**Interview 015 Pseudonym: Susan** (older participant)

*Recording starts mid-conversation as pre-interview small-talk drifted onto relevant topics.*

SUSAN: I’d always had a bit of an issue with the statements around Millennials. You know, Snowflakes and all that palaver. But also just, just the sort of – cos it’s anecdotal and it’s not very robust what people are saying. And I find it logically very hard to believe the Millennials are more or less screwed up than those who experienced World War II, for example. You know, and were evacuated and stuff like that. You know, that’s a very disruptive childhood. It’s very… it could be potentially traumatic. I mean both my parents-in-law were very traumatised by their experience as children during the war. And so, you know. I know my generation, I think we’re Gen X, em, we’re, you know, we didn’t have anything significantly major apart from the Cold War kicking around for us, but… but you know, still, I just….. So I’m very very interested in something a little more robust. The generations coming after us are so much less robust than were – I find it very hard to believe really. It’s attitudes, that’s what it is.

INTERVIEWER: I think what I’m interested to see is whether Millennial missionaries are actually quite like older missionaries but different from other Millennials, or whether they are taking Millennial traits into mission. Or what kind of balance of that. Or is it – yeah – is everyone much the same? So, yeah, it’s interesting to hear what are the challenges that organisations think they are facing with Millennials, and what is it – is it partly just an age thing rather than a generation thing?

SUSAN: I mean, the stuff that I hear organisationally – so my job is [staff care in missionary organisation]. So the stuff that I hear organisationally, em, particularly from say more traditional fields, is that they, you know, the usual stuff like they want more supervision, they want more input, they don’t know how to look after themselves, if you know what I mean, like cook for themselves. And so they’re much less prepared in terms of self-care I suppose. If you want to use that model, you know [NAME]’s model, with self-care issues they’ve got…. And then they give up more easily, according to … So things that I’ve heard. That is not my experience of people that I know, but that is what people say to us. And I think, I think it depends, you know, I mean… what exactly is the age band that you’re looking at with Millennials?

INTERVIEWER: I’m taking quite a wide band. So I’m looking at 1980-1999, years of birth.

SUSAN: So I thought 99 was the, what’s the next one after Millennial?

INTERVIEWER: People are saying Gen Z, but what it will end up being known as….. Yeah, I’m taking a wide kind of – because people start it anywhere from about, I’ve heard as early as 1978 right through to about 85 or so; then taking it through to about 95 / 2000 ish. So I think by taking a wider one I can look at the data I get and say, actually is there an argument for moving the boundary, or putting the boundary in a particular place? Obviously, boundaries are never that clear with generations. My daughter was born on January the 1st. And there’s not much difference between her and someone born on the 31st of December – you can’t draw a line from one year to the next. But…

SUSAN: It will partly depend on their experience growing up, which band they actually identify with best. Tom [pseudonym for husband] and I were both on the border line for being, well 66, for being Gen X. But when we looked at Gen X – at All Nations actually – we were like, oh yeah, that is us, it is broadly speaking more like that, whatever it was that was characterising them.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. I’m the other end of Gen X and I do identify more with that than I do with the Millennial thing, but at the same time, I feel like people that are your end of Gen X somehow don’t necessarily or are somehow more GenX than I am. I find it quite a strange…

SUSAN: I guess if you think about it, the people at the one end of the band that we’re looking at – which as you say is fairly arbitrary, are going to be define – they’re going to be people who are more defining the characteristics than those that follow.

INTERVIEWER: And I think that’s one of the interesting discussions I’ve had with people. Like I was talking about Millennial traits in a meeting one time and a GenX-er said “but I want those things too!” And actually, I think part of it is that one generation fights for something that they want and then the next generation, that’s part of who they are. So they just accept it as a norm, because it’s been fought for, for them in a way. And they’ve just inherited it. So, instead of wanting it, you just think it’s normal.

SUSAN: Yes

INTERVIEWER: That’s quite an interesting way of looking at it.

SUSAN: Yeah, no, I would say so.

INTERVIEWER: There’s a lot of cross over because of that. So you think that “oh that’s who I am as well” but actually it’s in a different way.

