‘Making Food Allergies Your Business’ podcast
Episode 2 – Inclusive food allergy practices

Claire McGuigan & Paddy Glasgow:

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CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Hello, and welcome to our second podcast in our three-part series, *Making Food Allergies your Business*. Today, I will be interviewed by Paddy Glasgow, founder of Glasgowbury from *Small But Massive* podcast, where we'll be deep in conversation, talking about the research that I have done with The Open University Ireland.

The research is important, and we wanted to share it on podcast to let people have a better understanding of what it's like to live with a food allergy, the challenges there are, to eating out with the food allergy, but also share some ideas that the people who have food allergies have shared with us in the research to how businesses and food production people could actually make it more inclusive for them.

PADDY GLASGOW: This is podcast two of *Making Food Allergies your Business*. I'd like to welcome Claire McGuigan. Claire is a nurse, researcher, mother who works at The Open University. Claire's latest research, exploring how people feel working, living, and eating out with food allergies. Claire, welcome to the podcast. And what I would like to say, first of all, is could you tell the people out there about the research with The Open University, how it came about, what drove you to get it in place, and what's the future of it now?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Thank you, Paddy It's great to be here with you. Thank you. As you say, I'm a nurse researcher at The Open University Ireland. And I suppose my interest was sparked whenever my daughter was born 10 years ago with multiple food allergies.

So, she had 18 different food allergies when she was born. So even as a nurse, it was very strange to get your head around, first of all, how that somebody could have so many allergies whenever they're first born, but also how you actually adapt and change your life and to be able to care for this person now that has so many additional needs.

And while the needs are not physical needs. There is a lot of emotional support. There's a lot of reassurance. There's a lot of keeping things safe and adjusting your lifestyle and where a child can go to birthday parties and things like that. So in that journey over the last 10 years, it didn't seem as if it was an inclusive space for my daughter to be socially and physically safe.

PADDY GLASGOW: And interacting in society. Yeah.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: And to be included in things like birthday parties or going to play football or something like that and it's instinctive. When you see a child, you want to give a child a sweet, or you want to give them a packet of crisps. You want to give them a drink or something like that. And for my daughter, who has egg, gluten, and milk allergies, none of those things are possible. So, then it's very hard for her not to feel different because she can't have it.

PADDY GLASGOW: You feel exposed in a way that nearly withdraws you from society and certain elements. Like you said, there are parties and gatherings and places where young people would gather. And it's so many opportunities out there. You mentioned sweets, cakes, everything's out there.

And everybody else is doing it. So for somebody like me, that, maybe, doesn't understand it, as knowledgeable as yourself and other people that are researching this, how does food allergies affect people's lives?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, that was really what our research was about. And we were working with the food industry, so it was a knowledge exchange piece rather than a pure academic piece. So, we were trying to get in underneath the public who have food allergies to try and understand the three main questions.

How does a food allergy affect you on a daily basis? How does it affect you going out to eat? But also, then, if you could tell the food industry five things that would be important to you to make it more inclusive for you, what would those things do. So that's what we started to do.

We started to look at that as a semi-structured questionnaire. We had ethics approval, all the usual things. But it was important to do that at this stage in 2022, because the literature was, maybe, 15 years old on this. So, we wanted to see had there been any journey and anything updating, anything new and eating fresh.

And what was really stark about it, that there wasn't food sector have made great leaps and bounds to cater for gluten-free products and cater for dairy products. But for example, if you have a nut allergy, then what the new labelling and things like that means that for a lot of people. And that would come out in the research were that, either it's through the new labelling or the producers are more risk averse to litigation, that they have put on statements like may contain. And they have put on handled in a factory that contains nuts, but it might be free from all the other things. So, people are excluded by the virtue of that legislation, as well that came into force.

PADDY GLASGOW: And people looking at that label, and they're not so sure then, Claire, what to make of that, obviously, and to commit themselves to that product or not, or at the same time, lives are busy. Would you actually read every individual label on stuff you're buying, unless you had allergies, the answer is no. It just goes in the basket.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: That's true.

PADDY GLASGOW: And with your daughter having allergies, as a family, planning like a day or a weekend or an hour or half an hour to go out, get something to eat, research where you can go and eat, does, that interfere where you can go to in your holidays. Is it difficult for a family, like yourself? And I'm sure you'll be speaking here. There'll be so many other families would be really interested in this, maybe starting off in their journey now.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah, it is. It is a very important point that you raised because food allergy affects every aspect of your daily thinking. And so, you have to plan ahead. So, you have to know what's in the lunch box. You can't just nip into a shop and pick up something.

