept saying, hit me, hit me what? You know? And that's all he could say. So he doesn't remember this. He has no recollection of it, but Ruby does. Not the incident, 'cause she wasn't there, she was at school.

But the whole unfolding of the, you know, being lifted out of one house and into another, without any explanation, no contact with mom. It was just horrific. And then, you know, social services are saying to me, you know, will you look after them? Well, obviously, of course I'm gonna look after 'em. They're not going to foster care.

Not a chance. And I sort of went, were, I'd always been the professional in the social care arena and the safeguarding lead for our organization. I've done safeguarding around domestic abuse. I've been on the marrack panels. I've been involved with criminal justice. I've worked on homicide reviews with the home office.

I've done all safeguarding from every professional angle you can imagine. And then all of a sudden, I'm the one being scrutinized around whether or not I'm fit, occur for my own grandchildren. So that was a nine hour it wasn't all done at the same time, but nine hours of assessment of asking those questions about our family networks, how we make decisions, how we deal with conflict in the house.

What support networks we have, all our background, our finances it, it was just, it was so intrusive and pretty judgmental. I had to pull them up a few times and say, well, hang on a minute. You can't ask us questions like that. I don't care what you're doing. You know, wind your neck in.

And, and they did. And I had to say to two of the social workers one day, I said, I actually feel sorry for you now because I know that you're strapped for resources and that you've got high caseloads. And I do understand the sets you're looking in. We also gotta deal with me. You can't bulldoze any bullshit past me.

I'm not having it, you know, you're not treating us like this. And so, you know, they were on eggshells for a bit, but they kind of got used to me and, and we built up a really great trusting, like, working relationship. 'cause I was, you know, I'm honest, as the day is long, I've never been any different.

So they knew that they were going to get, you know, what they saw, I suppose, really. And three weeks turned into 26 weeks, and then Covid landed in the middle of that. So 26 weeks turned into 74 weeks and the courts weren't sitting, and meetings were delayed and contact was done through the window. You know, the social worker couldn't come in the house.

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And there was all that faf to deal with. But I felt like we'd already been locked down as a family. We were kinda locked down before lockdown. It was, it was a bizarre situation. So. April 21 was the final court hearing. My daughter was still staying with the partner, still defending her. And anyway, they didn't engage with the social care teams all the way through.

They had chance, after chance, after chance. They just didn't do it. And it was proven in court that the injuries were caused by an adult and that he, his only contact with an adult on that day was with her. This, you know, my daughter's female partner. And that was all noted in court and everything in a finding of fact hearing.

And even that wasn't enough for my daughter to kind of say I'm out. And so we had to just find a different way of being a family. One of the hardest things apart from being under scrutiny with social services and the fact that I'm like a social co professional myself, was having to deal with my daughter who basically cut me off.

Stopped referring to me as mom. That kind of crept her. I'm not sure when that happened, but that happened. That was heartbreaking. Started to refer to me as Maura in meetings and then just cut us off. And it's like grieving for somebody that's died, a relationship that's died, but we're still sat in your living room 'cause you've got to facilitate the contact visits 'cause it's the best thing for the children.

It was just heartbreaking. Now she's not with that partner anymore, but it took three years for her to kind of get the strength to leave. And it was a very coercive relationship. But I have never been able to compute the decision making behind partner/children. It, to me, there is no decision to be made, but.

She didn't make it; she didn't make the right decision. She knows she didn't make the right choices and she deeply regrets it. So we're in a position now where she has regular contact. I mean, she came for tea on Wednesday night. That's, that's a new thing. So that's, that's quite nice. She's took the children away overnight.

They've had little normal visits to different places. And it, you know, it's going well. Everything's settled, everything's calm. We've got a routine going. The kids understand what's what. Louie asked me a question the other week 'cause he's never really asked why he doesn't live with his mum. He's never questioned it.

And he said to me only about a month ago, actually did I come out of your belly or mum's belly? And I said, mum's belly. And he went, oh right. Well why do I live in mum's house then? And I said, well, your mum had a friend, like when you were a baby. I said, and you just were really not very nice. I said, they were quite a dangerous person.

I said, so. We just decided it was safer for you to live here. I said, but she's not friends with them anymore. But you were settled in up, so we, we carried it on. He just went, okay. And that trotted off, you know, playing swing ball or whatever he was doing. Just very upsetting, you know, doesn't get it. Ruby, on the other hand, still struggles, still struggles because she's never really had an explanation from her mom about why she had to move.

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She just kept saying, why, why? I don't understand why Louie has to live with you, but why do I have to, why can I not stay with mom? Because if they do anything to me, then I can tell you. But Louie couldn't tell you. 'cause obviously social services explained to, to her directly about, having to be kept safe and that mom would demonstrate she couldn't do that at that time and stuff like that.

So I mean, she absolutely gets it now and she knows that she's safer with us and that things are more stable. You know, my daughter still struggles with mental health, but like on a small scale, she's got things in hand. She's working, she's got herself a lovely dog who's absolutely done the world of good for her.

And she's building her life back up and she's doing well and she's had a couple of relationships that she's ended because they have not treated her well or the red flags have been there. And I thought, you know what? You, you are learning. And it's really great to see that. And she's been open about what's going on and stuff, so.

