THIS WAS
TOMORROW

ANTHONY

Community lead at Kitty's Launderette

In conversation with Enrico Policardo
Kitty's Launderette, Anfield, Liverpool
2026

Edited from the recorded conversation.

01 Who are you, and what is this place?

I'm Anthony. I work here as the community lead - sometimes we say community engagement lead. We're at Kitty's Launderette, which is a launderette and a social hub, in Anfield, the area I've lived in my whole life.

How would I describe it to someone I've never met? It's a launderette in the last way you'd expect a launderette to be. It can be anything on any given day, and that's not even in our control. We've had film nights, knitting groups, tea and toast mornings - but also organic things happen. People meet. It's like a comedy show half the time, with all the different characters. It can be a tourist spot. It's a launderette by name, but a lot more by nature.

My role was built on the recognition that we want to do things in partnership with others. We don't want to be an isolated community within a community. We offer a lot of essential services - free washing and drying, subsidised laundry. But we're also a point of access to all the other amazing organisations that are more traditional in how they help: children's centres, schools, food banks, pantries, statutory bodies. The communication between your everyday person and them is often complicated. If we can make that easier - kill two birds with one stone, do your laundry and get access to all the other support in your neighbourhood - that's my job. It's a role that's still developing, and it's different day to day.

02 Anfield is said to be one of the most deprived areas. Can you talk about that, and what's changed since the launderette opened?

This area's been deprived as long as I've been alive - which is ironic, because it's also the place that brings the most money into the city, through the football. We're the most deprived area that brings in the most money for the local economy, which is just hysterical when you think about it. There's that

saying, light grows in the darkness - I don't really like that analysis. But I do think when people are fed up, it's not long before things like this start to exist, because the alternative isn't good for anyone.

I don't think I've seen the hardest of what many people in Anfield have seen. But growing up, a lot of the houses that were later knocked down under the council's compulsory purchase orders were derelict. It was like a wasteland. Shops too - a lot shut down, and that hasn't really changed.

Kitty's grew out of something that happened when I was about twelve: the bakery. It used to be family-owned, and it was going to be compulsory-purchased and demolished, along with the terrace next to it. Then an artist, Jeanne van Heeswijk, made a project for the Liverpool Biennial that became Homebaked Bakery - getting local residents to organise around the community hub the bakery had been when the Mitchell family ran it. I feel there was a bit of inevitability to it happening. But an artist coming along and really facilitating that space was important. The launderette has similar beginnings: the bakery inspired so many people and lifted the spirit of the area. People thought: we've got this bakery - what else can we do?

Some of the people involved early on here, like our colleague Grace, had been part of that, and she's an artist too, so her creativity allowed this reimagining of public spaces like the launderette. It's always interesting asking Grace, why a launderette? Partly because she'd been involved in cleaning, that domestic daily-life stuff. But it's also about spaces that have been lost. Local bakeries have been replaced by Greggs or Sayers or whatever - corporations. And launderettes used to be run by the council, and then got passed over to private companies. So that's where we come in: let's bring this back to the area with lots of creativity, embodying the spirit the bakery had - let's see what can happen here and how it can grow.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, Anfield was probably the last place people would have imagined this happening. But it has. And I think it's waiting to happen in a lot of other places around the country. As deprivation rises - I'm not saying it should have to happen - it creates community resilience. You see beautiful things come out of it. The sad thing is it's only because we lost everything that we have to recreate these spaces.

03 What have you learned, working in a co-operative?

I'd never worked anywhere like this. I was twenty when I joined; I'm twenty-four now. From sixteen I worked in a shop - hierarchical. Then briefly a café - hierarchical. School, college - hierarchical. You get used to every space in your life having a hierarchy. Even in the supermarket, when the label says 50p off, you can't challenge that.

I always laugh, because one of my first days here was a team meeting, and having the right to use my voice and represent the people we talk to every day in this space - having that platform - wasn't just a nice addition. It's how we actually function. It's been amazing. It's taught me so much about people shaping the spaces they use. Now I can't imagine my life without my own voice being considered in a space. The idea of going back to an organisation where I'm just told what to do sickens me. And even me facilitating that top-down approach - I've been completely torn off that. You come into a space like this thinking, wouldn't it be nice to help people - like you're doing something for the community. But you soon learn you're doing it with the community. So that's my lesson: do with, not for.

