

Petr Torak 0:05
Good afternoon, Miriama,

Miriama Cechova 0:05
Good afternoon

Petr Torak 0:06
Fine.

Miriama Cechova 0:06
You are welcome

Petr Torak 0:06
Thank you. And as you know, with the previous sessions, those sessions are for young Roma boys and girls, you know, to aim to inspire them to show them positive role models within our community. And to show them that everything in life is possible with a bit of obviously, courage, bit of, you know, endurance, everything can be achievable, if you work very hard. And so that's why I'm very grateful for your time. And for you being here today, Miriam. And to start this short interview, I would like to ask you, first of all about yourself, where are you from? From which city? Maybe what country and how you came to UK?

Miriama Cechova 0:59
So I am from Slovakia. I'm from Barrio originally I came here with my parents around 14 years ago, we came here well my parents, my father was here before we came here on two years, then we've decided that it's time to come here to live with him. And but we mainly came here for education and obviously for a better life, like most people do.

Petr Torak 1:23
Okay, so how old were you when you left Slovakia?

Miriama Cechova 1:27
I was 10.

Petr Torak 1:30
And what was your experience like living in Slovakia?

Miriama Cechova 1:35
So, I've had a quite good life because we lived in a you know, a small city, all of the family, we lived all in the same area. I went to school only till year four. I actually liked school a lot. And then we moved here. So the language was a bit difficult for me, because I really enjoyed school back into the back. Yeah, and when I came here, I kind of seen that there are big differences in the schools and the way they teach you. So it was a big shock. But I I enjoyed Slovakia, I think that I had a really good childhood. And I wouldn't really complain because I said, the area where I lived or my family there or the neighbourhood, you know, everyone got along with each other. So it was not bad, but just I remember that, you know, from from the older people because I was obviously only 10 years old. Everybody was you know, looking for jobs. It was people were struggling with with money, but my father, he worked abroad, so we were kind of okay, but it was a bit of a strange situation. Just because most of the fathers, they all worked abroad, because there was no really work where I lived, because it was such a small city. So that's why we when my father came here, it was just a better option for us to come here so that we can all be together instead of you know, seeing him once every three months, for three days, so.

Petr Torak 2:55
Okay, and when you moved into UK, how was it you know, what was the experience like to go suddenly into UK school? You know, new language, new culture, you know, new people, how was it for you?

Miriama Cechova 3:07

It was actually really strange for me, as I said, I, I couldn't understand why in primary school, I had to sit on the floor. And you know, in year six, I was learning things that I was learning there in year three, so it was a bit slower the learning, I guess. But I didn't speak any English when I came here. Well, I had a few lessons when I was in Slovakia before we came. But it wasn't I didn't really learn much more than from Hello, how are you? So it was a bit strange. But I actually learned English within seven months, I spoke fluently, completely fluently. So it was a bit strange for me. But then I only went to year six, which is the last year of primary school. After that, I went to a secondary school and I was the only Eastern European kid in school.

Petr Torak 3:51

Yes

Miriama Cechova 3:52

So I was, it was that was quite difficult for me because people didn't understand where I was from, who I was and why how I can speak another language. And because I spoke English very, very well actually spoke better than I speak now. So it was really, really difficult for me because I couldn't fit anywhere. And yeah, being the only Eastern European kid and trying to explain it to people that I'm from Slovakia. They're like, Where is that the people had no way all the kids had no idea where I was from. So it was a bit difficult for me then but obviously as time went by, I was still young, Eastern European kid there until I think you're nine or 10. And then few more started coming into like year seven and eight. But by then I was already I already made friends and everything by them. But at the beginning it was really strange and difficult because all the other kids from the Eastern European kid who went to the primary school with me, they all went to the same school and I didn't. It was a bit strange for me then.

Petr Torak 4:53

And what about after secondary school? Where did you go from there?

Miriama Cechova 4:57

So I went 90 day double. So I did psychology, sociology and law. I then actually enrolled to uni. But I involved to psychology then I went on and spoke to few psychologists, few people who studied psychology and everybody was saying the same thing to me that psychology is a bit of a subject, because you have to be, you have to have a lot of experience. And you'll have to basically everyone was saying to me that you have to work for free. So you have to do voluntary work for many, many years until you actually get somewhere. Like, you'll just be working as an admin for most of your time while you're young. And you've just, you've just finished so that was really put me off. And I was like, I don't know whether I really want to go and do something, and then never get a job in it until like, maybe 40 or something, you know, by the time I was 18, I was a bit confused as but well I didn't really know if that's why I want to pursue. So I actually started working with social services. And, and I really loved it, I'd worked in child protection. And I fully enjoyed it. So then I went and I studied health and social care. Because that's what I want. That's why I really enjoyed.