And also, the ingredients list on food changes. So, something you could have had yesterday when you go to buy it, say, next week. There could have been a change. So, you have to be very careful on the label. And the issue with being prepared and going places is that you have to change your lifestyle. So, you do exclude yourself from certain places. And so there are certain restaurants that you will know that will be much more open to the idea of it. Their menu is a little bit more adaptable. Their staff are more knowledgeable. And you take a barometer check of that culture when you go in.

And usually, within the first five minutes when you go in, and you have that interaction with the person at the front of the house, if they get it, and they get what an allergy is about, then you're more inclined to stay. And certainly, that has been my personal experience.

But that is what has come up through the research as well, where people, if they don't feel that staff are knowledgeable and that they're treating these allergies as serious, then people are more inclined not to stay. And what will happen then is they remove themselves from going to those particular places. They remove themselves for the social group that's going there.

PADDY GLASGOW: They removed the whole family. Because if it's a family meal out, and there's an individual within the family, a sister, a brother, a mother, whatever it is everybody's together. And looking at that, that's a good lump of people to be leaving a restaurant.

You know, you could have a potential there at a birthday party, for instance, 10, 15 people. That's 15 customers that you've lost by not adopting, but maybe just not being as the knowledge not there, Claire, for individuals out there. What is your message to restaurants, and what's coming back from the research?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, what the research is saying that people want to see more open and inclusive menus, so they want to look online and do their research and prepare before they go. And they want to see clear ingredients and the dishes, not just that they're labelled gluten-free or vegan.

But they want to see the particular things that are in the ingredients, so they can make an informed choice. They also want to see inclusive practices where there is time, whenever these environments are, as you know, are very noisy and busy. And they're hot and they're warm. And there's an element of human error everywhere. But what people are saying is that they want the transparency. And from the very moment you take the order, right through to how that is communicated to the kitchen staff and back to you and what we were finding in the research were the level of trust wasn't there.

And one of our participants was entering her 60s. And she said, look, whenever we go, they would take my order. I don't know if they go away, out of sight. Do they actually have a conversation with the people in the kitchen, or do they just let on?

And so people who have food allergies, when they're eating out, they are surveying the environment. They're not just surveying what is being said. And the cues are picking up from the communication. They're actually assessing the environment. They're assessing the size of the kitchen. They're assessing the risk of contamination, but they're also assessing, is my message of safety that I want from start to finish? Is it getting through and how is it getting through? And what they're saying are things like, how I would know if they weren't taking it seriously?

For example, a lady had gone out to eat, and she thought, well, this is a brilliant restaurant. They have little flags on the food when it comes out. And you know, that's your one with the allergy on it. But they were out at a Christmas lunch, and the two people in the party ordered the same thing.

And the server gave the one with the flag to the person who didn't have the allergy. And whenever the lady said, well, that one must be mine. And she said, it won't matter. And they're both the same. And she said, well, you know, I couldn't possibly have had that because, obviously, they didn't see the seriousness of it. So I think there is some clouding around--

PADDY GLASGOW: Education. There's an education, I suppose, listening, Claire, to that, there's an education of the front of house. There's educating if the message goes from front of house and to where it's supposed to be ordered, and then getting to the chef.

And maybe in a situation like that, it's good, maybe, sometimes, if even a junior chef was just to step out and just stand at that table. It only takes five minutes. I'm sure it'd be a good method, if they could, you know.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, that's exactly right.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Or talking about communicating from the kitchen. And I know they're busy, but maybe someone that's knowledgeable in the kitchen can step out and go here, here, here and here. but that's what your research is about, isn't it, Claire?

And that's what, I suppose, you and your colleagues are gathering. And I think it's a very important thing. So, say individuals that had allergies of a family member eating inside your own house, does that cause extra finance and everything that goes with that to try and get the elements that you need that's not going to affect your loved one as such, as well.

He explained about eating out there, what about inside the house? Because we're all only people. Life's fast. Life comes and goes. Schoolbags fly on under the door and hit the staircases, you know? And footballs go flying out. And there's mucky bits all around the place. And then you're having to de-stress your main to cook this meal. And is it something that, maybe, should be brought into primary schools? Like, how to prepare a meal for someone that has allergies from a young age. Is it something we need to look at, too, in the research.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think there definitely is what's coming out of the research, the financial implications were balanced in a way, because people were saying that if we were eating things that were convenience food. For example, you buy it. You can take home.