It's just where we are now. So Ruby's obviously at secondary school, she's just starting her better options for next year for GCSEs. She gives me a lot of shit about being a comedian. Tells me constantly that I'm not funny. She said, I've heard you practicing and talking about ex-husbands and swearing is just not funny.

And I said, yeah, it is. I said to her, okay then if it's not funny, how am I selling out venues? How am I selling out a theater with 300 people in like, on my own? And she said, they feel sorry for you 'cause you work for a charity. I said, right, piss off. Yeah. So yeah, we have a bit of a love hate conversation.

She is only joking, but she loves having a dig, especially when her mates are in the house. But yeah, life is pretty good actually. But that whole journey and oh my God, the scrutiny with, with social services, I had an experience once where they rang me up and said you're gonna have to facilitate contact.

There's no staff in the contact centers because of Covid and blah, blah, blah. And I said, well, my daughter isn't socially isolated. She was at a party two days ago. She put it on Facebook, it's public. I don't really want her to come in the house. I'll meet her outside, we'll meet her on the park or whatever, blah, blah, blah.

And they said, no needs to be inside. You know, weather's not great. Like I said, you cannot force someone to bring someone into their home. When Boris is telling us, you know, don't do this you're gonna kill people's grandmas and all that. 'cause this was in the time where we were getting that really like frightening propaganda and everything.

'cause people didn't know what was going on really. They were making it all up as they went along. And so I just, you know, I ended up really standing my ground. And, and there were, there was a woman yelling at me saying, you know, you're making this really difficult. And I said, I'm not making it difficult.

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I haven't invented Covid. You know, she was welcome in the house, but she is not socially isolated. She was at a party, a house party. There are photographs online, I've screenshotted it, I've sent it to you. I don't want her to come in if we get covid, we are both key workers and the kids, you know, are still going to school.

'cause they were key workers, children, and all that. I said, where, where are we then? You know, I'm not doing it and you can't force us to do this in our own home. And they were like, well, we're gonna have to look at foster care placements. We're like, no, you're not. You're not gonna pay three grand a week and foster care placements because I've said no to one contact

visit, grow up. But you know, it's hard to push back when you're dealing with, you know, proper authority. Authority who've got real, who've got all the control and all the power around what happens to the children. You know, and I thought, everything I say is being written up. I don't wanna look difficult or not that I want to engage or anything.

Like, it wasn't about that. I just thought, hang on, everything's on me. If I'm ill, what happens to them? And this was still around the time where they were saying, you know, people were dying. Well, people were dying. That wasn't made up. But I just thought, no way am I bringing somebody in who's not socially isolated.

I don't care who it is. No one argument, but three days, three days of conversation, they tried to bully me into doing it. And the last conversation, I ended up putting the phone down and saying, you make me ill. I mean, I don't know how else to, I'm trying not to be dramatic and or overly dramatic, but honestly, I was as near to a nervous breakdown that summer as I've ever been in my life.

And I just said, you, you can't do this. And I pushed back. I said, no. The day and time of the contact visit passed, it never got mentioned again. And I thought, oh my God, you could have bulldozed me into doing something that was really risky. And you, you're not, you're not even bothered that I've said No.

There's been no consequences to it whatsoever.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: As a professional, you would've pushed back a lot for the young people that you work with. You know, you've, you've, like you say, you've probably done every role or, or, or certainly works with every role in, in social care. these are your grandkids, but also, it's not just your grandkids.

And can I just say thank you for sharing that story with us, because that's not, you know, that's not an easy story to tell for mom at all. Let alone grandmom. But what I wanted to kind of, what I was thinking is, you know, you've done that, but this is your grandkids that you are fighting for. But actually it's not, not, obviously it's not against your daughter, but your daughter is on the other side of that as well, you know, so, and I think I'm listening to your story, I'm thinking, thank God you've got want of a better word, the balls to push back. Because how do people who haven't, got the professionalism, haven't got the, had that working relationship or what that looks like before with social care or what's expected, at least you had an insight and look

how hard it was for you. Like how do you, how do you think those families who haven't got that kind of insight, how do they manage.

Maura Jackson: I think the reality is that they probably get bulldozed over and they will agree to do things that possibly make them feel compromised or, or ill you know, which is a worst-case scenario because they feel like they can't say no, they're not allowed to say no, or they're gonna be really badly judged for saying no as, as standing up for themselves.

But I found myself one day in one of the meetings that we, we were required to attend with social services, and my daughter was present and my daughter had said to me privately, you are well in with social services. Just tell them that I'll be fine.

I, I didn't do these injuries. I love the children. Just tell them and they'll give them me back. And I, I said, well, you explain to her that our relationship professionally, like, doesn't do that. That there's no way I've got that level of influence because the courts are involved. There's a process, there's a, you know, cafcass and the guardian ad litem and all the rest of it, you know, this is all way bigger than me or Backup, you know, and it's nothing to do with work.

I had had to come into work and declare a conflict officially on record to the board of trustees and say, I am now being assessed as a foster carer, a kinship foster carer, to look after my own grandchildren who have, you know, I've had lots of time with I mean, one of the laughable things was, part of the assessment actually was an eight-page risk assessment on the dog.