Petr Torak 6:08

Mmh.

Miriama Cechova 6:08

So once I've finished that I just kind of I was working with child protection for about two or three years. No, for two years. And then, yeah, I just gathered that I loved social care. And I loved the whole idea of you know, helping people. Because a lot of the people who I worked with were from Eastern Europe, and they didn't understand why the guidelines of the British are the way they are and why they need to follow them. So that's why I kind of felt like I wanted to explain this to the people so that they understand that what they think is normal in Slovakia is not normal here. It's not the okay. So that's why I thought, Okay, this is what I like what I'm going to continue doing.

Petr Torak 6:55

That's absolutely brilliant. And I know that this is very, very big topic and very sensitive topic within the Czech and Slovak and Roma communities. You might remember the bigger tensions all around the UK in 2012, where there was this report on ITV, where there was a, somebody was saying that the social services and foster parents are stealing money from the families. And it was a huge problem, you know, so I see, you know, how important your job is what you're doing. So that's brilliant. And I guess, when you mentioned that you like to help other people. It's kind of stick with you. And I believe what you do now is still within the same limit?

Miriama Cechova 7:36

Yep, yep definitely, it was just the thing because the Roma community here grew so much. And from when I came here, when I came here, there was not really too many people here, there was Polish community here, but not so much Slovakia and Czech, So I kind of seen that this is getting bigger, and a lot of people have problems, they know who to go to. And, you know, although their children spoke English, and they couldn't help them, because some of the languages, you know, complicated, it's complex, they didn't understand and, and they didn't want to do it for them. So the older people needed help. So I worked with Roma community care. And I, when I worked with Roma community, I enjoyed the job, because, you know, you get to help people, and you know, they benefit from your help. So and they have nowhere else to go. So and it's your community. So I, I really enjoyed that. So after that I went on to doing something else. But now right now I opened my own office where I do this. So you know, we help people fill in forms, deal with any inquiries regarding benefits, debt, utility, whatever issues that they may have, we are there to you know, support them, and provide them help. That's, you know, that fits, fits them because there might be people who might provide help here. But they are not actually Roma. And for a lot of people here it is more important to speak to someone who is Roman because they feel more comfortable. And they feel like I understand them. And they can also speak Romans if they didn't speak very good Slovakia or Czech, so.

Petr Torak 9:13

Absolutely, and it's important to have this mutual trust as well from your own country, from your own background you know, I know that from here in Peterborough there are lots of people from different communities that abuse the power and also their position when they from the charge for you know other nationals for EU application 300 pounds you know and it's and you know I had this elderly gentlemen he was in his eighties and he paid 300 pounds to this person you know it's just horrendous, so yeah it's important to have someone you can trust and you can go to for help.

Miriama Cechova 9:47

Yeah, of course definitely. You know, we are a profitable company. But our prices do not. They are nowhere near that. They are very far from that. We are not you know, we would not want to, you know, take advantage of anybody, we are there to provide our services. But we are not taking, you know, we don't want to be one of those people who do this for taking 300 pounds a week, we don't want that we want to continue to build our clients so that we can help them. It's not just about money.

Petr Torak 10:17

Absolutely, and people most of the time they don't mind you are paying you know paying for a service, just being as you said not being taken advantage of you know.

Miriama Cechova 10:25

Yeah

Petr Torak 10:26

That's very very important a bit so no that's absolutely amazing that people in community in derby has got this opportunity, do you get also customers from different cities coming to you?

Miriama Cechova 10:38

Uh no, we get people only from Derby. But we actually don't only have Right, well, we basically the people that come and see us are from all over Derby. And they are they varying backgrounds, so we

are there to help everybody. But 90%, like, I would say, 80% of our clients are Roma, but they are not from other cities, we do have a lot of people who just came from other cities, and they come to a straightaway as soon as they arrive. So we've got that but not from other cities we haven't had so far.

Miriama Cechova 10:39

Okay, and if people want to contact you, or get help, how can they contact you?

Miriama Cechova 11:12

So they can send us an email, or they can write us on Facebook, we sending multi services on Facebook, or they can give us a call. Whenever the people call us, we have our we have the lines on our phones, so we can pick up anytime, anytime they need any help or support, whether we're here , so we're not just in the office, and we provide help there. We can also do it at the office.

