**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Taskin Saleem**

**Project: Growing Old Gracefully - SubCo**

**Date of interview: 06/03/2018**

**Language: English**

**Venue: SubCo**

**Name of interviewer: Francis Ball**

**Length of interview: 02:25:25**

**Transcribed by: Francis Ball**

**Archive Reference: 2018\_esch\_GrOG\_01**

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*Interviewer*

Interviewee

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**[00:00:00]**

*Okay, it’s the 6th of March, and I’m interviewing Taskin Saleem as part of the SubCo project, at SubCo. Erm, could you give me your date of birth please just for the tape.*

Okay. 12th of February 1962.

*Okay, and where did you grow up?*

I grew up in South London.

*MmmHmm.*

We came from Pakistan when I was three years old, so my life has always been in South London, but my working life has been in, er, East London.

*Yeah. Do you remember Pakistan and moving, or…?*

Er, not from that young age. Obviously since I’ve been back and forwards since then, yes, but from three total blank [Laughs]. That was 1965 we came. And my father used to work for the Pakistani High Commission, so we came over then, then he decided to stay on. So been to, obviously primary school, secondary school has always been here, and university. So it’s as if I, you know, was born here but not quite, you know?

*Yeah.*

Yeah.

*What, what sort of work does the High Commission do? Is that sort of like an embassy?*

Yeah it’s an embassy. Yeah, it’s the same thing. So, erm, he was an accountant.

*Oh wow.*

So he ran the accounts department for them. So he was a diplomat but not on the other side, it’s more on the, on the day to day stuff really. And it’s based in, erm, Sloane Square. I think it’s still there now. So yeah. So we lived in Fulham originally for that about first… trying to remember… five, six years of our lives—of my life I should say—and then we moved to Southfields in, in again in South London as well. And we stayed there until ’83, which is when we moved to, erm, East London.

*Oh right.*

And again it’s ‘cos my father transferred, erm, his job, ‘cos he was brought into what’s called then the British Gas Board. And he was an accountant in their department, and the work changed so he expectant, so we came to live in East London. And it was a culture shock coming to East London [Laughs] It’s very different from South London.

*So what were the differences?*

I think in terms of… I mean there is an Asian community in South London, but it wasn’t as concentrated as when we moved into Manor Park. Erm, I hadn’t seen so many Asian people in that environment before apart from when we used to go shopping at the weekends or something like that, so that way, seeing all the shops and everything, erm, the neighbours… It, it was, it was a bit of a culture shock growing up in quite a white environment and then coming to something that was very mixed as well. Erm, so I was just the last couple of months of my degree when we moved to East London, so it wasn’t too bad the journey back and forward for a couple of months, and then after that it was just looking for work and things like that, so as I said my growing up was all in South London but all my working life has been in East London.

*So did you go to university in London as well then?*

Yeah, it was called the Roehampton Institute. Erm, it’s, er, a teacher training college, but it also did other degrees. Originally I thought I was gonna be a teacher. After six weeks I thought, ‘I can’t control children’—I’m not a control freak—then I went on to do sociology and education as a combined degree. So if I did wanna go back to teaching, you know, afterwards as a post-grad student I could catch up quite quickly, but I thought, you know, all these thing about disciplining kids in the classroom back in the ‘80s—it was a whole different world back then.—It wasn’t as, as, as I’d say it so fluid as it is now, and I thought that wasn’t me. So I was more into community work. Erm, so I’ve always done community work as a result of that. So when I graduated I was unemployed for about six months. And during that time I actually, ‘cos I was in East London by now, I was looking for voluntary work so, as everybody does, you write to the local authority and go, ‘Have you got any volunteer jobs?’, and they, erm, redirected me to an Asian organisation that’s working with young people. And they were going to be doing a summer camp, so it was like, er, ‘Can you go and help there as a volunteer’. And, and I went there and I think, er, first within three weeks we’d organised a camping trip for sixty kids up at Debden [Laughs]. And they were all Asian children, which was, again, quite new to me as well, where it wasn’t mixed at all. Erm, so we did that, and then I think aft-, then I… Then I got some other voluntary work as a result of that with what was then called the Newham Council for Racial Equality, in Newham. And, again, there’d been quite a lot of racist attacks at the time, and I was being drawn into some of that with some of the work that I was doing in the community, I think, and the voluntary work, working with young people being picked up by the police. Erm, and, er, so I got involved with the Newham Council for Racial Equality as a volunteer again. So I think I volunteered with them for about three months before I got my first post, erm, which was in Redbridge. And I still kept on working with young people in the youth club. There was an Asian youth club that had been set up by the council, so I was doing some sessional work there, and it was mostly young men, and they had, erm, a group on Wednesdays which was for young Asian women, but it was still very new concept of having a youth club for Asian women. Erm, and these were young women who were still at school, er, between fourteen… I think they were fourteen to sixteen at that time. So it was once a week. We had, we’d had that XXXX [00:05:39] Asian, the girls worked there. And then I got my job in Redbridge with the, it was the, an organisation working with women and young irls. So it seemed quite a nice progression. And I worked there for a couple of years. Er, and then I came back to Newham… [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