SUSAN: Yeah. So, going back to what else I see. The other thing is that people – they talk about people giving up, but actually people leaving – they join with a shorter term in mind and are much more prepared to move to something else than older, certainly Boomers and Busters. And Gen X. I think we were already moving into that, being prepared to just say “no, we’re not doing that.” But most of the time there was also that sort of commitment to the thing – if we could possibly make it work then we would, kind of thing, I think. Em. And raw data figures, you know, like in terms of the numbers of people coming into the organisations, into mission at the moment, it is much less, especially career joining. So when I joined [organisation] in, whenever it was, 95, 96 kind of area – so I was in my late twenties, mid to late twenties, and there were twenty or thirty people on the course the year that I was doing. And now your average course is about a third of that. So, and actually, last year in the training I don’t think they had any British people doing it at all. They have got more coming this year apparently.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think [organisation] is particularly affected by – I’m thinking like because of the language training and the time commitment for language learning, whether that…

SUSAN: If I’m honest, I doubt it. Because it’s always got the geeks who want to go and do that.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely

SUSAN: It was always a niche market if you’re honest. But it’s, em, the numbers…. I think if you talk to [names other organisations] or any of them, they’ll probably all be saying yes, there’s much fewer people joining. I don’t know whether like Tear Fund and IJM for example – International Justice Mission – one of the guys came and did a talk for us – they’re a much smaller mission than [organisation]. [Link with other mission organisation omitted] You know how that works, yeah?

INTERVIEWER: Vaguely!

SUSAN: Yeah, I actually literally, I mean I do [staff care] for [Partner Organisation], it’s not for [Organisation]. Organisationally and numbers wise, it’s a much smaller grouping of people and they all meet in offices, which of course we’re not in that context a lot of the time. But their demographics are almost the inverse of ours. I mean they have a lot of people under the age of 35/40. And very few 40+. Whereas ours is the other way round completely. So, literally we could turn their triangle up the other way round and it would reflect us. Put us together and we’d have a really balanced organisation.

INTERVIEWER: And you wonder whether that will happen? Whether people will move from one to the other? Or is it something about justice?

SUSAN: Justice and development, I wonder whether they are having the same issues. And certainly over the course of my time in, you know, professional missionary-dom, the understanding of what mission work is about and the justification for it and all of that kind of stuff, has changed radically. So… yeah. I mean even the word “mission” means something completely different in churches these days.

INTERVIEWER: Can you expound on that a bit?

SUSAN: Well, yeah!

INTERVIEWER: Tell me what you mean.

SUSAN: If you pick up any magazine – Christianity Today or whatever – or any church production. Or you go to church and they want to talk about mission, what they’re talking about is what they’re doing in their local community to reach out to people. So historically that was called home evangelism. And mission was reserved for overseas work. Or specific outreach to other communities outside of the British community, whatever that is. And that isn’t the case any more – that is definitely not how people view mission. I don’t know – 9 out of 10 people would not think overseas when they think mission. I mean, they kind of sort of see it as part of it. And then, as a result of that, because it’s all been merged into one big “we’re all missionaries”, and it’s in part our own fault because we’ve done our soundbite stuff at the front going “we’re all missionaries” in order to connect to people. Well actually we’re not all missionaries; we don’t all go overseas or you know, go into another culture in this country as well. I mean we can be a missionary in Britain – I don’t totally think you can’t, because we have so many cultures here. But, but there is that sort of sense of crossing over – the cross-cultural piece is not, yeah, is not where most people see mission themselves today. Anyway, that’s what I would say I mean when I say that.

INTERVIEWER: Can I take you back to your beginnings? Can you tell me a bit about your own faith history?

SUSAN: Yeah, sure. I grew up in a family that went to a liberal – very liberal – United Reformed Church in [city]. Didn’t know anything much about, you know, any concept of a living faith. And I went, when I was sixteen I went to a school in Italy, randomly, and that sort of changed the direction of where I was going. And it kind of was sort of tied up with my faith journey in some ways. Because that church was doing that “churches to schools” [? Not very on recording] and it was a sister school in Italy. [School name] is an international school in [area of UK]. And so I applied to go that on the back of that visit from the church to there. And so I kind of sort of… and I was having a bit of an existential “does God even exist?” kind of crisis from the age of about 14 onwards. So when this kind of came up through a church visit, I was like well, I think God is going to show me that He exists before I leave here, because he obviously wanted me to go and if He doesn’t do that, then He obviously doesn’t exist. Or something like this. And I did have an experience of meeting a teacher there who was just a lovely guy and he had a strong faith – Catholic I think – but very, em, very vibrant in his faith. And that really impacted me with a sense of God being real. And then I went to university in [UK city] and by that point I was well ready to become a Christian, so I met Christians and I think they got to me within six weeks. [laughter] But having been to an international school for two years in Italy and studying Italian and getting another year in Italy as well, a huge part of my faith journey related to mission and was with an overseas ring to it if you like. So, and there were missionaries, ex-missionaries in the church I attended who did a lot with the Christian Union at [city] University and house parties that some of us went to. And just really, you know, and continued to influence us fully until they died a couple of years ago actually. Were really quite interesting people, you know, had gone to Borneo and been a medical missionary in a…. and she did Bible translation in Borneo…. Just the very typical traditional [organisation]-style – well they weren’t with [organisation] but you know that style of mission work in the jungle somewhere, chasing a snake… You know what I mean. But it was very, yeah, there was a lot of input during my university years and it was tinged with this overseas thing. So then I met my husband at university. And whilst I felt called into mission in some sense – I didn’t know what or where – I decided to train after I’d done my degree in Italian and Politics as a midwife, a nurse and then a midwife, because I thought well that would help me if I went overseas, not because I particularly wanted to do the job. Interesting. And during that time period we got married. And Tom is a linguist with a capital L – he had a very clear call to North Africa. And I was like, oh, alright. So I didn’t feel a need to have a specific… it was in the ballpark, it was in mission, that was enough. You know, it was fine. And so that was… that’s pretty much how it’s gone really. I’ve been fairly flexible about what I do and just pick out what’s around as a result of that. So…

