The Hum Podcast

Episode 18: "I Needed Any Kind Of Indication That There Was Beauty Out There"

[Theme music begins]

[Lia's voice begins to come in over top of music]

Lia: You'll never forget how painful it was, how alone you felt when you were in the shelter, when you thought that your life was over, you thought - it's just so easy to believe that you wouldn't be entitled to the life that other people can live.

[Music increases in volume]

Male voice: You're listening to The Hum.

[Music decreases in volume]

Gilad: Do you wear jewellery that tells your story? Delane Cooper is an incredibly talented studio jeweller and has a fascinating process of creating custom luxury pieces. Her design process includes an interview on why you want a piece created. Research, meditation and dreaming allows her to create a distinct piece of jewellery, and not only do you get a one-of-a-kind piece of art, but a unique story where the design feels authentic to the wear. I met Delane two years ago when she designed my partner's engagement ring and I can't

recommend her enough. Connect with Delane at delane.ca for your story to be told through your next piece of custom jewellery.

[Music fades out]

Simona: We are very excited to have Lia Grimanis here with us today, a motivational speaker, two-time Guinness World Record holder, and founder of Up With Women, a GTA-serving registered charity dedicated to helping recently homeless and at-risk women to build sustainable, prosperous careers and businesses with the aim of permanently exiting poverty. So of course the first thing I'm gonna jump at is, the work that you're doing is phenomenal, but you are not just a one-time Guinness World Record holder, but you are a two-time Guinness World Record holder [Lia laughs], and I think the people really need to know in what category. So number one, you pulled the heaviest vehicle, pulled a hundred feet by a woman, and then again you pulled the heaviest vehicle pulled in high heels, so the question I'm gonna - the burning question I have to ask you …

Gilad: It's burning.

Simona: Burning. What brand of high heels were you using [Lia laughs], because I broke numerous heels just walking to a parking garage, so please let us know.

Lia: So it's kind of funny because the reason why Guinness World Records has a female category is actually because I made a big feminist treatise to them.

Simona: Good.

Lia: I said it's not fair that you have unisex records when it comes to strength, you know, men have testosterone. They're, you know, they can be six foot four and four hundred pounds. They have lots of things against us and so you'll never have women competing in these, unless you actually have a women's category, so that's why they have a women's category. And in fact even the high heeled record, there were high heeled records for sprinting and - oh, you know, relay races, things like that, but they never had a - anyone wanna pull a truck in high heels and so I had to make an argument for that as well. The reason why I did that was more important than the record itself because, you know, I mean I'm always surprised to see who does what in the Guinness World Records, because I mean so many of the records have no message whatsoever, they're just for fifteen minutes of fame and people are dying doing some of these records right. And, you know, thank goodness my skill isn't squirting milk out of my eye or eating a whole bottle of ketchup in three seconds, because I mean, you know, that's really what the Guinness World Records is all about and, you know, but mine at least it sends a message to survivors that we're stronger than we think, and that's really important and, you know, I mean yes it's kind of funny to be pulling a truck in high heels. You know, when I did it on The Today Show, they had me do it uphill on Rockefeller Plaza, and it's kind of funny because, you know, when you fail everybody thinks it's the stupidest idea in the world. When you succeed, they're like oh my god, that's so cool. So when I got it the second time, it was great, but when I failed on The Today Show, it was really interesting because I didn't know that men's right activists existed. Within twenty minutes, first of all, the UK's Daily Mail had this wonderful article because essentially what happened was, it was a whole minute of live excruciating failure in front of six million people and, you know, I'm autistic, sometimes I don't know what comes out of my mouth.