… and worked with the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, and doing… It was a new unit they set up to do community work as well as advise surgeries, and it was all about welfare rights and housing. And that was based in Canning Town at that time, in 1985, ’86, er, eighty-, no… ’84… ’84, sorry. ’84? I’m using my… ’84, ’85, yeah, that’s right. Erm, and Canning Town at that time was very different to what it is now. It was a quite racist area. And we were in, above an advice centre right at the top of the roundabout where—I don’t know if you know Barking Road—where the Canning Town station is. It’s just there: past Community Links and Anchor Trust, but they… It used to be… you know, sometimes you’d leave like six o’clock thinking, ‘Mmm, maybe I should’ve left a bit earlier.’ Especially in winter, ‘cos you’d get a few comments and things like that. But, again, it’s about that resilience and that support, really, that you had around you. So I worked there for a few years, erm, and then I came to work back for another voluntary organisation called Eastwoods Trust. And that was working with As-, Asian elders. And I also worked for community links;’ I did part time initially at both places. And Community Links, again, it was around advice and information service. So, erm, I did quite a lot of young girls’ work and women’s work there as well.

*What was it like making the shift from working with young girls and women, to working with elders?*

It, it was, erm… I wasn’t sure what to expect [Laughs] because apart from my parents there were not older people around us who I would say were in their sixties or seventies. So, apart from coming across people maybe when you’re shopping I really didn’t have any contact with older people. So it was quite… Again, it was another shock, culture shock in many ways, ‘cos you’re working with a whole different age group. Erm, and, and then it was looking at, er, a lot, for a lot of them, English wasn’t their first language, so although I speak Urdu and Hindi I didn’t speak it as fluently back then, ‘cos I hardly ever used it: I spoke English all the time. So, you know, I had to learn quite a lot of the language in conversations and discussions with them. So, in many way ways, you could see it as like a learning partnership really! [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

So I think that helped quite a bit. But in terms of the needs of older people, you know, I could see they were very similar to working, when you’re working with young people in terms of not getting support and services. But, again, being Asian elders, it was this whole thing about not feeling part of society, that you’d just been discarded by your own families. Because the expectation then was that you’d be looking after, looked after by family or relatives as you grew older. And a lot of them, when Eastwoods, when I worked there, was only one scheme at the time for men. It was nine bedsits, and they were, most of them were seventies and above, erm, and a lot of them had been originally from East Africa. So they’d come over when Idi Amin, erm, er, you know, there was this big exodus because he didn’t want Asian people in the country. So they came and a lot of them knew India and Pakistan, but they hadn’t really grown up there. Their home was actually East Africa. So they was having quite a culture shock. So for me, working with older men from a wholly different environment, it took me a while. I was a development worker there; I was there for about six years. And, and, erm, but I think, again, because of the community work angle, it was all about welfare rights, housing, legal… I t was like a natural progression in many ways as well. And there were a lot of issues around racism at the time in terms of housing as well: trying to get housing if you’re an older person. There were lots and lots of difficulties there. So linking up with organisations that worked in the borough. For instance we had Newham Monitoring Project, we had Shack East London, which was a housing organisation which merged into Shelter which works a lot with vulnerable people and homeless people. So there was about four or five different organisations that we used to work with around trying to get services for, for different communities, particularly Asian, African, Caribbean communities. So, you know, again, Asian elders were in Newham, Asian community was in Newham, but it’s very different to what it is now. I mean, Green Street I remember there were just two, one boutique, one Asian boutique and that was it, and one grocery store. Manor Park had a little bit more. The rest were just ordinary chains really, er, er, and lots of white grocery stores as I would call it. So, having seen that change and Asian elders working along that, it, it, it was quite different.