INTERVIEWER: So when you say the thing was “mission” for you – obviously that means overseas in that sense, but was that the main bit of it? How would you have defined “mission” as you felt that you should be in mission, if you see what I mean.

SUSAN: I think probably the simplest way… a very long… when I started dating Tom – I dated him twice and the second time he’d already gone overseas with [organisation] and they have that policy, you know, you’re not allowed to date people. But then we actually had already been dating before so it wasn’t…. we sought forgiveness! But they had a question about being called into mission, if you like, whatever. And I said, I feel called to people and I don’t really mind where it is. And I think that to me is – I’m a very people-oriented, wanting to be connected, working with people. Not physically necessarily, but just focussed on doing things that’s helping support people. And so I didn’t really, I didn’t have a very specific sense – it wasn’t a calling to a country or a particular… it was a particular space if you like and it wasn’t in my culture in Britain, I think. As time went by, as we worked with [organisation] … So we were involved with a language project initially, got chucked out of the country, and sort of moved towards administration in Tom’s case and I had babies – and then we went… because Tom is a linguist, he wanted to kind of go, to be more involved in teaching and linguistics. So we redirected again, some time in our late thirties. And went to [Africa]. So Tom was teaching at a university there. And during that time I did a lot of sorting out for myself in terms of emotional stuff, cos I could. And once that was sort of largely – I did a Masters in Theology – cos it was difficult to get involved with [organisation] work because of where we lived, it was too distant. And that has been the case most of the way through my [organisation] experience. When we moved to [UK town], we moved here because of the training moving here and Tom became the [role in organisation] until about two years ago when he stepped out of it and the training now has moved down to [college] and out of [town], so we’re now here and in 2015 I finished my Masters, and so then I was offered a role leading the [staff care] context in [organisation] so it was a bit a jump from not really having a work focus in [organisation] to suddenly having a massive leap. Interesting role which was very very different and much bigger than I would have ever dreamt of honestly. To go from really being essentially what they call an “unassigned spouse” in our lovely organisation, to leading, setting up and leading the [staff care] context in [organisation] was a big change. So there you go – that’s my potted history. There is a unifying theme of being connected with people in all the things that I did. I quite like teaching as well. So, I’ve done a fair amount of teaching a course called [title] which teaches adults how to teach adults. And there have been little bits and pieces of teaching along the way.

INTERVIEWER: So did you find you had to kind of create things for yourself to do, if you were “unassigned”?

SUSAN: Yeah. So…. Basically I kind of like did what…. I had a proper job assignment in the first two years. But then when we were chucked out of that language project, that morphed into.. we moved to [European country] and I was language learning and looking after my first child. And then, after two years there, Tom was like, I really want to do linguistics, I don’t want to be doing administrative stuff like partnership stuff, all that kind of stuff, I’m a linguist with a capital L, I should be doing that. If I was in another organisation then maybe not, but this is what – I am in an organisation that does linguistics, so let me do it. So we moved back to the UK for 3-5 years to do that. And being in [city], Tom was able to commute to [organisation HQ] but I couldn’t do that as well with – by that point I had two more children, we had three kids. So I embedded myself in the church that we were involved in, you know, leading toddlers, connecting with people locally and doing the odd course, so teaching [course title] and teaching another course that I did. They were sort of one or two week shots and I wasn’t really connected to the work into North Africa. But Tom was travelling all the time from there. So… Even though I struggled with it, and I’m pretty certain that if I had been ten years younger going through that same experience I would have found work to do because the virtual space in which we work now and the variety of options that are available were not available to me when my kids were little. And I did, generally speaking, always have boundaries to do two or three hours a day. Particularly when I was in [Africa] actually, because I had house help. But it wasn’t ever really an option. It was, you know, just to do that, it never became something that anyone sought to make happen or suggest to me. Whereas I think it would be different now. You know, or more easily different. So, yeah. So as soon as I finished my Masters, it was a case of, well I’m going to look outside the box not just look within [organisation]. Cos my Masters was looking at Attachment Theory and how that impacted your relationship with God. And that whole area of space is very connected to adoption, fostering, all that kind of thing. I could have either gone more into academic research in that area or more practically into the whole, you know, the Home for Good stuff, and all of that kind of stuff that’s going on in this country. So there was a whole world there that I could have gone further into. But when I was offered this job, you know, it was like totally what I had wanted and actually, in terms of if I had to think of something that suited me as a, you know, creative thinker, strategic thinker, problem solver, you know, wanting to see change in the area which we looked after people, all of that sort of stuff – and actually being able to potentially do something to change how we do things, to bring more coherence to how we do things perhaps may be a better way of putting it. You couldn’t have asked for a more perfect job really, to be offered to me. And certainly unexpectedly because you wouldn’t go, as I said, from where I was, to think that you could go from where I was to there, to here. So, it was a very … it was very tied into my relationship with God that. Because in my Masters I was sorting through my relationship with God and there was a big huge trust issue there. And about six months before I finished my Masters, I kind of had a bit of a conversation with God… I have friends who came back from [Africa] and were like preachers and they didn’t know where they were going to live, what they were going to do, where they were going to get any money from …. But they weren’t trying to make it happen, they just were waiting because they felt that God was going to *give* them the place to live. And He did! It was like…. I’m not there! [laughing] “I’m going to try to trust You – what can I trust you with? I can trust you with what I do next.” And I did actually. And I completely wasn’t worried and I was very happy once I finished pushing different doors and seeing where it was going. And then this came up. This job came up. And it, it, it really did feel like… yeah… it was kind of like… from God. Which was really nice. Does that give you enough background to where I’m coming from?