Petr Torak 11:39

That's amazing. Okay, looking back to your childhood and your teenage years. So what was your dream job at the time?

Miriama Cechova 11:46

I actually wanted to be a psychologist.

Petr Torak 11:50

Okay, so I guess, you know, we see working with people, you know, away, you know, working in the office, it takes a you know, it kind of takes a psychology Anyway, you know, to work with certain people, you know, whether it's a person that maybe doesn't understand fully what to say, or maybe it's under stress, or anxiety and, and they come to you for help, it takes anyway, somebody that understands a little bit of psychology, I guess you're not far from your dream.

Miriama Cechova 12:21

No, I always knew that I wanted to work with people, I'm not the type of I know, there's different kinds of people, some people like to sit behind the computer and do their job, which I understand, but I I prefer to speak to people and to, you know, provide some sort of service and speak to people face to face. So I knew that this is definitely what I want to do. I just want to have this one to one contact with people while I'm at work. And just kind of sitting in an office and you know, just working with the computer. It's not really for me, I know it maybe for other people might prefer this. For me personally, it's not something I can do it, but it doesn't. I can't I don't feel like I'm reaching my full potential, if that makes sense.

Petr Torak 13:01

It does yeah and looking into the future, let's say 10 years from today, where do you see yourself?

Miriama Cechova 13:08

So I actually would like to continue the job that I'm doing now or do something to do with it. So I'll continue helping people and, you know, share my knowledge with other people. And I would actually like to go and study psychology. Once all of this pandemic is over right now, I wouldn't want to do it from home, I want to go and study and be able to speak to people and go do voluntary work. So I am planning to go and do this, but I would still continue just to be helping people. And I do want to stay in the the job that I am now or somewhere around that. So I don't want to really swipe away, like go away from that I want to stay in the same sector that I am now.

Petr Torak 13:53

Okay, what about any plans for any kind of franchising, you know, maybe expanding to different cities, and.

Miriama Cechova 14:00

Well would like that, at the moment, it's a bit difficult to you know, we've got big visions, but since we've just started we want to build our clientele here and provide the best services here first.

Petr Torak 14:11
Absolutely

Miriama Cechova 14:12
Before we can, you know, go to other cities, because what we need to do is we need to establish, we want to see exactly what issues people may have, and issues that may be arising now. Since Brexit came to place, we want to see what are the going to be the changes with the people, whether people coming here if the people might be wanting to go back to the you know, to Slovakia to Czech republic or Poland or wherever they may be from because we understand that right now, some people may have different issues. So we need to be want to establish what the issues will be and we also want to start organising projects and events. But at the moment we can't do that. So we need to do that. We want to do that first and then we are planning to expand so.

Petr Torak 14:56
Okay yeah and apart of the things that I mentioned, what do you particularly like about the UK?

Miriama Cechova 15:06
So I just like the way of life here, I like that people, you know, from you get people here from all over the world and you can, when you speak to people that don't see you the way that they would see you in our countries, which is you know, as a Roma. And it's, if you look a certain way, you might not get discriminated face to face, but there it is there and you know, that so this is what I like here is that everyone gets treated the same way. And usually, even if someone does have some sort of comment, you kind of can just ignore it because the 90% of the people are not like that. So that's what I like about the this country and also you've got many opportunities here. You can study you, can work if you are willing to you can do everything you don't have to be you know, stuck in one place and you've always got potential to grow and to you know, go up in Slovakia it's not really like that. It's a bit difficult, especially if you are Roma or if you are, you know, younger it is it's difficult, is more difficult not in here, it's not like this, you can really progress. And you can you know, better yourself here. So you've got a lot of opportunities here, which is another thing I really like about this country.

Petr Torak 16:23
Absolutely and yeah I completely agree with you, and now looking into the Roma aspect of our debate, what does it mean to be Roma?