I don't have a real connection with my face, sometimes - and actually that's part of the reason why I can pull trucks and stuff, because I have interesting issues with feeling pain in a different way et cetera. But - but so, you know, there I am, I'm pulling and all of a sudden the word "shit" falls out of my mouth. I didn't think it, it just fell out of mouth, went into the mic and out the speakers, bounced off of the walls of Rockefeller Plaza and into the ears of these poor little Bible Belt children who, you know, drove all this way for a good family show. All of a sudden there was this minor Twitter explosion. Within twenty minutes, the UK's Daily Mail puts out this article, which was really wonderfully written. The body of it was beautiful, they looked up Up With Women, they talked about the previous record, they talked about what we do, but the - of course, the editors being who they are, they want linkbait, and so they put "oops" - cuz as soon as I said shit, I said oops afterwards and that went off the walls as well, it said "oops, Today Show airs the word shit twice as woman tries and fails to pull a fifteen thousand pound truck". So that happened and then Twitter happened and then somebody texted me and said, Lia you need to check Reddit. And I've never been on Reddit, so there were six hundred messages from men's rights activists. Most of them were fat shaming: oh honestly I don't think the truck could have pulled her and, you know, she should just go back into the kitchen and eat cake, or stupid feminist they, you know, they want us to take them seriously but then they do these stupid things. But there was one narrative that was going on that was really like shocking to me. In that, there was this one particular guy who was like just launching into a tirade saying, you know, this is what's wrong with feminists, you know, it's bad enough that they outnumber - that women outnumber men in the universities and men are the only ones doing the dangerous work. This guy was trying to say, you know, she's manipulating the data, cuz on the side of the truck it said "80 percent of adults in homeless families are women, help us pull for homeless women". So they saw that, which is the only thing I wanted people to see. So I was relieved, but

at the same time he said, she's manipulating the data, trying to make it look like women's homelessness is actually a thing. This guy literally said, literally - not literally, I'm gonna paraphrase because the sentence structure was appalling, but he basically said oh yeah, well homeless men are murdered, women are only raped. And it took every ounce of strength for me not engage in that conversation.

Gilad: It's wild, you know, we pulled up a report actually around homelessness, and this is to show that it's real, the numbers tell a grim story. So at least 200 thousand Canadians experience homelessness in any given year, at least 150 thousand Canadians a year use a homeless shelter at some point, at least 30 thousand Canadians are homeless on any given night, and at least 50 thousand Canadians are part of the hidden homeless on any given night. They're staying with friends or relatives or a temporary basis if they have nowhere else to go. We know you've been quite open about your struggles with homelessness in the past. What was your catalyst for your homelessness and did you ever think that you would end up in that position?

Lia: Well, I had a reasonably good life. I mean I grew up in poverty and it was a really challenging time for us, but you know it wasn't a violent household per se, until my grandmother discovered that she had cancer and died within a matter of weeks, and so my father was chronically depressed. He was a functional depressive. I mean he was still showing up to work every day but, you know, a very depressed man and you know oftentimes what happens we can often see, I mean with any gender you can see depression turning into rage, but it often happens particularly with men. And so the grief that my father and my uncle were experiencing became rage and that became violence, and then little things would just set off rage, you know,

a screw missing from a light switch or low water pressure, you know. We lived in this house that was falling apart, you know, it had rotten floors in the kitchen. You had to walk around the edges cuz you didn't want to fall through it because there was a flood there that never got fixed. We already had a really challenging life, you know, he was so depressed at times that he would forget to give me money for food, and I was 13 years old but, you know, again, he was pretty docile until this point and what I didn't realize at the time was that I was, that I'm autistic and so when you're autistic you have social communication disorder, which is essentially you have a hard time reading people's faces, you have a hard time being able to read between the lines. There is no between the lines for me, and so when people try and read between my lines, it's like what are you doing, I don't understand. But the - how that factors in violence is that you don't see the escalation until it hits you oftentimes, and so it's like you don't see the train - it's like a blind spot, you don't see the train coming until it hits you. And so my life for a period of time, while they were you know suffering, was normal, normal, normal - run for your life. You know, it just would switch like that and I would find myself running away from home because the violence would get pretty severe and, you know, trying to sleep on whatever couch I could find, then running back because, you know, the biggest challenge that you have when, especially as a young woman, is oftentimes you find yourself running away from violence, only to wind up in more violence out there and for me, you know, there I was seeking a couch to sleep on and I ended up losing my virginity raped as a result of someone who gave me a place to stay, and that abuse continued for probably about a year and a half, because it still felt like a safer place for me than being home with my dad. So, you know, one of the important things that we really need to recognize when it comes to thinking about homelessness is that when people think of the homeless, they think of the caricature. They don't really see real people. What they see is, you know, every time I go and give a speech, whether I'm talking to 10 year olds or to 60 year