And if they were supposed to be 'free-from' they’re naturally more expensive. So like a loaf of gluten-free breads, perhaps, a fibre for 10 slices. So that's automatically more expensive. But then where people who have been on an allergy journey for such a long time, and they've just got used to it, and they've embraced it.

What they were saying, probably, over the years, it has saved the money, because they've had to go back to learn how to cook from scratch. And therefore, when they're buying non-processed food, then their staple food is much cheaper.

And so, it's just about them being creative and then picking up the skills of how to cook. But to cook something from scratch, if you're in a busy family, doing all the things that you need, that takes time. And it takes preparation and all of that--

PADDY GLASGOW: Planning.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: And planning. And also, the variety in your food. And also, it changes people's palate. So if people can't have certain sweet things or things, then their palates

naturally savoury, or it's not just a little bit blander. So, people tend to gravitate towards different food choices that they want.

And what they're finding is that choice isn't on the menus. So, for example, we have this menu that can be adapted, but we've heard a few times in our research that people have just been left with a bowl of rice and some vegetables and plain chicken rather than having this dining experience, where they feel cared for and nourished and nurtured by the food that their--

PADDY GLASGOW: With the saliva on their-- that's about the smell.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: The smell and the anticipation of it.

PADDY GLASGOW: That's definitely mine. That's definitely mine. And then you've got something just comes out. Excuse the phrase, a bit flat for what you expect to be in the arenas you're in. Well, that's interesting because something, I suppose, that for people out there, listening, that it's just not about going out. It's about in your own house. It's about looking after your kin. It's about everybody in the family. Would you say there's a need for an education within the family? Do you need to have a separate part in your kitchen? The utilities need to be different, or what way does it all work?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah, I think there is. I think there's a message. There's definitely a public health message for people, either as an individual family that are either new to it or are grasping with it, or even as children get older, and maybe they're pushing back a bit. And they won't eat certain things, or they want to just go to places to eat with their friends. And how do you know that's safe? So, there's an element of education there. Because as you start to let your young person grow into an adult, then you have to prepare them for that.

PADDY GLASGOW: And trust.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: And trust them. And I think we talked about on the first podcast about kissing, so simple things that naturally young people want to.

PADDY GLASGOW: To let people know, this isn't about breaking up. Me and Claire aren't agony uncles and aunts, but if we are, and you have a few problems out there about kissing and courting, just send it in at 08652651. So sorry. You were just saying there about young people and kiss. That's very interesting.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: It affects their identity. It affects their identity, and it affects their expression of who they are. And it affects their freedom around how they express who they are. And that's not covered in sex education or any of that at schools. So, there's a public health message attached to that in itself. There's also the wider piece for grannies and aunts and uncles who want to share their--

PADDY GLASGOW: Have a wee bit of that.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah

PADDY GLASGOW: You're not do you any harm.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah.

PADDY GLASGOW: And that's what you get.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: That's what you get. And I think the message has to be that this is something that could kill somebody. That's the big message here. The big message is--

PADDY GLASGOW: It's fatal.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah. The big message is that food allergy is something that you can't take lightly. It's something that you must do all that you can to keep yourself safe as a person that has it and accept your responsibility with that. But part of that is you have no man's an island, so you have to ask for...

Not that you need to ask for help, but you should be able to have a general appreciation in the public and a general awareness of how serious it is so that you don't get the taunting and the bullying and all the things that goes on about it and why you're so different and all of that. So, there's definitely a public health message around that at school level, at the wider society level.

PADDY GLASGOW: You brought up a point there, very interesting. To be different, sometimes, leaves you a bit isolated. All these things about being different, having allergies or whatever, should be embraced in the schools. And I think it's important that for anyone out there listening to the podcast to know that they're not alone if we say that.

And that there's people out there, like your good self, to talk to, I think. And that's important, too, because as your tagline goes, making food allergies your business. And I think it's important that is the case that everyone embraces, if there's a loved one, to know that you can go places. You can eat places, and you can be embraced and welcomed in places.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, I think if we're going to take being inclusive and being an equal society, I think that's at the heart of it, really, that everybody is different. There's no two people the same. And I think that's where we have to be and to accept that and respect that.