Miriama Cechova 16:34
I'm actually very proud to be Roma, because we've got our own identity. And we've got our, you know, the culture, the traditions, and the thing is everywhere in the world that you go, you're able to speak to them because we've got pretty much the same language. I've been to many countries I've travelled to a lot of places and almost everywhere I meet Roma, they speak almost the same way. But all the other the all the other Roma do so it's, it's, it's, I know that we don't have a country, but we are all kind of together all the time. So no matter where you go, you're able to spot a Roma, you can see who is a Roma who isn't in our culture, you know, we have a lot of music, a lot of dancing, and I think our culture is fun. And it's about family, which is also very important, because in our culture, if there is no family, I mean, you can't really they say that, you know, are you really Roma if you're not really close with your family, you don't, you know, go to places with them. And, you know, go to all the parties that we do and all that. I mean, it's quite important. This is an important thing about our culture, which is why I really like it's we are very family or family based. And we all stick together, which is I think, really important.

Petr Torak 17:48
And do speaker Romanes yourself?

Miriama Cechova 17:50
Yes I do of course I do I speak two type of Romanus actually speak the Latvian romanese as well fluently.

Petr Torak 17:55

Okay that's amazing, all the question about the Roma would you say that the role of Roma women is changing in the society?

Miriama Cechova 18:04

I think it is, I think it definitely is. Because I know that obviously, if we're looking back, remember, women will kind of, you know, at home and men were the breadwinners, and now it's changing, the women also going to work and they're looking after themselves. They want to work, they want to better themselves as well. And they are also looking for this for their children. They want their children to go to school to be educated. So I think it's really, really changing. I think the values are really changing. Now, they are not the same as they were before where women were, you know, at home cooking, doing the cleaning been looking after the kids, it is changing. And you can see it now that a lot of the 90% of the roma women are now at work. They are not, you know, just, it's equal now. So the men and the women have equal roles. When it comes to work, even looking after the kids is becoming more equal, which is something I really like. I think it's, I think it's much, much better that you know, women have now are becoming more empowered, and they understand that they can actually do it just what men can do. Because in the Roma culture, when you're growing up, you can see one thing and you don't really see the moms going to work. And, you know, for example, my mom, she was always at work. So even when we lived in Slovakia, she was going to work she was a social worker. So I kind of seen that. So that's why I was I wanted to do the same. And I feel that this is important for the kids to see their moms and their sisters and their Auntie's also doing the same because it really influences the children. I think.

Petr Torak 19:32

Last question, what would be your final message to all Roma children and young people listening to this video? What would you recommend to them?

Miriama Cechova 19:40

So I would definitely recommend them if they want to do something to continue doing it no matter what it is, because I understand that sometimes parents might want to get you to be someone, but you don't actually enjoy it. So if for example, they want to be musicians, let's say I think that they should pursue this by going to music school. You know, pursuing music, going to college or going to university, and, or if not just to, you know, speak to the teachers speak to their parents about things that they can do, or go to their local youth centres to speak to them about what they can do. And for example, if they want to be a doctor or lawyer, how they can achieve this and see whether they really want to do this to speak to professionals, because in their, I understand that in a lot of a lot of youths in the Roma community, they think that they can't do it, but I really believe that they can. Because if you want to do something, you're going to do it. So you know, and you also need a little bit of a push. So I think it's also important to, you know, stick around friends that also have certain values and goals to be someone in future. Because if you're the only one who wants to do something, and you've got five friends telling you that you can't do it, you will not go for it. So it's it's best as a as a child, or as a teenager, this is what you're going to do you rather go out and, you know, have fun, which I understand it's part of being a teenager, but I think it's really important to speak to other people to speak to your teachers to focus on your GCSE, then make sure you do your GCSE, because in here without your GCSEs, you will be stuck. You know, a lot of jobs require GCSEs. And it's better to sit in an office and you know, do your job or you know, have a profession than going to work as a manual worker, when you can speak perfect English, when you have the opportunities to do everything because you you're basically living here, and you know how the country works. So I think it's really really, really important to pass your GCSEs to speak to other professionals or youth workers or teachers on how you can become better and your choices of where you can go in education. And also to make sure that you get the support from your family or from someone who can help you get there. Because in here in the UK, you can really achieve whatever you want, if you really put your mind to it.

Petr Torak 22:11

Okay, amazing Miriama Thank you very much. It was so powerful, you know, you know what you you know, have offered in this interview. So it's amazing. I really appreciate it and also it was a pleasure talking to you.

Miriama Cechova 22:24
Thank you for having me.

Petr Torak 22:25
Thank you very much. I hope to obviously meet you in person soon. And I'm obviously sure that if there are any questions from children and young people that will contact us, we will be happy to

Miriama Cechova 22:37
Definitely, yeah tell them to you know, message me they can even message me on my on my my private Facebook if they need to. So whatever they need, I'm here if they need any help.