We've got a dog, right? We've got a Shitzu. And because we had animals in the house, we had to do this risk assessment, and I said, seriously, what the fuck are you going to do if the dog doesn't pass his risk assessments? You are gonna pay three grand each for the kids to go into foster. But I, I'll show you the dog.

Look at him, look at this vicious dog. He's asleep on my desk,

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Brilliant. Oh.

Maura Jackson: honest to God. And so we to fill in this risk assessment and, I, I just thought it's laughable. This, you know, some of it is absolutely laughable. We had to get references from people about our parenting ability so that we had to provide references.

My husband has no children so this was a complete fuss for him. And it was like, weren't we gonna get a reference that says people have seen him parenting and I have people who've known me like all their life and stuff, and that was fine. You couldn't have family. And so they asked me, could my ex-husband do a reference because I was part of parenting his daughter.

I said, absolutely not. What you're gonna declare what's going on to somebody I haven't spoken to for 15 years? What was the GDPR there? Are you mental? So there's all this stuff where you kind of pick holes in it and think, well, I've got a minute if I am not have said no to that. Well, they had gone and phoned him and said, oh, we're investigating, blah, blah.

Can you tell us what kind of parent she is? Now he would've said I were good parents. I mean, he's, he's not an idiot. And he's not vindictive. But I just thought, I bet there are relationships that have brought down where that would've been a risk where somebody would've thought,

oh, I'm would've just, you know, stick the knife in here and say, you're all right, bitch, or whatever.

And I, I just thought, but even the confidentiality aspects of it, I don't want him knowing all my bloody business and what's going on with my daughter. So there were loads of things where I just thought, o no way. So I did actually put two formal complaints in, in that sort of 74-week window about how they were dealing with the, the situation and where they were breaching their own procedures.

'cause I said to him, you are the gift that keeps on giving here. You're breaching your own procedures and open that Nobody notices. Well, I, I, I'm noticing, and we, we had a meeting, we had an official meeting in response to one of the complaints, and I said to the two managers that I met with, you know, again, I'm totally.

You know, in admiration for the job that you do. I wouldn't do it for a gold pig. But you know, notwithstanding I'm not putting up with this bullshit. And also, I feel quite sorry for you because you have to deal with me and I will not let it go. You know, you will answer for what you've done. And I did say something in that meeting.

It was minuted, if children's services, partly commission backup where I work, where I'm the chief exempt. So I've bid for a contract with them and they're partly commissioners and I said to them, if I rang Backup in the way that you deliver your services, you would decommission me. You would decommission us and take that contract away, but your practices are repolling.

And I'm only one person and I've only been exposed to a couple of people in your teams and it's a shambles. And, and it's such a shame because the individuals within it, you know, we have two social workers that I dealt with in particular were absolutely fantastic, lovely people and really good at the job and really went all out to try and help us.

And then a couple of others, they weren't horrible. They just rushing. You know, you can see they're not interested. They don't really care. Have we seen 'em? Are the children alive? You know, stuck their head in the window. Yeah, tick, I'm done. Now I'm off and thought, bloody the hell. I've took half a day off work for this.

And, and on that note, right at the beginning when it sorts of first happened, the other thing that was really very difficult to where, I felt I was being bulldozed quite a lot, was because Louie had got actual injuries. He had to go and, you know, be seen by a medical professional. We had to have some x-rays and this, that and the other.

And they rang me one day and I was in the hairdressers, it was a Christmas do lunch on the, so I was in the hairdresser in the morning, he was at nursery and he said, Louie's got an appointment today for a full body x-ray at three o'clock or two o'clock. And I said, I can't do it today. It's a Christmas lunch at work I'm hosting it.

You know, you know, I'm chief exec, blah, blah, blah. Right. Well, okay, we'll send, we'll send somebody up to pick him up from nursery. I said, what a stranger. And they said, yeah, but you

know, I said, you can't do that. How long does a full body X-ray take? They said About three hours. And I said, absolutely not

are you sending a stranger to pick him up from nursery? Take him to the hospital where he was last week in a really stressful environment where his mum was freaking out. I said, absolutely not. Well then, you'll have to do it. And I said, can you not get me an appointment tomorrow? Or, you know, any other day?

No, it's today at two o'clock. So I just had to ring work and say, I'm really sorry. Somebody else will have to host a lunch. You know, it'll be, and it was fine, but I just felt really bad. I'd let people down. And there's just no, and I, I, I said to her, you know, I work full time I've got commitments and responsibilities and what have you.

So after that day, then I spoke to the board of trustees again. 'cause I told 'em what had gone on. And I had a month off because the appointments, there were no notice whatsoever. And it was pediatrician, you know, x-rays, they had to be seen obviously by social services. We had to have family meetings.

And then the assessment started. So they were all in December. So this was, the incident happened on the 28th of November. It was Louie's second birthday on the 4th of December. I didn't take any photos 'cause he still had two black eyes and I thought, I'm not taking any pictures of him today. He looks a mess.

And then. The whole of December then I was off work while I started out all the practicalities and the logistics of what they needed. And I went back to work in the January. So, you know, I don't know how other people cope quite frankly because, you know, I was in a fortunate position that I had the absolute backing of the company that I worked for.