04 What is utopia for you?

Creating a space where you feel you can change your environment to meet whatever the need is. And not thinking we have to do it just one way - you can do one thing in many different ways at once. I'm on the left of politics,

obviously, but the point is we can have systems that aren't so bureaucratic and top-down. We can collectively decide how spaces are run, and the society we live in. You look at places like Rojava in Kurdistan and how they run their day-to-day administration collectively, with a democracy that's genuinely representative - at least from what I've read. Utopia isn't flying cars, or an AI revolution. It's the way we live, and the way we decide to live together, needing to improve. Once that improves, I think we'd feel a lot better - if we actually had a say over our lives, and stopped limiting ourselves to doing things one way at a time.

05 What would you tell someone starting something like this?

Work out how the space isn't just helping people, but developing people - in their lives. You can set out with a vision you think will be amazing, and if you don't move from it - that's what I mean about doing things one way. A lot of utopian projects come along and the way someone envisioned it doesn't work, but they won't let go of the idea, because it's this biblical thing: this is how it's going to work. You need to scrap that, especially working in a community. We learn every day how we're not getting things right for the people using our space, or for us as workers. Don't let that get you down. Ask: how do we develop new ways of working together that move us forward - until the next time things stop working, because that will always happen. You'll always reach a point where what you built is no longer fit for purpose. So: constant development.

As a workers' co-operative, a lot of that is about the workers - training and skills, and decent, secure pay, because you need that to develop as a person. And in the community, it's being able to show people other ways of being. Coming here doesn't make you some radical leftist. But we have a unique chance to connect people with the credit union, or food co-ops, because we

have a bit of evidence here that this way of working works. People feel it. It's slow, because people won't just abandon the culture of individualism. But over time you see people talk about things differently.

I'm involved in a cinema project called Anfield People's Cinema. It's been in different places round the community, and this year we really want to run it outside Kitty's. And because it's at Kitty's, people don't say "your cinema". They say "ours". We never set out for that. But it's so interesting that people have adopted that way of thinking. For the first few years it was, "yous are doing this". Now it's, "we're doing this".

06 Could the football culture here be fertile ground for community?

I've not got fully developed thoughts on it, but we did a podcast project a while back about football stadiums and what they mean for community. Back in the day, people from the community could go to the match, your neighbours were there, and the city was a lot more political. I don't think that's a coincidence. In the eighties we had the Militant tendency in the council - what they were saying on paper was brilliant - and surely it was the football that brought fellas together at the weekend to talk about this stuff. Now Liverpool's less political as a place, ticket prices go up, fewer locals can go to the game, and that sense of community from the football has gone. Maybe when Sky came in, it turned the corner. Now the club's about keeping people out, not bringing them in - and especially not bringing them together, because football being political is just so scary to the owners of any club.

[…] In Dublin there's a club, Bohemians, who've set up a climate co-op and put together a community wealth-building proposal they're sharing with their local community. I'm like, wow - a football club doing something I could never imagine from the likes of Liverpool. Obviously it's much smaller, a

few thousand capacity. But it's so radically different. Bill Shankly used to talk about socialism. Imagine Arne Slot doing that now. It's just not happening.

A lot of activism in this city was born out of football. Hillsborough, and how the response brought the community together - a tragedy, and I'd say a crime. I wonder how the ground would react to something like that now. It's a very different time, with very different interests.

07 People seem afraid to take positions now.

It's like apathy. Or an abandonment of hope. It unsettles me how many people say there's no point voting. If you don't want to vote but you want to organise locally, do it. But not voting and leaving it there winds me up, because you're giving them what they want. You're making things worse. You can't afford to be politically apathetic.

And even I sometimes find it hard, because the people still speaking are the most extreme. Some people would call us extremists for what I believe about the economy and how we live as a society. But the real danger of extremism is the far right. It's grown so fast that people feel they're already in the minority, and the press makes it feel that way. In here we chat to a lot of people, and a lot of people see through it. But read a UK newspaper and you're told the far right will win the next election. The threat is real, but that only makes people quieter. That's where organisations like us have to say: you can feel there's no hope, but you can't just sit there. We have to do something about it.