INTERVIEWER: I’ve got a list of questions here and I’m trying to see how many you’ve already ticked off! [laughter]. And where to go next.

SUSAN: It’s hard isn’t it? Take your time, have a look!

INTERVIEWER: I might just go with: who have been your models in faith? You mentioned the former missionaries when you were at university, but other people that spring to mind?

SUSAN: Possibly early on in my… so we had a year in Italy… I had a year in Italy I should say during my degree. And the year before that I had met with two other people to pray about that year in Italy. And that year in Italy, we had an amazing time and we were very connected with some missionaries that had just arrived in Italy at the same time as us and were very happy to find these young, free baby sitters! [laughing] And who did a lot of discipling of us as well. So, I mean there were positives and negatives to that experience, but overall they were pretty…. I think the experience as much as the people – but certainly the whole thing together was pretty key. Honestly my husband. [laughing] Who else? Before we got married, I had a really horrible year that I had got to know a family and started living with them the year before I got married, and they had a huge impact on me as well just in terms of – she’s probably one of the most effective evangelists I’ve ever met. Just by loving people and caring for people. Yeah. So them. And then I would probably say jumping into the more recent past, our time in [African Country] . So that couple that had come back from [African Country] , their faith experience was so different to mine, you know. They did things like arrive in [African Country] , go stand in the middle of [city] and start handing out soup and see what God did with all of that. And they built up an entire mission from that. [laughing]. And I never felt… I’ve never felt like I wanted to be them, in the same way I never felt like I wanted to be [name] who was this effective evangelist person who I was telling you about, because I’m not the same personality and I couldn’t be. But it was just a very… I’m quite a reflective practitioner. And it just really, you know… I sort of take things that I see like that and think about them and think, well what does that look like to me? So the example was, well how can I sort of take a step towards trusting God. Rather than sort of kind of feel like, I may as well kill myself now because I’m nowhere near as trusting of God as these people. So, it’s probably kept me sane that part of me.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that’s a very useful skill!

SUSAN: I can’t say I keep up with it all the time, but yeah. It’s often just small things that happen that impact me more than just one or two individuals. Probably these are some of the bigger clearer input into me, into us, both of us, as missionaries.

INTERVIEWER: How did friends and family react when you decided to go into missions?

SUSAN: I think by that point they were so resigned to me doing things in a way that they didn’t really understand so they [pause] – well, I mean, and also really by that point we were – my father died when I was a baby and my mother died just before we got married. So that wasn’t really directly an issue with her. She might have had a problem with it, I really don’t know. But then my sister and brother – I had another brother who also died before we got married… I said it was bad, yeah. And so my brother and sister who were left, they were just like, she left home when she was sixteen, I mean…. [laughing]. So I think they were just a bit more resigned. Friends wise, you know, the church in [town] which incidentally is called [name], I mean, has been our only supporting church for the entire time. And has been amazing really in consistency and maintaining relationships with us. It dipped actually, when we came back and moved to [other UK town]. In part because of our own family situation. Our boys especially didn’t particularly want to go to [town] and were busy playing football or rugby all weekend and made it very, very difficult for us to actually maintain connections with the church there. Covid-19 has been great for that, because… so we’ve been re-connecting really well back there. But our support was at you know an all-time low in the last few months, or year really, or two. I mean it’s never been great. But returning back to the UK, it just dropped massively. And then our lack of connection with the church in [town], our main church. Challenges with connecting to church here in [other town], which we’ve not really done even now, so eight years later… it’s, yeah, that’s been, that’s probably been one of the hardest pieces of being back in the UK and still being focussed on overseas mission.