The board were totally taken as much. I mean, they were quite happy for me to stay off longer but I was going nuts. And to be honest, all the kind of appointments had been pretty much dealt with by then. But yeah, December was really difficult. Both of their birthdays are in December. Ruby's is, is just before Christmas.

So. It was very hard to fit all those appointments in, try and let them have great birth days, you know, be a normal person and not absolutely go mad. It's really, it was a horrible, horrible time, but thank God, you know, I've got good people around me. And things settled down afterwards and, you know, five years later it, it's totally fine.

It's fine.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: So you, am I right in thinking you have, is it kinship guardianship for the special guardianship, don't you, for the kids? And that must have been to get that over the line. You know, just a few of the things there where you, you a. You're not being bullied, but that must take some mental toll, which I'm gonna kind of, I want to return to, but also, you know, the procedure, you know that they're going against GDPR or know, it's not, but I just like everything that I'm listening to Maura, I'm like, oh my God, this is so unfair.

This is their grandma, nana, whatever the kids call you and you've got their best interests at heart. You've taken them at the drop of a hat. And actually, I think, how is it that we scrutinize and I, my mic was off so I wasn't, I was really laughing and if you're watching this, you'll see me laughing. But eight pages for a dog, for the dog.

Do you know what I mean? And I'm not being funny if it was like a massive, vicious dog that that was already growling as the social workers come in the door, fair play, but it isn't. You know, but how do we. You know, we are not holding up people parents to this scrutiny. And yet those who step in those, you know, and not just like yourself, who are, you know, kin, but those who are foster carers.

I mean, I understand the scrutiny, but my goodness, like, can't you just give us a break? Can't I do that appointment tomorrow? You know, it's just so difficult. And we both said before we started this, it's, you know, there's lots of lovely people there who are up against a huge amount of pressure. There are some people who care about what they do, care about the people that they are, and some people who, you know, are just getting on with the job.

And they're not, they're not connecting with those families. They're not you know, reaching out and finding out what they can do to support. But it is the system, isn't it? It's the system that's broken. Surely. Maura, how did you get it over the line so that you have got that guardianship now?

Maura Jackson: One of the challenges of the whole situation was throughout that like two-and-a-half-year window right up, the special guardianship was appointed to us in April, 2021. But right up to the previous sort of October, November, there was still language and narrative around, you know, from the social workers saying she's, she's coming along.

There might be a chance that the children get to go back, but it would be a very slow, incremental process, you know, to facilitate that. And I thought, well, they've been with us two years. So Okay. You know I mean it was out of our hands at that time and I never ever said you know, absolutely they cannot go back.

I think we were always hoping that she would somehow very quickly say, oh my God, what a nightmare. Need to bend that partner off and I want the children back, and what do I need to do? So in the October there was, there were, we had a meeting and they were saying, actually, she's turned a corner. The relationships ended.

She's done this, that, and the other. And you know, we are going to have a look at it and, and see whether it's feasible. So me and my husband were like, bloody hell, this might actually end up, you know, revisiting it some point slowly, but, you know, God, like, who, who thought that sort of thing. I think we resigned as some to the fact that we were gonna be keeping them.

But they asked us, you know, would you be willing to have 'em permanently, if that was the recommendation Of course, of, of course. So this went on till about the January and then in the January, we were told, actually, no, that is not the case. We are going to be recommending that you two are given special guardianship.

No explanation. Now, the other thing that I've not mentioned up to now that is particularly difficult for kinship foster carers is that you are not party to court proceedings. Grandparents particularly are not allowed in court. So you are doing all the work, you are taking all the impact of looking after a child or children, yet your only involvement in the court process is fed to you from a social worker who may or may not remember to ring you and pass on what's gone on and what decisions have been made the same day, the next day, a week later.

So that is incredibly difficult and we were always kept on the outside because you're not part to proceedings. So the information around our assessments and all the meetings that we'd had and any conversations are all fed back in reports to the judge to obviously make decisions about the children.

But both the children's fathers are privy to that information about us, but we're not allowed in. So, now Ruby's dad, great guy, really nice man, still around, very supportive. Doesn't live locally but manages it really well. They have a really good relationship. He's really good with us. And vice versa, everything's good.

He has had to give consent for Ruby to live with us, but he wanted, and he has also agreed that should anything happen to me, he will take both children, you know, he's a nice man. He's getting married next year. We're going to his, his wedding. So it, it is fantastic. He's a lovely person. Louie's dad, completing utter wanker in and outta prison.

Absolute fucking pill. I mean, he's a knob of the highest order. Ugh, fucking he's a dick. And so it just burned me thinking he's getting options around and he, he will by law have to be sort of asked, do you want to apply for parental responsibility? Do you want this? He was given our address. I just think this is wrong.

You know, it's wrong that this gob shot who I don't want any contact with and who is not permitted to see the other two children he has with another woman. He's not allowed. He's such a tit. And no, he, he can't have any contact with Louis either. That's been prohibited. But I push for that. You know, the system is, is

shot at it isn't fit for purpose. So people like us in that position of kinship, foster care, and are excluded. And it's only because I would ring literally the same day and say, what, what, what happened? What's, what's next? What's next? You know, what was the outcome? Even if it was like, well, it's been adjourned, or they're doing some more reports, or there's, you know, they're waiting for whatever.