And just because somebody's a little bit different with food allergies or have different needs, either physically or otherwise, that, I think, is a testing of a caring society. We need to move socially. We need to have public health messaging around, how we keep people safe.

And I think what's interesting in this research the work environment wasn't as inclusive or as supportive as we would have imagined. Because the participants in our study were, aged from 22 to 60. And what they were saying over that particular stage of their life, whenever they were working, if they went into canteens, there may not be something for them to eat.

But also, whenever they were going out on work lunches or buffets were arriving, they may have paid lip service to it. But actually, if you had a buffet and spoons were getting changed about, there was really nothing there for people to eat. And also, then, if co-workers were mixing it up as well, the messaging around, well, it's just an intolerance, you'll be on the loo for the rest of the afternoon.

Whereas, people were going out of their way to say, well, this isn't just a tummy upset. This is going to make me really ill, and I could actually die from this. So there didn't seem to be even in that other layer of society within work environments.

PADDY GLASGOW: Understanding of it.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Understanding of it and the seriousness of it. Now, it isn't serious for everyone, but for people who have it, you never just know when it could be serious.

PADDY GLASGOW: Is there a way you get a pen or something you put around your neck, like the diabetes. You've got the MedicAlert Is that out there for...

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah, you do. You get what they're called MedicAlerts. You do get them. You can have them as necklaces, and you can have them as wrist bands. And you can wear them as just wrist bands or as metal bands. You can have them.

The danger with that is in, perhaps, a young adult group. And people don't tend to want to wear those things to be different. So, there's a message around that. We probably don't it very well with diabetes and epilepsy and different things like that. But we probably need to do a little bit more work on food allergy because it isn't given the same credence just yet in the public health messaging.

PADDY GLASGOW: Why I brought that up is seen an incident myself one time, where a medal wasn't being worn, and it was like a hypo. And I think it was a case of the person being young at that time and not wanting to wear it. But I think that people know they can make certain things that we put on look pretty cool for young people.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, that's right. We used to have badges. Whenever I was growing up, and it was a trendy thing to have badges on your jacket and all those things.

PADDY GLASGOW: And your back and all. So hopefully, that's something that young people will embrace. Just going back to about what we talked about being in the house, and we

talked about going out to eat. So, I suppose what we'll do now is we'll jump out of our own country.

And we'll hopefully land in some luxurious country that good people, like yourself, your daughter and all those people out there with allergies can just land on and have a good time, get a bit of sunshine, have a few drinks, and have some food and be safe as their country's doing it better than other countries.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, from our research, Spain and Portugal and Italy were picked up as places that were better at it. And again, it wasn't just we just land, and they were better just by choice or by chance. People who had researched it, who had spoken to people, and a great source of information is from support groups where people...

It's just anecdotal where people are saying, look, I've stayed here or I've stayed here, and that seems to be much more where people are gravitating towards that is the experience, where people are saying, this has been safe. And so they're following allergy groups, Facebook groups, and things like that.

And that seems to be where they were getting their messaging about where to go would be safe. But the other side of that is that they do a lot of preparation. They do a lot of preparation, and you can get translation cards which are free on the website.

And we can put the details up for that. You can get translation cards and get ready to go and have that with you. And the biggest challenge is people remembering to take their EpiPens out with them still in different places.

PADDY GLASGOW: Is that something, too, that you feel that young people might forget to take out, or has it got a stigma?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think it has got a stigma. There are two stigmas with it. I think we picked up really was there's a stigma that this is just a young person's problem. But what we were picking up in our research were that people up into their 30s. And even up, I think, our oldest person was in our 40s that wouldn't have taken her EpiPen with her all the time.

And there was a gender imbalance where men were saying, well, I don't take it out because I don't have anywhere to carry it, and I can't do it if I'm on bike. Because they're not small and the shape of them don't make it easy for men to put in their pockets or in their coats.

But I was surprised that women weren't putting them in their bags and taking them with them. So whenever we had asked for that, they were their risk assessment, they worked through a risk assessment in their head. And what they were saying, well, if I knew I was going out to eat, I would definitely take them.

But if I was going to work and somebody just said, after work, let's go for something to eat, I wouldn't have them with me. So, they just aren't thinking of it as the whole day. And they're thinking if they go to the shop, but you know and I know, if we go to the shop you could get talking to somebody, or you could end up in a cafe for a cup of tea.