INTERVIEWER: What have been the issues there? Why have you not settled? Is it mission-related do you think?

SUSAN: [pause] Well I’ve obviously pondered this many times and I actually don’t know the answer to be honest. We’re definitely a statistic. You know, they say, don’t they, that missionaries coming back find it difficult to reconnect to the church context here. I don’t know that – I mean I’ve always put it down to my own issues with church and faith. But when my husband was also really struggling with the church that we had chosen to go to across the road, because we visited all the different churches that we, that appeared to exist around us when we first moved here. And they all seemed much of a muchness frankly, so we just went to the one across the road. But we, we just, I think, you know, we can criticise church.. it’s full of lovely people. So what’s church? But I think it’s the way in which church is done. And the, the … some of the problems relate to who we are as people in the sort of things that we think and the way in which we think, finding people in [new town] that think like us is a lot harder than it is in a university town like [town]. And I think that’s part of it. And just, I find the … I find church boring a lot of the time. As all my kids have all inherited this – none of them go to church. So, you know, I don’t know is the answer. I mean there are things that I can criticise about each singular thing but I just don’t know whether that’s even fair. And I’m not like “that’s a bad church”, you know. We ended up doing, we ended up attending the church across the road for about three and a half years I think before kind of going to like… we were both so depressed going to church and so fed up and like, I was finding reasons to not go to church, like take my son to play rugby on Sunday morning rather than go to church, which kind of when we got to that point, was like, ok, you need to try somewhere else. And so we tried that for a year. We mooched around, didn’t really settle anywhere. Came back to the church across the road after a year, thinking maybe we just had to have than, I don’t know, whatever. But within a few months we were back in the same space. So then we tried another church. By which point none of our kids were going to the same… one of them [family detail omitted] was going to a church somewhere else and [the other children] weren’t going. Well actually, my youngest said he was going to go across the road anyway because [family member] was there. [Members of wider family] had moved [here] by that point. And we knew we couldn’t carry on going there. So we went to a church that didn’t have any young people their age. They had a gap. They had lots of under ten year olds and then young families of 30 to 45. Not many people our actual age range. So we went there for a year. And then [son] started saying, oh I don’t want to go there any more, so we went to a different church for him. Then he stopped going. So we’re now at that church, have been there for about two and a half years. And it’s alright. We go to it. We’re not in the same place as we were with the church across the road, where it just felt like they were trying so very hard to be like [Christian conference] and not really succeeding. And hitting all of that. And we were just constantly having to sort of, well it’s not about us when we’re singing the worship songs, and nobody else is singing, you know. It’s not about us. And then the sermons were really not very good. And well, that’s not what it’s about, you know. And you just spent the whole service talking to yourself, talking yourself down from being critical. It was horrible. It was a horrible place to be in. And it’s not fair on that church either. Because they’re not bad, you know, they’re really nice people. So it just felt, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: they’re obviously right for some people

SUSAN: Yeah, totally. And… So I kind of, I don’t know, I feel really sad. It’s a big sadness to me that we haven’t been able to embed ourselves in a church here properly, or feel like we have. So from that perspective as I say, Covid 19 has been great because I feel like we’ve reconnected back in church in [town] and that is where we feel at home. You know, we have people who we know from thirty years ago, all the way through to people who we’ve met more recently, which is really nice. If we’d have gone back to [town] would our kids have still been connected to church? I actually think they probably would have. Christian friends, more Christian friends. But how they would have got on with their faith, that’s God and their journey really, not mine, in a sense. I feel sad that we haven’t been able to do that with our kids.

INTERVIEWER: So you moved your kids around a bit?

SUSAN: Not compared to a lot of people, frankly. But I think, [one child] especially, would say that [they’d] suffered from our being, doing what we did. Not in a, you know, wished we’d never done it – I don’t think he would say that, maybe he would. But more that, you know, [this child] takes a long time to warm up with friendships and was just getting there… I mean we’re talking two or three years. And [this child] would just be getting there and then either would change schools or you know, it was just really unfortunate. [This child] has had some real issues with being angry about what happened and having, didn’t really want to come back to England and all that kind of stuff. So, I would say that, that also took up a lot of our head-space in settling in [new town] frankly.