It was like, right, well, you know, and then sometimes they'd ring and give me a piece of information like, when were you gonna tell us, you know, this actually matters to what we're doing. This is, we are the ones that are taking all the impact and all the brunt of what's going on. And then also having to find a way to communicate that to Ruby and sort of let her know what was happening in, in an appropriate way and make sure that.

They were both still okay and everything as well as just practical life. And both keeping done a full-time job and fucking covid. It honestly, it was mental. It was the most mental I, if I ever

questioned. Not that I have, that I was not resilient. That, you know, I would say now my resilience is overflowing.

'cause whatever I get thrown at now at work or whatever, I mean, works stressful. And I deal with like life and death situations, frequently, really difficult situations, really challenging. And I just think everything can be, I can handle anything. I can deal with anything me. And I always have been able to do professionally, but this was different because it was so personal.

And so when, when it got to the stage where they were saying, right, we are gonna make that recommendation. Well the attitude of social services towards us totally changed. We became the saviors. We became best mates. All, they couldn't do enough for us. They were throwing money at us. What can we do?

What do you need? Do you need new furniture? Do you need No, we're all sorted now. Thank you. You know, and it just, yeah. But they right at the end, then at the end of the process when it was agreed, this then a conversation to be had where you agree a financial package for you to continue to be a special guardian like a foster coverings type thing to contribute to living costs and stuff like that.

And so they came back to me and said, Would you want one or are you just gonna pay for it all? Or yes, I want a financial package. Don't take the piss. And then I had consulted with a solicitor. I'd had a, I paid 300 quid of his consultation who were superb and explained what we could and couldn't ask for and what certain levels they were and how long that could last for and stuff like that.

And when they came to me and made an offer and they said, oh, we're not gonna pay nursery fees anymore. We're not gonna pay this. 'cause they'd paid that through throughout the time that they were on the care order. So I said, yeah, you are. Yeah, you are paying us your fees until he's four. Even if he wasn't in a, in a kinship place, he'd get 33 hours.

So yeah, you are. And so I went back and I just said, I've, I've seen a solicitor and actually you've got to pay for that. You've got to pay for me to get legal advice. You know, this, I'm allowed, I'm entitled to independent advice. And they haven't mentioned it. And I thought, don't, don't start. We're nearly at the end of this.

Don't push your luck. And it just sort of went on and I went back and anyway, then they offered an amount of money and I just thought, this is less, this is less than what we're getting before. You know, you can't, you can't do that. So I just went back, put an appeal in, was pretty forthright. You know, I can put together a mean.

Document me. I know what I'm doing. I'd got all the legal facts correct and then I went back and I got the financial package that I asked for. So I just thought, fuck off, you know, fuck off.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Do you know what Maura, I was just thinking about then when you were saying it first, you know. Louis's dad having access to information about you and you not having it, and you actually have the kids, you know, stuff like that. That's so unfair when we say not fit for purpose. It's a broken system, isn't it? It's completely broken. But also as well, I think

it's very easy to be. Oh, well you are grandma, so why would you not just have the kids? Why do you need the money? You are their grandma. Hold on a minute. This is too professional. This is a professional couple who've done, you know, you've done your parent tidbit and, and they've left the house and you are getting on with your own life.

And looking, my guess is looking, you know, the money that's coming in the pot is for holidays and retirement and all that, and then all of a sudden, you've got two very expensive, 'cause we know how expensive kids are. You know, and yes. Does that mean that you don't love them? Of course not. I, you, you talk about the drop of the hat.

They asked you, do you want, you know, if it came down to it, would you take them permanently? And bearing in mind, your husband hasn't had kids, you know, so he just thought, my guess is, and obviously I've never met Mr. Jackson, but. my guess is that he was like more than happy to have the grandkids round at a weekend and stuff.

But actually this is, it's a very full time and especially when they're quite small, you now have got Ruby who is a teen, you know, with all what that brings. And actually, I think sometimes people don't realize the, the monetary side and actually what the pressure that can take off you as a couple if they are.

And actually they should be providing it. I, I know a few foster carers and actually they've, you know, their kids call mom and dad. They are here for the long hall, you know, and they often get asked, why do you not adopt? Why are you not just taking these kids in? And they said, because everything stops, everything we have got, we would have like, you know, it's not like if you've planned to have a baby, it's not like if you've planned this, this is often dropped in and actually. The, the finance just take a bit of pressure off, don't they, you know, take a bit of pressure off. Before we finish, I want to I wanted to ask you about how did you get through this? Because I, what I know of you, you are a real strong woman and we know that you don't take any crap that you will push back. But as we've already said, you know, you're probably in a part of, kind of a, an episode of your life where you thought everything was settled and you were just, you know, you were cracking on with a career. You've got a lovely husband, you know, all that, and then this happens. How did you get through it mentally, having to fight and constantly fight?

How did you get through it mentally? I.

Maura Jackson: Well, there was sort of three stages really. So initially I was just going day to day. I don't think I was getting through it. I think I was just focused on the logistics of life and what I needed to do at work, at home, just to make sure that all responsibilities were met. Now, they moved in in the November right at the end, and then by the following August it was fever pitch time.