olds, educated people, whatever, you know, I ask them what a homeless person looks like. And of course they're always saying, you know, dirty man, hairy man, shopping cart, talking to themselves, all that stuff. And homelessness doesn't look anything like that, people just look like people, especially women will do whatever they can to not look homeless because you can be a target for predators. But on top of it, it's also important to note that there's no straight line with homelessness either. Oftentimes, it is either, you know, you going to a couch and then you're coming back home, then you going, you know, sleeping in your car and then you're coming back home, you know, it's never just sleeping on the street. In fact, with women, it's rarely sleeping on the street, simply because of the predatory factor right. So I ended up, you know, a good chunk of my homelessness was just desperately trying to find places to stay and then when it got really bad to the point where my uncle actually threatened to kill me, then I ended up in a shelter and, you know, when you're in a shelter, well when you're anywhere, when you're experiencing any kind of homelessness, there's a certain symbolism to shelters because, you know, nobody ever talks about them, nobody thinks about them. And so as soon as you end up there, you sort of feel like you're broken, there must be something wrong with you. And, you know, nobody ever came back to my shelter to say look where I am now, I'm successful, I'm a doctor, I'm a lawyer, I'm an astrophysicist, or I'm a garbage collector. It didn't really matter, nobody ever came back to say I was here too and look where I am now, you can get here. And so for a long period of time, I just - I wanted to kill myself. I didn't think I would live to be past the age of 21 and, you know, for a long period of time, I was just simply asking myself, do I live or do I die? But the day that I decided to live, that was when I made a promise on my shelter bed that I would become that person, you know, because I had to - because of the violence I had to drop out of high school, so I have grade 10 and half grade 11, everything else, still a high school drop out, proudly so. But I wanted to be that person to say look at me, I'm successful, but I

couldn't be a doctor, a lawyer, an astrophysicist cuz I didn't have an education, so the only choice I had was to make money, but I made that decision that I would be some form of quote unquote successful and then I would come back and help other women to rebuild their lives faster than I did, and so that's how I ended up in the technology sector. And once I had reached that goal, I ended up - I ended up quitting everything and building my charity.

Simona: Wow.

Lia: Yeah.

Simona: How - what was it like making the decision to enter a shelter, like did you know how to navigate or how to even find one or get into one?

Lia: Well, it all happened because I called the abuse hotline right, and this was way back in the days, there were actually phone books and at the front of the White Pages - I don't know if you guys have ever seen one of those [Lia laughs].

Simona: Yeah, we're just like - we're 80s babies, so if that was a thing propping up, like our foyer, like our foyer table …

Lia: Something you set fire to.

Simona: Yeah, or like -

Gilad: That was my Google for the first twenty years of life.

Lia: Yeah, so they had the abuse hotline number and I called just because, you know, I thought I was gonna crack. I thought - it wasn't that I needed somebody, you know, I just needed - I needed somebody to tell me that it wasn't my fault, because I was being told regularly that I must have provoked my uncle and dadadada, you know, it must be something I did. So I called the abuse hotline and I just wanted somebody to tell me that I wasn't crazy, that it wasn't my fault, that nobody deserved, you know, to get beaten. And she did a lot more than that, I didn't even know about shelters. That's why I didn't end up in one for a couple of years during my homelessness and she said, you know, you need to get out, you need to get into a shelter, and I was like, what's a shelter. She said just give me a few minutes and I will find you a shelter, and this was in 1990, winter of 1990. It was the beginning of the last major recession before the 2008 one, and it took her a few hours to be able to find a bed for me, because all of the shelters were full. I think somebody had mentioned something about, I don't know, there was some sort of major sports event and whenever there's a major sports event, there tends to be a lot more survivors of violence in these shelters.

Simona: Why?

Lia: The tension of watching sports and if your team loses or you get interrupted while you're watching this critically important game, you know, it can turn into violence, right?