It's hard, though. We're in secure, well-paid jobs. Telling someone in a very precarious position they have to take a political stand - I don't want to speak from that place of privilege. People get angry at others for not speaking up.

People are scared, and rightly so. But let's not tell them the reasons to be scared can't be changed.

08 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

I'd like to live where you're from in Italy - if Kitty's opens there, I'll go and sit in the sun! No - I think the future of business in this country should be co-operatives. Democratically owned workplaces and community spaces. If the council opens something for ten or fifteen years, it might be amazing, but at the next crisis it's gone. We're only seven years in, touch wood, but we've proved sustainable. We survived a pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. […] And co-operatives are more likely to survive the first five years than a typical small business. So co-operatives have got to be the future.

The wider picture is different. We can't keep living on the brink of a far-right or centre-right government - stuck in that loop. We have to find our way out while really listening to why people have moved that way: material deprivation, frustration. We need to learn cooperation again, and educate people about why it matters. So this might be the start of some sort of future. Hopefully the wider picture gets a lot less bleak. We'll see.

09 What makes you really happy?

Being in here, to be honest. Sometimes - not even as a worker - you realise what a privilege it is to have a space like this in your community. I'm speaking to people I'd never, ever have spoken to otherwise, whether someone I find difficult or someone I really like. It's the only place where I can meet someone from an entirely different point in life. It's a very diverse community. Even the spaces that support asylum seekers and refugees are often kept just for that community. […] All these spaces have unwritten

communities, and we've not signed up to any of them. I think that's beautiful. When I'm having a good day, folding clothes, and something like that happens, it makes me happy.

What else? Going out, enjoying nature. Pizza - Italian pizza. Music, festivals. And hearing about exciting possibilities - when things are done a different way. Bryn and I have been on a China hype recently, hearing how they do things. I'm not saying it's a perfect utopia, but hearing about other ways of being excites me, because it breaks the mould. We need more people doing different things, so we can hear about them and take inspiration.

10 Anything else you'd like to say?

BRYN: I still remember when you came in for your interview. You and your mum had been customers in the first two or three years after we opened, and I think all of us were captured by Anthony's personality. Very open, honest, very deep-thinking. We were like: this is the kind of person we need - someone who'll spring us into the extra work the launderette does, the nice stuff that really makes it its own place. Your openness leaves you open to having the piss taken out of you. But it also means he can speak to anyone, from any background or life experience. They come in, bump into him, and he'll know every detail about them. It makes people feel like they're part of the family.

ANTHONY: It's a good opportunity, the job here. Honestly, if I didn't work here, I'd still come here, as a customer, with my family. I wish every community had the chance to have a space like this. The local paper, the Echo, wrote about us last week, and so many people came in saying, we should have one of these in our community. And it's like: yes, you should - so do it. Come here and we'll tell you how, as much as we can. We can't

guarantee it, because there are blocks - property prices and everything that makes it harder. But even if it starts in someone's basement with a couple of machines, start that way and go from there.

BRYN: To the earlier point, the original plan for the launderette was a launderette-café, with an artist's studio in this room instead of what we have now. Covid scuppered that, and the economic struggles. But I think it's quite a beautiful thing - Anthony's ability to adapt to changing environments, which a co-op model really lends itself to. We changed our model during Covid to do what we needed to do. We changed the plan for this room because, once we opened, we realised we needed more income to support the services - it was really important to do free washes and subsidise community events. And Grace's research, especially in Italy - the entrepreneurism of the co-operative movement there, the way co-ops move between industries and find little niches to support an organisation - that's what we need to grab hold of. I'm looking forward to some things we're talking about now, like a cleaning co-operative, another way to get money out of the Airbnb-ism round here. But I'd like us to be more imaginative with it.

ANTHONY: There's a guy, Josh, who organises the cinema with me. He's just written an application for an artist grant about imagined futures, and the idea is a greengrocer's that funds a cinema. It's bizarre. But things start off as a mad idea and grow over time. If you'd told someone in Anfield fifteen or twenty years ago that there'd be a launderette putting on film nights and poetry clubs, they'd have said, get lost. We always laugh at a crazy idea before it becomes reality. You need people who are a bit mad. And you need to create space for that - in here, and physical space too.

This Was Tomorrow – Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of?
A long-term audio-visual investigation by Enrico Policardo.
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