This was the time where we're arguing about contact and covid and all the rest of it. And in that August the lockdowns were just lifted and my sister, who lives in Essex, came up for the first visit that she could have done, like since the initial lockdown in March. And she came up and she just looked at me and said,

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What, what, you know, what is happening? I said, what? And she said, well, obviously I know what's going on. And, you know, she knew the whole picture and everything, but she, she just took one look at me and said, have you seen a doctor? And I said, no. Why would you know? And she said, I don't think you look well.

And I thought, why? And I thought, well, I, I'm a bit knackered or what, you know, that type of thing. But I looked, when I remember back to that time she arrived, I'd not had a shower for three days, which that never happens. I looked like dog shit. And I was trying to make breakfast. 'cause she'd arrived early in the morning.

And she was talking to me, mom, my mum was upset. And I just thought, can't I can't be, I, I don't wanna talk. So I just sat there in silence and shut it. You need to see somebody. And then. She said, I'll come with you to see the doctor. I said, what for? What's the doctor gonna do? I said, well, I don't know, but like, get antidepressants or something.

I said, I'm not going antidepressants. Like I, they'll take the fucking children off me. I'm not doing that. So on the Monday she was picking me, I'd like, 'cause she's gone back then and, and then she's, you know, ring the doctor. Ring the doctor, so I'm not ringing the doctor. And on the Monday, I think I was just a bit, well I were a bit frazzled.

I, I were really frazzled and I went into the dining room and looked at the wallpaper on the dining room wall and thought I fucking hate that wallpaper. I've always hated it. So I started chipping it off, but I didn't have anything to take it off with. 'cause of course I not thought this through. Then I was getting bits of paper and plaster all of my clothes.

So I just took all my clothes off and used a butter knife to pull off the wallpaper. And then while I was doing that. The phone rang and it was the doctor, and I burst into tears and the doctor said, what you doing? I said, I'm just trying to scrape all the wallpaper off the wall. I'm naked and I'm using a butter knife.

The doctor said, can you please put the knife down and sit down? I need to talk to you. Your sisters rang. So like, okay. So I talked to the doctor and then I went in about an hour later, the doctor was only in the corner. And I got antidepressants and I also then they were talking about counselor but the waiting list for like, you know, five months or whatever.

So I just rang up and, and arranged to see a counselor that I knew through work. And I started counselling that same week. So in terms of the question, you know how did you cope mentally, I won't coping. That was not coping. I cried all the time, cried every day. I hadn't realized that had become a thing until I started talking to the councilor

I thought I've cried every day for about four months. Yeah, that was a really, that was just the worst time in my life and I've dealt with worse shit than this, let me tell you. But that was the impact was awful. So then when I started to look after myself, the antidepressants really helped. I took them for about a year and a half.

The other thing that I didn't do well in terms of not looking after myself and lockdown all the rest of it, so I put five stone on. So over a two-year period, I put five stone on. So that was really

not good. That had a damaging impact on me mental health and health in general. That wasn't good.

So I was just eating away through the problem. But then when I kind of, you know, things started to settle, or at least we knew that this was the new normal or, you know, whatever terminology we're using it was then about right. I'm going back to the things that I know. Work for me. So reflexology, spending time with friends, but we were in the middle of lockdown, so you can't be around people.

So I had to sort of put things in place where I was Face Timing people. I joined a couple of groups on Facebook. So they were like quizzes and stuff like that. And then I started to practice the standup comedy because somebody had asked me about doing it and I'd said, absolutely not. No, that's, no, not for me.

The thought of it, see, when I speak I, I'm quite funny, you know, people laugh and that's lovely. But then when somebody was asking me to perhaps try standup comedy, I thought, actually there's a difference between being funny. And that being a lovely byproduct. But then to say to people, I am funny and I'm gonna guarantee that I'm gonna make you laugh and I'm gonna charge you money for the privilege.

And I thought, Hmm, that's a step I'm not prepared to take. That's too much pressure. But I saw an advert on Facebook for a competition. For people that were brand new to comedy, never tried it before to give it a go, and it was a little competition with a five-minute set and I thought. Alright, then I'll do it.

But I, were absolutely wired because I've been taking loads of medication because I actually had covid when I saw this advert, I was in bed poorly. So three days later when I kind of come round and felt better and I got an email off this bloke saying, right, you're on the list, it's, it's in four weeks' time.

I thought, oh no, not a chance. So I rang him up. I said, listen, love, I've made a mistake. I went up to my eyeballs on Coco Ol, I'm, there's no, no, no, no. So we had a chat on the phone and he was sort of asking, well, what made you click it in the first place? There must have been something, there must be some basis to it.

So I told him, you know, I have hosted events for the charity and, you know, blah blah, and, and, and done that for a long time, public speaking. Anyway, he then said the thing that I just thought you twat, you've just emotionally blackmailed me into saying yes, which was there are no other women on this lineup.

You would be making a mark for women in comedy. Women are always underrepresented. And I just thought, oh, fucking hell. I would have to say yes. So I said yes. And that's what I did. So I did the competition. Four weeks later I'd been pacing up in my bedroom, practicing my set for four weeks. It was really terrible.