Simona: Wow. You don't - you rarely think about that connection actually, that's a really …

Lia: Yeah, yeah, I was really surprised when they told me that as well. So I ended up in the shelter, cried my eyes out my first night, I was so naive. I thought that's what living on the street was and yeah, I went through that struggle for a long period of time and then finally made that promise and then they got me into affordable housing, I was put into this rooming house. I had, you know, a fully furnished rooming house, with an empty closet and an empty set of drawers and nothing, but I had a bed, I had a bed, and I think they provided the sheets and the covers, so that was wonderful. And that's how I started my life, you know, that's how I started rebuilding but it was a long process. It took me almost ten years to get back to my starting point and that was why the promise was so critically important because, you know, it just seemed so unfair that, you know, here you were, you're running away for your own safety. And when we look at mothers particularly, they're running away not just for their safety, they're running away for their kids' safety, and then they're the ones that end up living in poverty for years and years and years because the barriers are just so significant. So to be able to build my own charity and to be able to help other women to rebuild their lives faster, it's a - you know, I really had no choice, you know, you can't really - once you make a promise like that, you can't do anything else because you'll never forget how painful it was, how alone you felt when you were in the shelter, when you thought that your life was over, you thought - it's just so easy to believe that you wouldn't be entitled to the life that other people can live.

Gilad: It's so interesting, you know, I used to - actually before JAYU, I used to work at a youth shelter and it's funny that you do mention the fact that people who just view homelessness as this stereotype, the shirtless men walking down the street or the grocery cart, but we had, you know, all kinds of youth passing through there. It was a youth shelter, so it was youth between ages of 16 to 24. A lot of youth who were experiencing violence at home. We had a lot of

LGBTQ youth who were coming from households that just didn't accept it and for their own safety, they had to leave. We even had kids who couldn't afford both housing and the cost of tuition, and they chose their education, and they were at the shelter at night and U of T students during the day. And so we had all kinds of youth passing through there and one thing that I thought about when I was there was we as a society might not understand the link also between mental health and homelessness, and I wanted to get your thoughts on that. Does society understand the possible connection there?

Lia: No, no, and I'd be curious as to where you're going with that as far as your own ideas, but here's the thing: this is one of the big things that kind of sticks in my craw because, just like the caricature that we have of the anti-social character who, you know, smells and talks to himself and whatever, people have this misconception that homelessness is because of mental health for the majority of people. The fact of the matter is only about 15 percent of the homeless are homeless due to mental health issues. In fact, if you look at - there's a fifty city study that happens every single year and they ask all of the shelters what is the principal cause of homelessness for their clients. And every single year, the top three causes are unemployment, poverty, and lack of affordable housing. When you put a gender lens to it, violence factors in as well, but mental health doesn't factor in there. What is important for people to recognize, though, is that poverty and homelessness can trigger mental health issues, so I mean - god, 92 percent of our clients have told us that, you know, they've struggled with mental health, I mean how can it not be a surprise? You know, if you're struggling and, you know, you end up in a shelter with your children and your children are crying, they don't understand why they can't go home, how can that not trigger depression, how can that not trigger anxiety? If you're surviving violence, how can you not end up with PTSD? But the impact of poverty alone will trigger mental health

issues, the impact of isolation alone will trigger mental health issues, so this is a human issue. It's not a homelessness issue, it's the fact that someone is in crisis, the natural result of that is mental health.

Simona: I think one of the - you mentioned when you add in the lens of it being gender, it becomes exponentially different, and as a woman who not only is experiencing homelessness, but also dealing with autism, having to figure out how to navigate a system that's not designed for you, what was it like having those kind of two, two things at the same time? Being a female, understanding that, you know, just even on a monthly basis you need certain resources, and then someone with autism, having to try to communicate that you need things or communicate with service provider or even trying to like navigate what couch is safer than another couch or an area or, you know, it's so bad on the streets, it's time to go home again?