INTERVIEWER: they say that one of the traits of Third Culture Kids is that they make friends very quickly, but I guess that’s a statistical thing that is a majority and there are always some that don’t and therefore struggle…

SUSAN: I think there are different types. And so there is an issue of blending in, being able to blend in. And all three of my kids can do that. You know, [name]’s teacher said it was like he’s always been part of the class. But he would never ever have said that he felt British or that he felt part of the class or that he felt like he had really close friends, until right at the end, towards the end of his second year back. And then the one friend that he had went to one school and he went to another. So, yeah. It’s a difficult one. So yeah with the TCK thing, the other two are fine really. Their stage of return was different. [name] reached the end of prep school because she was at private school in [country], she reached the end of [?] school and three or four of her friends were coming to England anyway, to posh private schools – we weren’t doing that obviously. But it was a sort of general, that was a time to move. She got to climb [mountain] and do all these ending things. [name] was year six when we came back – for him it’s hard because he doesn’t remember a lot of stuff that the other two remember. [name] right in the middle of everything. Yeah, [this child] did have it harder. So….

INTERVIEWER: There are so many now missing out on all those ending things with Covid

SUSAN: yeah, absolutely. I think they also have that in common with each other as well.

INTERVIEWER: yes.

SUSAN: And I think that’s part of the issue for MKs when they’re coming back. People say ‘oh where have you been?’ and they say [country]. And they go, ok, and move on. They don’t ask any questions – why would kids ask questions of other kids. It’s not a bad thing that it doesn’t happen, it’s just a human thing. But it’s then very hard to … if you’ve got a whole world of emotion connected to leaving and there’s nowhere to place it or bring it… and [this child]’s an introvert, so makes it very difficult. Processes things internally so you don’t really know what’s going on. So a bit of a challenge.

INTERVIEWER: So was there support around that at the time? Do you think that’s changed now?

SUSAN: No there wasn’t organisationally for us. That might have changed – they’ve got someone else who’s doing the TCK thing and she’s very caring and young. And hasn’t really got a lot of experience with MKs but she wants to do her best. And she would try. But with a lot of this kind of stuff you have to be mad, bad or sad to go and get help. Or merit free help. And we really didn’t get there until, well, basically until [name] stopped going to school at the age of fifteen. So [child] kind of like started feeling ill and not being able to go to school and all this kind of stuff. And it was like, well, you know, then we got help. But it wasn’t – I don’t know, I mean, I don’t know. I don’t know what would have helped when I look back. I know what could have helped, is if [child] would have agreed to go and sit down and talk it all through like a “sensible child” [laughing] but no kid is that straightforward. [name] didn’t understand what was going on any more than we did, so, you know, it was really really difficult. Our first year back - in fact the first six months was hideous. It was probably the most difficult thing that I’ve ever done. And I really did wonder if we were going to implode as a family. But I, you know, but no, I didn’t feel like there was help. It would be different now, if it had all happened when I was in my role now, do you know what I mean? Because I have a wider connection to the global context, you know. In my team are the mental health people, the counsellors, that we have organisationally. And they sought help from them in that sort of way. And certainly my boss is a very pastoral guy and he probably would have been able to help as well. But I don’t know. It would look different. I certainly would have felt more supported anyway.

INTERVIEWER: so do think families now have more support, or seek more support? Or do you think it’s much the same?

SUSAN: I think it’s difficult.. in an organisation that’s 65-70% American, North American, those people [organisation] have access, whether they’re in the US or whether they are overseas they have access to counsellors, if counselling is what you need. And that kind of support. The rest of the world, it’s a bit more sporadic and a bit more difficult I would say. And I don’t know what the solution is on that. I’ve just made some changes finally to the leadership and mental health, and I’m hoping that one part of what that person will look at will be how are we, what are we doing to support… what’s available to support people. The complexity with our connection between [organisation in UK and organisation in other countries] for example is that usually if somebody is based back in their home country, then it’s really just their work relationship that is connected to [other organisation], but that’s really changing, not least because we have a duty of care to people whether they’re in their home country or not. And we’re separate organisations now. So yes, I think it’s changing, but we’re right on the cusp of it. I don’t think it’s made an impact yet. It’s changing because we have to, because duty of care has changed, and because we need to look at the MOUs around all of this. But we haven’t properly done that yet I would say. Flow of care is one of the biggest pieces of work that I have looking ahead for me. If I can sort out the flow of care to be a bit more constructive and helpful. But even then, I don’t know what the answer will be around the mental health scenario because in Britain it’s just more complicated. We don’t have mental health person at [organisation 2]; [organisation 1] counsellors are sitting around waiting to, you know… We’re 100 odd missionaries, 150 odd missionaries overseas with [organisation 1], not overseas but in the entirety, most of which live in Britain now. So, because our job is very much a consulting role, and of course the older you get in the organisation the more you fit into that category because you’ve got experience.

INTERVIEWER: have you noticed any changes in, I guess priorites, in younger families now?