But I won, I won the competition and it was only little, there was travelers in the competition, but 40 people in the audience. It was really lovely in a really nice bar in Bolton. And I was just

absolutely buzzing. And what I had a taste of then that I've built on and I love, is total escapism from everything, from the children, from work, from me, everything.

Because when you're writing and crafting your material to be on stage and you're practicing and you're rehearsing, and then when you're actually delivering it, you can't really think about anything else. You've got to concentrate. And then I got such it beyond that escapism was the joy, and it made me realize that I have not felt joy for such a long time, like none.

And somebody asked me it was actually on a webinar, and they said, was the joy in your life? And I thought, what makes you laugh? And honestly, I couldn't answer. I didn't have an answer and I thought, this is, oh my God, the option to ask me. I don't know what I'm gonna say. And I thought, this is awful.

I've got two grandchildren that I adore, and I couldn't even pick them because I thought everything around it is so stressful at the moment. I couldn't even find a joy in that situation. That's about two years because I resented the life that I was living. I resented that I didn't have that life that you described before where I was thinking, oh, I've got a holiday booked and I'm, you know, I'm out on the lash this weekend and I'm weekend away with the dogs, the weekend after and all that.

That had just all gone. So really, I didn't resent them. I resented living a life that I had not chosen, that I did not want actually. And that it, it might be two or three years and, and then all of a sudden one day I just thought, that feelings not there anymore. That resentment's gone now, but it took fucking ages.

That, and the comedy absolutely helped with that. And now. I'm actually earning money. I'm declaring tax. You know, it's, it's all legal and everything, but it's Ruby calls it the funny money. So she likes the funny money. She doesn't like the fact that I'm funny, but she likes the funny money 'cause it's paying for our holidays.

But yeah, so that's how I've got through it really. And I, you know, there is that driver and that motivation around the children aren't going back to that situation. 'cause I know that, that Muppet's still living in that house. So that ain't happening, not on my watch. So you know, that's a driver because you just think, I don't care how shit I feel or how suffocated I feel or whatever, with the circumstances it's all has to be about them.

And so that, you know, does keep you focused a lot. So that kept me going until it, the balance tipped into, you know, my self-care was kicking in. I was back to sort of a more normal, like, rational human being because in the middle of all this, Ashley, the fucking menopause arrived. And honest to God, when you just think, oh my God, are you fucking joking?

I've now got bloody dried everything. Everything's dried up and dropped off. You know, hot sweats, night sweats, hot flushes, migraines. Oh, I thought, but there was a period of time where I thought it was stress. So some of those symptoms I associated to the situation just want it, stress, it'll pass.

And then it was only when the antidepressants kicked in and it was like, actually no, this is, this is different. So yeah, perimenopause was on its way.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yeah. And that's not, that's never a welcome friend, is it? Do you know what I mean? Never. My, do you know what? I could sit and listen to you all day and it's been really lovely because I've known your kind of professionally and I've known you as a, as somebody sat absolutely laughing, crying at one of your standup routines and stuff.

And it's I, I please take this in the right way. It's heartwarming to know that we all struggle because I think sometimes when people see us, you know, and they see as like whether we we're talking on stage or in a professional capacity, they think, God, she's got her crap together. And actually we haven't always, yes, we have for you in this moment because we can do that.

But actually there is, behind the scenes, there is stuff still going on. I remember being at, an event, and it was my event. I was hosting it and I had somebody come up to my daughter and you know, typical teen, and this, this person said do you ever struggle with anxiety and everything in me? Now, if I'd have overheard that, it'd probably been a bit of a different matter, because I'm a very, I'm very chill, but like you, I can, don't push me because I will push back with twice as much force. And I actually remember thinking, how dare you, how dare you look at her because her mom is a psychotherapist and she, you know, treats all these kids. How dare you ask that of her. I remember being really, really cross. And then afterwards I kind of calmed down a little bit and came back off my, you know stool and thought actually. That's because the perception is that we have all our shit together. And actually we haven't always, but you know what?

We'll get through it. We'll, we always do. We always will. It'll be hard. I, I can't say that I've been naked trying to strip the wall with the butter knife. Right. And I was trying to not laugh because Maura, you say it in such a funny way, but actually for you to get that, to get to that point where your kind of even can't think about what you're doing, you're just doing it.

You're just going through the motions of I don't like that wallpaper. I'm gonna sort it right now and I don't want to get my closed it. I am gonna be stood naked. And thank God the doctor rang when he did. Do you know what I mean? My dad had a couple of nervous breakdowns and actually that's why I do the job I do today. so I know how hard that was. But equally, you say it with such fun and we can laugh because you are through it now. But that kind of leads me onto my, last question. Everything that you've been through in your life, which is huge, and we've only had a snapshot today, and you, you know, you are a powerhouse. And if, if you ever hear Maura on the stage, whether she's doing comedy or, or whether she's doing a keynote or she's coming, doing training in your company, she's a powerhouse without a doubt, right?

But everything that you've been through, what advice would you give your younger self?

Maura Jackson: That is the million-dollar question into what advice would you give your younger self? And I think the advice, there's probably two things that stand out for me in life. One is trust your gut instinct all the time. I think I would've benefited from knowing. What the

gut instinct really meant, and that it isn't just like feminine intuition or whatever, you know, it's a real physiological response to danger and risk.