Lia: Okay so, you know, and that's a really interesting question because the biggest challenge is simply that there are so many autistic women who haven't been diagnosed, and the problem is that autism has been looked at through a male lens for most of its history and autism presents very differently in females. So I wasn't even diagnosed during this time, I did not know why my world was so confusing and, you know, it had a significant impact. I mean, you know, I attempted suicide at 8 years old because I didn't understand why my world was so tangled, you know, I seemed to, you know, annoy my teacher to no end. The kid - the girls really hated me, I was getting beaten out there every day by several of the boys and I was put into special education because they thought I must be quote unquote, the word of the day, retarded, right. And that was the best thing that ever happened to me, you know, this teacher was so amazing. But then one day, he was walking down the hall with another kid and he didn't even notice me,

because I was out in the hallway, you know, cuz I was getting sent out every day by my teacher because she thought I was so terrible, and when he didn't even notice me, I basically took a belt from the lost and found and wrapped it around my neck and tried to pull it, use a pulley with one of the coat hooks. Obviously, that didn't work, but you know I mean even at 8 years old, the autism really affected me, but I wished that I'd known back then. Back then, there wouldn't have been good services and it probably would have been just as damaging to get services, but when you think about it from the homelessness perspective, I mean there I am fifteen years later, or ten years later and I'm still having incredible challenges and, you know, when you look at the statistics - there's a recent study that came out that said that autism is four times more prevalent among the homeless than it is among the housed, and so it is no surprise. I mean when you think about what I was telling you earlier about the impact of a social communication disorder on violence, when you can't even tell, you become - you know, as a young woman, you're already pretty vulnerable to predators, but when you can't tell that there are some red flags going on, you know, I found myself in men's bedrooms really angry that there aren't any etchings to look at [laughs], you know, not understanding why all of a sudden they would plant something on me, you know, and I'm like what the hell. So you're in danger all over the place because you have these blind spots that are preventing you from being able to protect yourself and you're already vulnerable as it is, so it certainly contributed a lot and I would say that it contributed a significant amount to that question of do I live or do I die, not consciously because, again, I wasn't aware that I was different from others. All I knew was that, you know, one day, I'd have a great time with someone, and the next day they'd be angry at me and I wouldn't understand why, you know, it would be like stepping into a time machine and not knowing what happened between this time and that time. And, you know, I remember when I was still in the shelter, they would kick us out in the morning. Not kick us out, you know, you had to go out. You couldn't stay, you

know, you get a sandwich, you know, you had to go out and do something, and so I would walk along Bloor Street. My shelter was at Madison, Madison and Bloor, so right by - not too far away from here, and I used to walk into the Royal Conservatory of Music, just to walk the hallways and hear the cacophony of people playing music, cuz it was just - I needed any kind of indication that there was beauty out there, but because of this autism, and again not knowing it was autism, but because I felt so disconnected, because the world was so confusing to me and I didn't realize, I didn't know how to connect with people, so I felt a million times more isolated because of that. And I remember one day, I walked down, I don't know if it was Bay station, it was one of those subway stations, and it was still deep in the period of not knowing whether I was going to live or die, and I walked down the stairs and I just sat there watching the crowd, and one of the beautiful gifts of my particular autism is that I have a really special relationship with sound. It's not irritating to me. In fact, it's a very physical feeling for me. I love the kinetics of sound, and so when I'm listening to music, I'll listen to it with my hands in the air because I love feeling the sound bouncing off of my skin, but also I would notice patterns right. I would notice patterns in sound, patterns in visual, patterns everywhere, and there I was staring at these people, feeling completely separated from them, and they were all mostly one on one in their own little microcosm of existence, not at all aware of anyone else around them, or at least mostly unaware of anyone else around them, just basically existing in this tiny microcosm of existence. But what was beautiful about it was if you really listened to the crowd, their voices would move together, you know, it was like watching the murmuration of starlings, there would be an undulation of sound. It would get louder and it would get softer and it would just, you know, it would change tones, and it was just so adorable - you guys know what the murmuration of starlings is right? You've seen the birds, they all seem to be independently flying, yet they all make this beautiful pattern together right. And it was exactly that, and it was just such a

stunning thing to behold. You know, I really don't believe that there is, you know, the stories always say there is a turning point that makes you decide that you're gonna live. I don't believe in that. I believe that it's a collection of things that suddenly, you know, eventually as they build up, you finally decide that life is worth living, but that was one of those moments just, you know, watching them and seeing how they move together, even though they were all total strangers, because for someone who felt completely disconnected and completely confused about how to connect with others, it made me realize that if - even if I never figure out how to connect with people, even if I never figure out how to have friendships, I'll never be alone because we all move together.