*When did that change sort of happen on Green Street?*

I think in the… Let’s see: when I was… Around in the mid-‘80s you could actually see that changing. Erm, and you could see in terms of jewellery shops that started, you know, coming [Laughs] so people got money. But food and restaurants, they were the main things. Clothes it seemed to come a little bit later, but they, that was in the mid-‘80s, erm, seeing that change. But with Boleyn, the Upton Park, where West Ham used to be, you used to have that there as well, and a few pubs that were quite racist at the time as well. And the national Front used to come down. So there was quite a lot of street mobilisation going on and defending people’s rights to walk down the street on football days, and not having, you know, racist comments made at them, erm, particularly at any time, whenever you go, even now, erm, you know, the pubs are there, if there’s an overflow onto the streets, but, you know, a lot of the time people don’t say anything. But there was quite a lot and it was quite difficult. So I think a lot of businesses kept away for a long time because of that, but I think as the population started increasing in terms of Asian, the needs were there, you could actually see the change in the number of shops and the kinds of shops that actually started coming up. Erm, and now I think there’s only one pub left on Green Street [Laughs] It’s there were the Queen’s Market is. The other ones have actually closed. Actually, the whole of Green Street I think that’s the last one there. And I think although the Asian communities do drink, they don’t tend to do it so much in pubs in the same way as some, some other communities do. And, plus, I think for the price you can get from supermarkets it’s a lot cheaper as well. So there’s lots of different issues around that when pubs closing as well. Er, and, and, erm, I think, you know, with, with SubCo and Eastwoods Trust and the other organisation I worked with the council as well, erm, I’ve always had that interest in community work. So when I left Eastwoods Trust it was actually to go and work for the council as a race equality officer, again because of all the experiences I’d had working with older people but also other age groups as well. It was, the idea was around, erm, looking at how service could be provided for BME communities, but also, erm, how to challenge racism in housing and in services both from staff as well as service users. So the whole, the whole laying of the, because there were six of us at a time where we had different remits around what we did. And I did older people and adults in terms of residential and day care. And it was also about how you recruit staffs and retain them to work with Asian elders in homecare situations, and the racism that used to come from staff to Asian elders and back again. So we used to have to deal with all of that and have… Er, we used to… I’m trying to remember: I think they called racist harassment panels in those days. And it was around, as I said, around services or staffing or other service users making comments, and having to investigate that. But also doing a lot of training and support work with existing staff about the importance of needing to change, but also around people helping them to understand different needs of different communities. So if you’re going into homecare, going into some homecare or to help, you know, certain, you know, erm, ways you would, you would, er, address and treat individuals, of things you need to take into consideration, and the fact that they were Asian didn’t mean that everyone was the same. You have lots of different religions, different languages, different dietary needs. And if you’re doing something so personal as that, you had to understand that. So we used to do a lot of training as part of our role as well.