SUSAN: I don’t think so. I think the big change happened didn’t it back in whenever it was when people started saying ‘I’m not sending my kids to boarding school’. That happened in our generation, it’s not the current generation. And I don’t think the current generation would any more think of sending their kids to boarding school than we would have done. Yeah. [comment on someone passing outside the window]. I mean, the things that we struggle with, the issues that we seem to have, I think there’s that sense of where do you get help when there is the beginnings of an issue. How do you help people deal with it more proactively. And what we’re trying to do in terms of say how people are supervised and how people are looked after is that it isn’t just work that people are thinking about, but you know, I really don’t know what a supervisor… I mean that whole time that we were, em, we came back. [husband] was being supervised by an [organisation] supervisor as well as a [other organisation] person, I don’t know. In terms of how younger families are dealing with issues, I imagine it’s pretty similar. I can’t…. whether the sort of Asperger’s thing comes up, or you know, all of those things. If it’s clear, it’s ok. If it’s not clear, then, and that, you know, in Britain it’s really hideous. I still don’t really know what, you know, [child] didn’t go to school for a year and a half. Literally. He was in his bedroom for a year and a half. And I don’t know what was wrong with him officially. And so if it’s that chaotic and that messy with something that life-impacting for a young person, … it’s not surprising that we struggle with trying to work out what to do and how to support families in Britain. Leave alone the rest of the world. So yeah. I’m sure any young families who are coming from Romania who are facing issues with their kids, don’t know what they do, or even what’s available to them when they are back in their own country.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

SUSAN: It’s just life, in some ways, isn’t it?

INTERVIEWER: how would you say you go about taking major life decisions?

SUSAN: Talk to friends – and my husband. Pray about it. Yeah, I … talk to friends who are, you know, Christian friends, and pray with them about it, hear what they have to say. The most recent one would be do I take this job or not? So that went, the personnel person who was at [organisation] said I think you should talk to [name] who’s the chief HR officer in [other organisation] who’s British. She got in touch with [name] and said do you want to talk to her. And he was like, yes, absolutely because we’re really short of people so I’m desperate. So he arranged a meeting, a skype meeting with him. And then he offered me this job. And it was a dilemma to me actually because I felt like – it felt very quick that he offered me this job. But it was the perfect job for me. If you want, if I had said no to this job, I was saying no to working with [organisation] because they couldn’t have given a better job description to me that pulled in all my experience in nursing and midwifery and you know history, and working in mission and my issues and how staff care – now member care or whatever you want to call it – all of that kind of stuff. It kind of, em, yeah, but at the same time I just felt like, how can I trust this guy who’s just kind of offering me a job in 20 minutes? If you remember my thing about trusting God. I had a meeting. So I spent that week talking to all my friends, you know, close friends, supporters who had supported us all the way through. Family that I lived with – both husband and wife, I think at the time he was pastor of the church in [town] so I was talking to him as pastor but also as a long-term friend. And [name] and then close friends in [town], yeah support people. And a few people here as well. And all of them said, yeah, it does sound like it’s really good. I think you should go for it. It does sound like… so I had a lot of affirmation from people. [husband] thought it did sound good, but he could understand why I was like…. So the first thing that I said, given that I had just spent twenty minutes that I had a lot of critical thoughts regarding the leadership and how they cared for people and how they approached things, why did you then offer me such an important role within 20 minutes of talking to me? Because I was like, that doesn’t make sense. And he just said well, I’m really sorry but, I have to say that the only thing I can say to you is what I said to my wife who asked me the same question, which is: I think God told me! And I really heard that as a response to the trusting, not as a ‘you’re the God-given person for this role [name]’. But it was very much about a message from God to me about trusting him in coming into this role so, so yeah. That’s kind of. That sort of approach is very much… Sometimes we would write down pros and cons. We very rarely have writing on the wall scenarios. One time [husband] and I had done a whole pros and cons for whether we should leave [country] just before we got chucked out. We’d been there two years, but we had spent three if not four years preparing to go to [country], you know, between Bible college and [husband] finishing doing his PhD and, oh yeah the [organisation] training was a year long then as well. So it was the fact… we can’t, we can’t just go, we’ve been here two years we want to move to [country]. It’s too embarrassing. And then we went away on holiday. And when we came back the letter telling us that we were not having our work permit renewed, which was a polite way of getting rid of us, was there. So we thought, oh OK. So that was a sort of, we sort of knew what God wanted but couldn’t quite bring ourselves, was too embarrassing. Not because we wouldn’t do it but just because it didn’t seem like that would be honouring to what we’d been doing for the church. And then of course it was great because it was all very sexy getting chucked out, right? Our support was perfect at that point compared to now. It’s all about what God gives you, it’s not about…. Sorry, that’s me being cynical again. But anyway, so we, generally speaking it’s a mixture of common sense, you know, friendships, that seems like a good direction. And trying to discern it – working it out with God.

INTERVIEWER: what were communications like? Keeping in touch with people back in the UK when you were first away?