PADDY GLASGOW: You looked at me there, talking to people. You're right there.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: You need to carry them with you from the moment. So one girl had said, ‘Look, I do. The way I get it into my head is, I take my phone. I take my purse, and I take my EpiPens. And that's my checklist’. So she works off that. And that seemed to be a nice way of remembering to take it.

PADDY GLASGOW: There may be a need for a hashtag then to go out and to have that, like an EpiPen is for life, isn't it?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: EpiPens, they're for life.

PADDY GLASGOW: They're for life. So you're totally right there. I mean, you put it on the top in the morning. You wouldn't go out with no top on. So at the end of the day, hopefully, the message here is have it on you all the time.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah, that's it. No exceptions.

PADDY GLASGOW: No exceptions. All the time. And so young or old, that's right.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Young or old, I suppose that is the message.

PADDY GLASGOW: And I suppose, sometimes, maybe people that are older, Claire, and diagnosed older, they think, that could not happen to me. I think this is very important to know that people out there that this is for everyone. We were talking, Claire, in the run up to this podcast. And I always found it extraordinary. If you want to tell the people out there, how many people in the world have an allergy and how many people can actually get access to going out to get food and join the troops of all that there.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, I think the statistics are rising across the world, how many people have food allergies. And unfortunately, I think, the challenge for us, and certainly, the challenge for me doing this research was trying to identify people from, say, a health service record that had a diagnosis of a food allergy.

There isn't a register of people that have a cancer register, where you have a cancer register and every postcode knows how many people with different cancers are in that area and services are directed that way. That doesn't exist for people at the moment that have food allergies. So what you can get is data, prescription data, and people have EpiPens.

But then, not everybody has an EpiPen for a food allergy. So it can be difficult to try and find a cohort to research. And I think the one thing, which would be really nice out of this was anybody who's studying research on food allergies would be to try and get some register that reflects that. And I know there is work going on with that so that would be good.

PADDY GLASGOW: And you've done a bit of research in that locally, didn't you? EpiPen for people out there, the different surgeries and things.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, whenever we looked at people who had food allergies locally, and we wanted to find out, roughly, what is people's understanding, how many people, the general public, when I asked them, they said, not too many people. Not too many people have a food allergy.

I don't know anybody with food allergy, they say. But then whenever we spoke to at the allergy clinic, where my daughter would go, they said, well, it could be as many as one in three people that have one or three children, certainly, in Northern Ireland could have a food allergy. And when I started thinking about that, I thought, well, you know, I'm not on my own, because I have a daughter who has it, but I don't know anybody else that has it. So where was the network of support and things like that?

So what was nice about doing this research was to try and find out how difficult or how easy it gets as people get older. Because the people in this research were in their 20s, right up to their 60s, but trying to see, were they grappling with the same issues I was grappling with as a parent.

PADDY GLASGOW: Or was there something they were doing that was helping?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Or something that was helping. And in many ways, there is examples of really good practice in the industry where there's a first new nut-free restaurant in England. And there were examples of good practice that could be shared.

But by and large, the message was, we don't go out really that often with a food allergy because of and they said there was like five key points come out of the research. And it was open and inclusive and transparent spaces to eat. So that meant an open menu, inclusive, that they knew everything was in it. And there was this attitude around protecting people and all of that.

PADDY GLASGOW: The customer is the most important.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: The customer is most important, and allergies were put front and centre. So what they talked about was instead of, come in and have a seat, it was more about here is our menu. Do you have any food allergies? Would you like to discuss that?

Because there was an overwhelming sense of embarrassment by the people we interviewed. That if they were escorted to the table, it was too late. Because then, they would have to get up and walk out through the place. So, they wanted to have that introduction about allergies very early on.

PADDY GLASGOW: And I'm sure, at times, they probably put their health under risk by just staying and eating because they were maybe embarrassed to get up and leave.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, what they would have said was, they would have readjusted what they would have ordered and at less of a meal or maybe just had a drink rather than risk eating something that they weren't sure of. But they wanted more choice.

They didn't think that it was enough the choice, if it was a menu that could be adjusted because they weren't getting the same dining experience. So they wanted more choice of food. They wanted to be treated the same. They don't want to be treated any different. They just want an equal playing field. They want to be able to walk...