*Were the staff quite receptive to that training?*

We had a mixture! [Laughs] It was very hard work, erm, because, also, it was something that’s coming down from the council, it’s comeing from the unions, that it had to happen because we were living in a multicultural society. And a lot of the staff that were home help particular in those days and worked in residential and day care were white and Irish, erm, erm, particularly women; there was a majority of women in care work. And, obviously, there were some who had that colour-blind approach—‘everybody’s the same’—but other’s it was like, ‘They’re taking over.’ And, you know, when you have accusations made you’d have to look into that. So there was quite a lot of resistance in terms of, ‘Who do we think they are coming in and telling them how to do their work?’ Erm, but I think… I mean I had to XXXX [00:15:39] I had residential and day-care, so I was at that quite high level needs I would say, I mean and the others were doing children and, and people with learning disabilities and mental health, so there was some cross-over but, but because you had people living in certain schemes, seven days a week, day in and day out, their needs had to be met in a certain way, and then it was, it was getting the staff along to do that. And I think where we succeeded I would say is where the managers were supportive of what was trying to be achieved in Newham. It’s where the managers weren’t supportive that there were issues. And, and that, unfortunately, led with a couple of managers to, to be investigated and HR was involved, you know Human Relations all those sorts of things and warnings about they had to change their styles and make it more open and receptive. But, even then, in the service in, in the council Black and Asian elder, er, staff weren’t staying. They had a very through, you know, there’d be there for a few months or a year then they’d be gone. And it’s because of the resistance they have from colleagues and also managers as well. So that was a big, big issue. And that led, I think, to the council looking at how to work with voluntary and private sector where needs could be met in a different way, and where staff could be retained to provide services. So in one, in one way I started the work in, erm, the council around that. And it’s not just me, it was the whole team. And there were some very sympathetic council officers and workers, right through senior management. But it did mean that there was a big change going on at the time, and also, around that time, the NHS Community Car Act came in, where there was a big drive again service users were being provided in the community for the community, and that cultural and religious needs had to be met. And so there was quite a lot of pressure and drivers for the council to do something. And they had to do that through our… whether it’s children adults or older people. Erm, and I think because of the… I suppose in many ways that some of our background was in housing in Newham, and working with older people, when they did have an amount of funding to set up services for older people it seemed actual that something like SubCo came into being. Because when we tried to, as I said, tried to retain staff within the council, tried to provide services for elders in the council, it was very, very difficult. So a lot of the time families would say and elders would say, ‘We don’t want the service from the council.’ They’d start and then they’d go away because of the racism they were facing. Or, you know, both, overtly but also covertly as well, and also institutional racism as well because people weren’t meeting their needs. And if you’re quite frail and you’ve got high level needs it’s, it’s like, it feels like a battle that you’re never winning to get services. And I think it’s bad enough for any community, but when you don’t have, you know, when you’ve got additional issues around the aging process, erm, happening earlier in Black and Ethnic Minority communities—there’s a lot of evidence to show that—people would just like withdraw from services, so there was no safety net. And the only time they came back in contact was when there were crises. So the council… So with this building, for instance, and I was working at the council at the time, this was, was, er, funded by the then Greater London Council, the GLC, at the time, and there used to be an Asian senior citizen organisation here, and the council also gave bits of funding as well. But I think there was this whole thing about misuse of funding, so everything was taken away. And the council then had about seventy-, I think about seventy-six-thousand pounds to set up a service for Asian elders. And it was like, ‘Ooh! Dreams come true!’ [Laughs] Almost, you know. And, and the idea was to look at, ‘cos remember for many years there was what’s called an Asian elders consultative group made up of different communities working with Asian elders, and a lot of the unmet needs have been identified, some of which I’ve spoken about already. But there was something about having an, an organisation that wasn’t based on religious grounds in Newham, because, again, any services that were around were based on religion. So trying to have something that was for everyone was quite a new concept. Erm, and with this funding XXXX [00:20:19] got some really good idea. ‘cos you know we were talking about it and everyone hammering away for a long time. And so for a whole year, erm, they set up a consultative group to decide on what services were needed for this new organisation. So there’s, you know, so the steering group was made up of community leaders what they called at the time, council officers, councillors, older people themselves—so they were able to fashion what was going to be the original SubCo…

*MmmHmm.*

… which was about, erm, providing services for Asian elders in the community. Ern, and then, also, looking at how you work with frail elders. But they thought the first thing, let’s start with one thing, and having things like luncheon clubs started off with two workers, and providing, you know, ten, twelve people initially. A lot of it was drop-in services. Although there was a minibus available to bring some of the frail elders in, a lot of people used to make their own way for the first couple of years. And I think, because of the development work that happened in the first two years, and getting branded in the community, you know, social services noticed—and I was there at the time—that we were getting more referrals from the Asian community because it seemed like, you know, people knew there was somewhere to go now that they felt comfortable. Word of mouth, all those sorts of things: it happened. And then SubCo started working with frailer elders as well, people who were recovering from strokes, people who had some confusion maybe and physical disabilities, but not dementia or anything at that stage. Erm, and then…

*Sorry, just to…*

Yeah?