And it's real. So I don't know any situation that I haven't sort of felt uneasy or where you get that this doesn't sit right, you know, that has not then proved to be exactly what I thought it was. And I'm pretty good at that if I've, I've got a sense about it. I just think, nah, I ain't doing it. I've always been confident enough to sort of, you know, nip that in the bud.

So trust your gut instincts because it's right. And it's there to protect you. And even if it makes you look unpopular you really need to listen to your gut instincts. Is, is the first thing. The second thing is, is that, and you sort of alluded to this just then, and that is everything passes.

Everything passes good, bad, and ugly. So whatever rut you might be stuck in or any kind of negativity of, of any description, like emotionally, practically, whatever, it will pass. You just have to give it time and, and, and work your way outta it and find the resources, whether that's advice, support, you know, time, what whatever it is to assist it.

You know, you have to be proactive, but everything will pass. There is, you know, a light at the end of every tunnel and it seems a bit cheesy to, but it really is true. And I try and say this now to Ruby, you know, if you're feeling miserable or fell out with one of your mates or whatever. 'cause these are the things that cause, you know, all the most drama it, it'll pass, it always does.

You just need to keep looking forward, keep looking forward. Only look back to see how far you've come and how well you've done. Don't bother with anything else. It's just not worth your time. And just some of the stuff that I do in the leadership training when I do the invisible leadership stuff is, is a bit about that.

You know, I've, I've got a whole thing about red flags in leadership that, that help. And one of them is about guilt. And I don't do guilt. I do not do guilt. I just think it's the most useless emotion unless you're a sociopath or a fucking serial killer. It really isn't serving any purpose. I think that it is just, you know, if you've done something and you regret it or, or you think it were bad or whatever, sort it out.

Sort it out. Either make it right, make amends, or just don't fucking do it. Again, don't be a dick, but don't sit around dwelling and festering in your own guilt because it, it's done. You can't undo it. You can either sort it, fix it, make it right, make up for it, whatever, or learn from it. But there's no part feeling guilty.

All that will do is just chew away at your self-esteem and your self-respect, and you absolutely no bloody use to anybody, then, least of all yourself. So let it go.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: I

Maura Jackson: Let answer, let it go. Let it go. Yeah, let it go.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Thanks as well.

Maura Jackson: Yeah,

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Ashley - The Resilient Kid: love it. Oh, Maura, thank you so much for joining us today. I do really appreciate it. I love, I love how honest you've been and I, I'm really grateful for that because I know there's other people out there that are really struggling at the moment, whether it is because they've got, you know, some around custody, whether it is that they're going through a hard time, you know?

Yeah, and we've had a laugh on the way, and I love that. Thank you so much.

Maura Jackson: that's I will say something. The foster care social worker told me. Told my mom actually. 'cause my mom was very upset throughout this whole situation, very, very upset and said to me, mom, you wouldn't believe how many families are affected by situations like this. You are really not in isolation.

There's nothing to be embarrassed about. And she said, there are so many families hanging on to routines by the fingernails and it's only a tiny thing. Then that makes the wheels come off. And then we become involved. And, you know, you've kept this family together for a long time. You've been supporting your daughter before this and compensated for, for things which we knew we had.

But and that is the thing that I think, you know what that is what I've seen. I knew that through work, 'cause obviously I pick up the broad end of other family breakdowns and conflicts through young people ended up being homeless. But. As I've been open about this story, so many people, like we employ 90 people at Backup, seven of us have got someone else's children living in our house.

That's a high percentage, I think, for a small organization, and I think it is quite common. So people are struggling and that's the ones that are doing it formally who are getting support. You know, what about those that are just doing it informally because they're just no, you know, cousin, auntie, sister, brother, whatever needs help and they can come and stay with me.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Yeah,

Maura Jackson: It's very, very common. Very common.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: and sometimes that might be only on a temporary basis.

I remember a cousin coming to stay with us because, you know, mom just couldn't cope anymore. And whether that was because she didn't have the capacity or, you know, and, and had been a bit of a bugger at the back, to be fair, you know, but he came to us for six months and actually in those six months, he turned his life around and, and he got the support he needed and then he went back home. But, you know, my mom did that at the drop of her hat. she just did that because it wasn't just that her nephew needed it, but so did her sister need it,

Maura Jackson: Yeah. Yeah.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: And I think we, we don't realize how many people are doing that. And that's only, that was for six months out of our lives, you know, not, not the rest of their life.

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So yeah, I think it's really common and we don't realize it. Maura Jackson, thank you so much. Every time I speak to you; I always have like Mrs. Jackson song running through my head. But no, seriously, thank you. I have loved our conversation today and there is so many golden nuggets there that people can take away.

I really, really appreciate it.

Maura Jackson: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

Ashley - The Resilient Kid: Take care. Thank you for listening. You know where to catch us. Check out Maura, the Feather Fixer. We'll put all the links to her socials and stuff underneath if you want her on a stage near you. Whether it's a keynote speaker, a big conference, or whether you want her to come and make your board laugh. Oh, you might want leadership training, however she does all of that. But you can also support Backup in Bolton. Please, please check out all the links underneath and you support.