PADDY GLASGOW: That's what inclusivity is about, isn't it? Everyone being the same. And it doesn't matter that in table one, everybody's grand, and able two, there's allergies. Table two, you should enjoy just as good as table one.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Well, that's it. And I think it was really interesting was that one of the ladies described, really, how whenever she arrives, she really assesses the whole environment. And she shuts herself off from the conversation that's in her group.

And she's really 100% dedicated to making sure she's watching the behaviour of the person who's taking the order. She's checking for understanding. She's double checking. When her party sit and talking about what they're going to do, she's watching where they're going. She's watching where they leave, everything.

PADDY GLASGOW: It has to be an obsession, or she feels she'll get out.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: But she's constantly watching the process because she's not getting the positive feedback back to say, listen, I'm taking your allergies really seriously. I have spoken to the chef. This is what we're doing or whatever. Or as you say, maybe the chef coming out for a five minute pause to check and that.

So that anxiety could be lessened a whole lot, if there was a way of actually giving positive feedback very early. And what then which he would describe then, as she was waiting on her order, she would normally be sitting, enjoying the conversation, saying about holidays and friends and family and all of that. But she was doing the watching, and she was doing the waiting. So, she couldn't relax.

PADDY GLASGOW: Just like the lighthouse. The light just going round and just going on around.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Yeah, she couldn't relax.

PADDY GLASGOW: She couldn't relax. And that there comes to a question. I would ask, Claire, is it a lonely journey for people working out what to eat and what not to? How would you speak to people out there, we, Paddy, or we, Claire, or anybody that has just been diagnosed and says you can't do this, this, this, and this. What's your experience been out? Just for other people out there and being a mother as well.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think it is. It's a very overwhelming place to be wherever... I think what you take for granted is that food is such a social part of everybody's life. It's part of your identity as any culture. It's something that brings emotion, and we use it for celebrations.

And we use it at sad times. We use it a lot in food. And so, food, because it's a fiber of most of our activity, it can be overwhelming whenever you said you can't have certain things because it could kill you. That's really what we're saying. The issue is, if it is one food allergy, it's probably easier to manage.

But if you have multiple food allergies, then you can have products that are gluten-free, but they have milk and egg, or we could have vegan products that are for people who have milk allergy, the vegan movement has been helpful. But it hasn't been helpful for those that have not allergies. So, it's really about making people understand that.

PADDY GLASGOW: The labelling of that, Claire, you were saying one time to me about that, sometimes, a certain food product, Paddy, could be called this in this country, or it's put under another name, maybe in another country.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think that's true because you can have different names for things. So if you take, for example, somebody who has a milk allergy, and you're expecting people to understand, the public to understand, the mums to understand, the people that have it do understand, and then the people who are cooking to understand, there are probably 50 different names for milk that could go on a label, that has milk in it, not necessarily milk, but there could be loads of different names.

You can have wye. You can have casein. You can have different things. But that makes it difficult then. And then if you're moving then into, say, a medical environment, then, sometimes, the names are in Latin or different things.

So, it's very hard for the public to understand that. And I think one example that came up of that in our research was where one of the participants had an allergy to nuts, and he went for the COVID vaccine. And he explained that he had an allergy to nuts.

And they said to him, look, can you read the ingredient on this vaccine and tell us, is there anything there that you can't have. And he said, well, I can't make them out. The most of them in Latin, and I wouldn't know.

PADDY GLASGOW: There you go.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: So, there's a barrier there as well.

PADDY GLASGOW: Labelling is another thing.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Label used ingredients and having them in a language that people understand. And there's a difficulty there for people who are in the catering industry, as well, if English isn't their first language. That's a difficulty as well. And it can be a barrier for them as well.

PADDY GLASGOW: That's perfect there, just to bring in about for people may be out there. I know it's not complete yet, but for The Open University research that you're doing, Claire, to coincide with the message through the podcast, there's an app as well.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: This is part of a wider project. And this is a knowledge exchange partnership project. We were working with the food sector to develop ways that the food businesses in Northern Ireland can actually adapt.

And so, we have a specification of an app, where we work with businesses to design that, where we can have this component in that. What we know from this research is that the public want people who are highly educated in what a food allergy is.

They understand the changes in their internal systems that will keep them safe, but they also want them to be directed to those places rather than have to spend so much time researching them themselves. So, part of this research was to find out and we asked the people in the study, what could the food industry do to make it more inclusive for you, make things better for you?