*… back-track a bit, was it easy to, kind of, draw these different religious communities together and…*

Right, yeah…

*… provide for their needs?*

Yeah, I think that there’s was that whole year of thrashing all of that out, and that’s why I think some, some of the organisation slowly came in as they were represented, like the local Gurdwara or the Hindus or the Mosque, they came in to explore on when they were on the committee about ‘What is this organisation going to look like? Is it going to be a threat for us?’ And there was some resistance, erm, from the, erm, some of the communities in Newham, because they felt it was going to be set up as a Muslim organisation, and, again, that’s because of my involvement, because I was working for the local authority then as well, er, and I was a Muslim woman in the borough, but I wasn’t covering at the time. I didn’t used to wear the hijab at the time, but I was still seen as a threat. And I think because of their own views of how they set up organisations, it’s like you say it’s one thing, but it’s actually something else. So they, lot of them, felt it was particularly it was particularly from the Hindu community at the time, and it was the right-wing Hindu community for the BJP, which is very similar to National Fonrt. So it wasn’t I would call, I would say the Hindu community as a whole, it was a particular faction that was saying, ‘No! Subco’s going to be set up as a Muslim organisation, and Taskin is, you know, not going to be letting any of us in!’ Although at the time, I didn’t work for, for SubCo, as I said, I worked for the local authority. And, and because of those accusations, as the first year was coming to the end where they had all the consultations and how they’re going to set up the new organisation, it was decided that the organisation was going to be a charity to the limited company. So in order for that to happen you had to have what’s called an inaugural general meeting where you elect a new committee. And these factions went to the chief executive at the council back then and to the director of social services. They were making so much noise, saying the, the, ‘The elections are going to be rigged! All Muslims are going to be’, you know, er, ‘brought in onto the committee and they’re gonna set Muslim organisation!’ And, although the director of social services, Deborah Cameron, and the chief exec, whose name will come to me in a little while, they knew that wasn’t the case but they had to make sure that everything was transparent, so the actual chief exec actually oversaw the elections for the first, erm, meeting, at the first meeting. Erm, and it was… And this was unheard of, that, actually, the chief executive of a local authority actually coming in to oversee the elections with the director of social services and the deputy director, because, again, they wanted to show whatever happened on the day, it was nothing to do with me [Laughs] who was heavily pregnant at the time as well! [Laughs] Erm, and, and, and there was some questions asked at the meeting, ’cos obviously I was at the meeting about, ‘How do we know that this, these elections are fair and transparent? How do we know that it’s not returning to a Muslim organisation?’ So people in those days were very up front about saying that. Erm, and then people had stood for the elections, it was a very mixed community; you had people of Sikh background, Hindu background, Muslim background, and the different factions within that. Erm, and it was a new committee was elected, and then it was uop to them, then, to, you know, confirm that it’s not going to be a Muslim organisation. And also, as I said, because of first time an organisation had money before they came into being—it had been allocated—so it’s normally the other way round: you’d have an organisation then applies for funding. So people… That’s why I think people thought the money was, you know, going to be syphoned off, you know, all these religious causes for Muslims and things. So, again, it was a very difficult first two years, I think, for, for the committee to get its feet together. There was quite a lot of, erm, infighting. I think some of the people that you’ll be interviewing who were there from the beginning, they’ll probably know more about that because I was an employee at the council so I don’t know… Well, I know in terms of hearsay, but I was actually at those meetings and what they had to do to toe the line and all those sorts of things. Erm, so, so there was, it was brought, it was bought, it was born [Laughs], you know, in, in, in, in a time, in a climate, in the ‘90s really, where things in terms of racism were still quite high, but then you had the internal prejudices from, you know, Asian communities. Again, that was very difficult to deal with as well. Erm, and the interesting thing: the first two workers happened to be Muslim [Laughs], which was really interesting, and that was nothing to do with me, and one of them was female and she was quite open that she was a lesbian as well, so, again, there was quite of a lot of stereotypes were being blown out the window, so it, it was quite, you know, interesting to see that. Erm, and then, I think within about eighteen months we were able to get funding for a volunteers co-ordinator for, for SubCo as well, who was, erm, Chinese. Erm, ‘cos one of the things when SubCo was set up it was seen as Asian community as in far east. I know in America they say Asian to mean like, you know, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese… So SubCo at that time was very much around that as well. So two days had been put aside by the council as, as for Chinese elders. And so the, it was, that’s where it was quite good mix to have that actually within the staff team in initially. And, and it was a good partnership in terms of, er, working together, but also having separate identities at the same time. And, and, and then with all the, as I was saying before with the NHS Community Care Act, saying that services now needed to have provided in the community, and the best places were, er, voluntary organisations who could be skilled up to deliver. But, again, we, we also had the issue with organisations like SubCo where you didn’t have skilled workers who were Asian, who had qualifications to work in this sector because they never saw it as a career. A lot of them saw, felt at that time that it was very downgrading, you know, to go to do a job to go into somebody’s house and clean, or you come to a centre and you’re looking after elders and you’re doing personal care. They found that very diffi-, very difficult concept. So, at SubCo, initially, there was quite a lot of work done, I would say, in the first five years trying to change that around, and that happened as the needs of peoples changed as well, when they needed higher levels of care, and getting people to get qualifications. So at that, you know, originally people came in without qualifications, but while they were in SubCo they were able to get the qualifications that were required at the time, and then obviously since then there’s all, there’s a whole raft of qualifications people can go for. But also people began seeing it as a career, coming to work with older people. Because in the Asian community people were working with young people, but no one ever worked with older people. So even trying to get that in as a career was quite difficult. So, you know, we did link up with local schools and colleges and adult education classes, and people would come in and do placements, say, ‘Yes, possibly could be a career’. And then on top of that we had issues around, erm, personal care: male-to-male, female-to-female. So initially, erm, under the Race Relations Act you, you could actually employ people of particular ethnic origin who meet the cultural personal care needs of older people. Erm, and so you could, you know, under Section 52D you could do that under the Race Relations Act, you could actually recruit people into those posts, which is what we did. But the other issue we had was that men didn’t want to have personal care from women, Asian men, and the Asian women didn’t want it from men, because they saw it as invading on their privacy. So for a long time we had male only and female only, erm, but it was very hard to recruit males [Laughs]…