SUSAN: So that was mainly email really. I think we… I’m trying to remember. You had to plug in the thing, the computer, didn’t you? Yeah. It was ok though. In [country] it was great honestly – phonecalls and email I think. But we had a very supportive church context. There were only like thirty missionary workers in the country. We knew them all and we had a history with them because [husband] had been there with [earlier organisation], so had a… you know, spoke really good [country-an] Arabic. We were well embedded there. It was very – it was one of the best churches to go to. Then [second country] the same I guess: phone and … skype was beginning to come in towards the early 2000s, is that right? Something like that I think. But it was very, you know, pause, wait and catch up. So yeah, it wasn’t, you couldn’t be as involved. And now, of course, it’s ridiculous. Now I’m living in [town], I could be anywhere in the world. And I would probably still feel as part of what’s going on in my team in church because of the Zoom services as anything. I mean, a bizarre scenario – totally different.

INTERVIEWER: yes, when it first happened, I kind of thought “oh I could go to church anywhere”. And I haven’t – I’ve got two very small children at the moment so I haven’t plugged into very much at all. But just that thought that actually “I really miss that church – I could go to their services.”

SUSAN: I think for us it’s been the right thing to be doing. I mean the church we kind of go to here in [town] isn’t doing live services – I think they might be doing a bit more now. But now we’re just very embedded in what’s going on in [other town], so….

INTERVIEWER: I think I will probably leave it there – I’ll probably think of other things. But very interesting talking to you.

SUSAN: It’s interesting thinking about some of these things I guess. I mean, from my perspective, you know, if you come across research or articles particularly that sort of help us understand – as you do your literature research – better what is going on. I mean I guess, I mean missionary attrition research that’s just happened, again. But other than that I wouldn’t say I’ve seen that much robust stuff coming. It’ll be interesting to see what happens to the member care MA from Redcliffe as it moves across to All Nations because I would think, I’m hoping that it becomes a bit more robust in terms of how they do some of the things. So…. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: There’s a book that I have come across – I’m just trying to think of the title – “Changing Shape” by someone called Ruth Perrin, which is a study of Millennials in the north of England who were very active. Basically people who were in CUs in their twenties and what are they doing 10-15 years later, which I found quite interesting.

SUSAN: When we were at university we were told that I can’t remember what percentage of us wouldn’t even be Christians, let alone…. And a certain percentage of us wouldn’t be in a church, you know, even if we would identify as Christians. So I don’t know whether that, they think that that’s changed even more.

INTERVIEWER: I’ve not heard that kind of focus – I guess you have to be in CU to hear it. I was in such a tiny one that we were only ever about 4 or 5 people anyway, so I think we were all very committed.

SUSAN: [town] university CU was pretty big. You know, I think it goes … I don’t know what it’s like now. During the years we were there it was very proactive and a positive place to be.

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*Conversation continued so I began recording again.*

SUSAN: A thing that we’re doing that you might be interested in: have you heard of Dare to Lead? It’s a…. you know Brene Brown? Taking her two books and pulled them together with a sort of leadership focus and so anybody in our organisation under the age of about 45 we’re looking to invite to come and do that course in small groups – build a kind of cohort, so you kind of have likeminded sort of people at a similar sort of level of leadership, similar sort of level of direction. To sort of do that. And that’s a kind of investment in them as… And it’s women that it’s focussed on, in order to encourage women leaders as well. But I think men can do the course – it’s not like it’s just for women, but em, but yeah. So that’s the main thing that we’re doing organisationally at the moment. But we are actively thinking about it.

INTERVIEWER: that’s interesting because you’re looking at younger people and saying, you have the potential to lead, which actually that’s something which I think Millennials really need.

SUSAN: When you look at it, I mean, at 53 I still feel young in leadership, age-wise in my organisation. You stick me in another organisation and I’ll probably be the gran-tam but in [organisation] in leadership I’m young still. It’s quite nice. But you know. And that’s crazy. But the problem that I have specifically with say, like I’ve got two people in my team who are in that category. One of whom has significant physical and mental health issues. And so supporting her through that. And the other one is in country overseas with three small children and husband also works obviously, so they share things and do all of that stuff, but supporting her to be in a senior leadership role – to do that with that is really difficult. Because of what she wants to do and what she can do. She’s slap bang in the middle of this Millennial thing, like 36 I think. So I think it is a challenge. But again, is that just life stage? Would I have had a similar stage issues? Is it intrinsic to their experience of growing up being told that they’re amazing all the time? Which is what – you know what’s his face, what’s that bloke that turns out to talk about it, you know… you must know him… Sinek. He says it well – and actually he’s challenging it and saying that’s not really an issue. He’d be a good person to look at stuff for. Well been interesting talking to you and I really hope – I don’t know if you think of things that you think it would be helpful in my role for me to be aware of, I’d love for you to just chuck it in my direction. I might not look at it, but I might. Brilliant. OK.