And what they said was, we want everybody to have a mandatory and mandatory was a very strong thing, a mandatory level of education on food allergies, the way that they have for food, hygiene. And whenever we talked about it, they talked about it as a basic level, but it was a universal level that everybody should have the same level of education on it.

But whenever you break that down into what that education would look like and how it would be delivered and things like that, the industry partners that we were working with were saying, this needs to be sure. It needs to be precise. And it needs to relate to the environment we're working in.

And it also needs to be portable. So that's where we thought about having a learning design part on the app. And the training record would go with the person. So, if somebody was working in one city and then decided to leave that job this week and go to work in another city, their record, the training record, the education record would be there.

Because, otherwise, the new employer has to pay at the moment for that. So, it was just to cut down and that make it a little bit more cost effective. So, we've picked up at the research, there are ways to do it, and it's just really how we move that forward then at the next stage. But the biggest bit for the people that had the food allergies was understanding. They wanted it, not just the education, but they wanted it regulated. So, they wanted the way that the eateries are regulated for hygiene, they wanted some level of regulation.

PADDY GLASGOW: A complete buy in the way that it is with the hygiene.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: A complete buy in, which would mean that everybody was taking food allergy seriously. And they wanted a visible symbol of that. And one of the participants had come up with a logo, a separate logo.

And then another participant had come up with this idea that it would just be included in the current hygiene five-star rating. And it would, perhaps, be purple because purple is the colour that the industry used at the moment for food allergies.

PADDY GLASGOW: They are.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: So that was where the thinking of that came from. So, the research has spun out quite a lot of ideas that are useful to industry. And it was useful. It's interesting, and we'll hear more about that on the third podcast, how one particular business has adapted.

PADDY GLASGOW: That's really good. And I think that the reason, I suppose, it brought that up was because you just sit there about language being a barrier. But an app's not a barrier, I think. To be honest, I think you're on the cusp of a wave. Is that what the saying goes?

So you may get on your best surfing board and go for it. What would you imagine it would be like in a world where people with allergies can be looked after and be part of an eating culture and be more embraced in society?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think we would have just the same social freedoms that most of the population enjoy at the moment, where you don't have to plan. You can just land in the spontaneity of living, the spontaneity of being social, of being part of a group, where you can go in and have the same burger and chips as someone else.

And it's not too far away. It's all within reach, that they can do that. It just requires making sure that there's, maybe, no wheat in the burger and making sure it's a different wrap and those

things. So, it's all possible. I think what came out of the research where people were saying traveling on ferries and planes and trains, they took their own food.

And with the exception of going on the Eurostar, which everything was detailed out. All the ingredients were on it because it was a French Chef who was actually preparing that works, that whole experience for them. But most people who are traveling for work or just traveling in general take their own food with them. The other bit about traveling was around the nut allergies on the planes. And one of the ladies had said, she had a nut allergy. And they put out the call to say no nuts on the plane. And 14 rows in front of her, somebody had opened a Snickers.

And so, she was absolutely sweating with anxiety on the plane because she didn't know. Because it's still a small, contained space. So, there's something about raising the social consciousness of people around how dangerous it is. But also, if there's any leverage around making some more concrete legislative work for airlines or different people. Because we do know of the tragedies that happen, and we do know of particular ones, the girl who died on the plane.

PADDY GLASGOW: That's right.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: And that's somebody's life. And we don't know if people have food allergy, we don't know if it's today or tomorrow or in 10 years' time, or if ever. But there's still that possibility. And when there's that heightened possibility, we need to take care of that.

So, I think what a town would look like is something that really just was vibrant and rich of the culture of taking care of people and being compassionate and understanding that food is a great social lever. And we can build community through food. And if we can build community through food, we can build an allergy awareness community.

PADDY GLASGOW: You're totally right there, Claire, because there's countries and cultures, it is food is their culture, and it is gathered. And on your thoughts going forward, things like who needs to know about the research, why they need to know, and what's the message, the statement that, from your research, you want to put out to industries, people, businesses. And what should we look forward to, you know what I mean, in the future.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: I think what we'd like the message out on the podcast. And the reason for the podcast is that we have this piece of research that we've been doing with as part of a wider project with the business industry, the food business industry.

And the reason for putting on podcast is that we know that people that work in these eateries and establishments, they're really just too busy to be sitting down reading an academic journal. So, we wanted to take the opportunity to put out what the findings are there to reassure them that there are ways of actually making it a more inclusive culture.