Gilad: You know, you started this incredible organization Up With Women, which helps women exit homelessness permanently. I wanna - I wanna tell a story and then I wanna ask a question. So when I was working at the shelter, I was doing a thing I hated most in this entire life. Most. And that was grant writing, I hate grant writing. I'm so thankful somebody else can do it for me now, but at the time, I was doing grant writing and part of it with the city or with any funder of the shelter, you have to write your post grant report, and success with our shelter was always measured by their metrics, and their metrics was always how many youths are now off the streets, without taking into account the fact that homelessness can be very cyclical. You just don't end up off the streets and then homelessness is cured, and so I have two questions for you. One, I wanna learn a little bit more about your organization, I want you to tell us more about what it's doing, and also how do you measure success with the women that you're working with, because for us at the shelter, for me success was very different. The fact that one of the youth in the shelter was just learning to shower every day was a success, or the fact that they were going to school even if it was twice a week now as opposed to zero is a success, but

in the eyes of our funders it really wasn't. So I'm curious to know again how to do you view success and what are you up to with Up With Women?

Lia: Yeah, so I mean, this was a challenge that I found as well, you know. I find particularly in our sector, everybody is so incredibly financially strapped, and yes you know the funders have a fairly narrow eye view on what is success and so as a result, even the agencies, no matter how thoughtful they are, they still find themselves being limited by that as well. But the biggest challenge is that there's not enough to money to give good quality services and so it's no surprise that, you know, if you need mental health services, the waiting list is eight months. If you want to get a job, you end up being put in this room with forty other people. You get a, you know, some training that might, you know, maybe 10 percent of it might resonate with you, and you end up wasting all this time. You go halfway across the city to talk to a job planner and they're underestimating your abilities and telling you to go and pump gas or do a cashier job, you know, there's a lot of training to be a cashier. And so, you know, it was interesting because the idea for Up With Women started with me, you know, I thought that the fulfillment of my promise was just to tell my story, but then when I ended up at the top of my field in the technology sector, totally underqualified for every position I got, but that's also thanks to autism. Hey, you know, if you don't know that someone's telling you to jump in the lake, you just keep calling them.

Gilad: Keep going, I love it.

Lia: Hey, how bout that job, you know, and then you wear them down and you don't know it. So yeah, I climbed the ladder by accident and ended up earning like 270 thousand dollars in a year,

and that was after living on a dollar a day in the shelter ten years before. It took me ten years just to get into the jobs. And so there I was, and it was only when I was at the top of my game at the company I was with that they were willing to pay for a coach for me, and I was like, well what's a coach? And at five hundred dollars an hour, I found out what a coach was and I was like jesus, I could have used this years ago and it just seemed so unfair, you know. It was so clear to me that here we are, we, you know, people assemble in community centre basements, they get really general services because that's all you have the money for, you're - all of the sectors or all of the organizations in the sector, or at least most of them are focused on survival employment, you know, kind of like what you're talking about. If they're off the street, it's a success, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you cured recidivism right. So the same thing, but my big thing was that oftentimes, I would meet women who, you know, there was a study that was done by U of T and they found that while most of the women were gainfully employed before they ended up homeless, the majority of them were still dependent on some form of government assistance and they were unemployed a year after being interviewed in the shelter because it speaks to those barriers. But the point is that women have lives before this, right. I mean yes, in the case of youths, sometimes there might be a little less of a work history or maybe none, but regardless, human potential is underestimated on a regular basis because there isn't the funding to be able to pay attention to each individual and so I thought there's gotta be a way to change that. So my idea was if these coaches are available to senior executives in the top echelons of the big corporations in Canada, you know, what if we could convince these coaches to each commit to serving one woman for a year at no cost? And that's how the whole idea started. I mean I self-funded it at first, ran it, built it while I was working eighty hours a week in the technology sector and immediately, we were able to have some results and the reason why we were able to have these kind of results was number one, we