And to thank them for the efforts that they are making because they are making significant changes. And I know with 'Natasha's Law' that has come as a regulatory change. And I know businesses have struggled with that. And yet, in all, they're making it happen.

So really, that means so much to people who have allergies to know that it's being taken seriously. There's still a lot of work to be done. And I think what the message would be for the people who are listening to this, who are obviously going out to work in the industry is to take care of yourself in terms of raising your own knowledge of it, understanding, questioning if you're not sure understanding that, your responsibility isn't just with taking the order.

Your responsibility is when you receive the customer in, that you have a duty of care to them, and that you have to make sure that they're well cared for when they're there. And that is, sometimes, it might feel like going above and beyond in a busy restaurant when you're working, maybe a pair of hands down. But really, those things are really important. And a person who has allergies and made it known to you, it's just about checking in with them, making sure that you've got the message right, if you're not sure. If it's busy or noisy, going back, making sure that you've passed it over, double check, and again, taking pauses for safety.

We would talk about in health, taking pauses for safety and then coming back. And coming back and check in, once they've received the meal, just to make sure that after five minutes, they're OK. Because if there's something going to happen, if they're allergic, it'll happen relatively quickly. Then they can be rest assured with that. So that's what I would say to them is they're doing a good job. We need the message out more. We need more understanding around it. And we don't want people that are working in food industry to be frightened of it.

We have heard in our research of places where people who food allergy customers have gone in, and they've been asked to sign disclaimers by the owners to say, well, if you take an allergic reaction on it, but you've signed. You've waived your right here. So, we don't want it to become a culture like that. We want it to be seen very much as an open culture. But by the same token, we need people who have food allergies to be responsible as well, because they can't just absolve themselves of their responsibility.

PADDY GLASGOW: It's not a blame game, you say.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: It's not a blame game. No. It's a partnership. There's a meeting in the middle somewhere. And for the people, the eateries that are doing it and doing it really well, it's working fabulously well. And they are getting customers back, and customers come in twos and threes. So, they're building loyalty. So, their model could diversify of how they run their business. So, there's a real opportunity here for businesses. There's a real opportunity for people who produce food and label food. So, there's lots of opportunities within the whole

food allergy world in terms of making things that are ‘free-from’ food market has grown over the last five years.

So, we know there's a need. So, there's a lot of room in the system for innovation, to bring new products to market. But there's also room for people that, after the pandemic recovery, has been so hard on hospitality. There's room there for people to get re-energized when they're looking at their menus to think actually maybe, well, do I need to do something a little bit different?

If we know that maybe one in three people aren't eating out, there's a huge proportion of people that could be enticed to eat out if it was the right magnet to take them to it. I think in the UK, I think we do, do food really well. I think what we find is that it's hit and miss.

And we find, certainly, out of the research that it's not the same level of choice for people. So, if you like Indian, Chinese, or Thai, the majority of people who have food allergies would probably stay away from them, if they were allergic to dairy, eggs, and milk. Those sorts of things. And yet and all, they need not do that, if we were able to get the message out to them if businesses were able to make it more inclusive.

PADDY GLASGOW: Brilliant. Well, what I would say to the people out there with allergies, it's been a great pleasure chatting to you, Claire. And for people out there, definitely, these are the podcasts where, hopefully, you'll get a bit of peace of mind, a bit of knowledge. So Claire, thank you very much for coming in. It's been great chatting to you. I probably get you on again to chat for a game. And we maybe have a cook make up on.

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: We'll do a cooking show next.

PADDY GLASGOW: We'll have a cook up one for people out there. We may even get live audience. So, we got live audience, saying--

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: Why not?

PADDY GLASGOW: Cook a few muffins and a few brownies. You know what I mean?

CLAIRE MCGUIGAN: You know, dairy, eggs and milk, those sorts of things. And yet and all, they need not do that, if we were able to get the message out to them if businesses were able to make it more inclusive.

PADDY GLASGOW: Brilliant. Well, what I would say to the people out there with allergies, it's been a great pleasure chatting to you, Claire. And for people out there, definitely, these are the podcasts where, hopefully, you'll get a bit of peace of mind, a bit of knowledge.

So Claire, thank you very much for coming in. It's been great chatting to you and probably get you on again to chat for again. We maybe have a cook make up on.

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