were able to deliver high quality services at low cost, it was personalized. It was - each individual got to draw their own map because we're all born to do something extraordinary, but you know, if you are just being told to go and get a cashier job or whatever, yes survival employment is critically important, but that's not about your career path. It's not about your ultimate purpose, but there are no services that really talk about that, right, because that's a luxury. So when you get this one on one, individualized service, you know, you're encouraged to work for your survival yes, but then you're also encouraged to look at a longer future and where do you really wanna go and really start to understand yourself. Now, we also have assessment tools that we get for free, you know, we have an emotional intelligence assessment tool that looks at fifteen different areas of emotional intelligence, you know, so you really get to learn more about yourself. If you're entrepreneurially inclined, you get to take a personality assessment that determines how entrepreneurial you are and what aspects of you are entrepreneurial. So you get to learn more yourself and then that coach, unlike mentoring, where mentoring it's like, if I were you, I would do this, so essentially the mentor is only teaching you how to be them. The coach is trained specifically to be a hundred percent focused on you and your path, and so what they're doing is they're asking questions that will help you to draw your map and, you know, the stories have been extraordinary. So number one, quality of service for a fraction of the cost. That's critically important, we're able to deliver the kind of quality that people get in the executive circle. Second, that this is an organization that was built by people with lived experience. It's peer led, right, so it makes a big difference when you can say I know you can get here because I was here too. And then the third thing is really the magic sauce that we really try and harness. Every single woman who comes into our program comes in never wanting to see another woman go through what she went through, very much like me, right. And so we try and take that ember and turn it into a bonfire, because we're trying to help our clients

to see that it's not just about being able to make your life for yourself and your family, it's about being able to make your life into that story that can inspire somebody else to believe that they can have it too. We're not just in the poverty reduction business, we're in the leadership business. Every woman who exits poverty, every woman who walks away from violence, every woman who is able to get to the life that she designs becomes a beacon for the women behind her and that in itself, when you see the women grasp that, you see their progress skyrocket. And so we just got our evaluation results back for the latest cohort, and we've been consistently getting these kinds of results, but, you know, over six to twelve months, the women tripled their income, you know, most of the women - what was it, 67 percent of the women tripled their income, you know, they were - we saw a substantial increase in permanent part time, permanent full time, and self employment. Their employment precarity went down significantly so, you know, we're actually seeing the results and we're proving it, and they're miles beyond what is typically experienced in the sector, but you know, I really do believe that it's those three factors that are why. It's no surprise that when we make our goals bigger than ourselves, our ego takes a backseat and so then it's no longer about us, it's about our mission right. So then it's no longer personal, so all of a sudden any rejection is no longer personal. Any disappointment is no longer personal. So your tendency to beat yourself up was just a big tendency among women who have been struck down. It's no longer there, right, so in a way you become unstoppable and so yeah, once you become mission-focused - and this is something that can be used in any sector right. I wish that - I hope that everyone listens to this episode and takes that on, because the more we focus on a deeper purpose, the more people's genius will come out because that's what we were born to do. Until then, we're living half lives half lived, right. We were born to be in communities, we were born to support our communities, we were born originally in small tribes right. Our big urban centres sort of take away our awareness of

that, but it's no surprise that we end up with dark circles under our eyes, walking around like zombies, you know, hating everything and, you know, yelling at the cat when we get home, watching TV for endless hours because we're not connected to a deeper purpose. And so if we can get that happening in every aspect, not just in the social services sector, but in every life, imagine what this world would be like.

[Theme music fades in]

Gilad: My name's Gilad Cohen.

Simona: And I'm Simona Ramkisson**.**

Gilad: This podcast is edited and produced by Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani. Our associate producer is Ron Ma.

Simona: The Hum is an initiative of JAYU, a charity that shares human rights stories through the arts.

[Theme music fades out]

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