*Mmm.*

… into care work. So, initially, again, a lot of people didn’t need too much personal care. It’s as the men grew older it became more of an issue. Erm, and we were able to recruit some, some younger men in those roles and then get the qualified. But it took a long time, I would say it took five, six years to break through that. And, and trying to get men to accept the fact that a younger Asian woman could actually do some personal care, and the same for women where men. ‘Cos there’s a whole thing in their minds about sexual abuse and things like that, so we understood all that, but, at the same time, sometimes it just wasn’t possible. We physically couldn’t recruit people. So what we used to do is, erm, you know, volunteers, erm, from the management committee members who we trusted to do certain things, they would come in and support when, because they were this, because a lot of volun-, a lot of the management committee used to live locally as well, so you could come and do that. but that wasn’t a long term solution: it was just in the short term. And I think once people started trusting the organisation and the ethos and the principals, then we could see the change. Then they started accepting some of it. Even now, you know, we still always make sure that it’s the individual’s preference, so ninety-nine percent of the time it will be male-to-male, female-to-female, but it’s not one hundred percent because of depending what’s happening on that day, who’s sick, who’s in on work. But, again, people are, you know… Oh, I was saying in the last ten, fifteen years: ‘You’re like my daughter, you’re like my granddaughter.’ So that whole concept of sexualisation that has gone out the window. So you actually saw them as a family member who’s actually supporting them, and that’s the way we’ve tried to play it at SubCo for many years. And they say we’re like a surrogate family in order to provide the care that we do.

*And I guess you’ve built up these sort of closer relationships as you’ve been working with these service users.*

Yes, yes, over years, you know, ‘cos, again, sometimes people came in quite healthy, it was more about depression and loneliness, but over ten, fifteen years, their health deteriorates and they need more personal care. So they have that trust there. So even though staff may change, they still have that trust in SubCo. And also we don’t have a high staff turnover rate, which is really good. So you know people tend to be here five, six, ten, fifteen years. Maybe more. Erm, so, again, you know, even though that person who comes in new may not know the staff, they get the reassurance from other service users about how we’ll work with them. So I think that makes a lot of difference really in terms of that. So even though SubCo was set up, we still had to campaign very hard for the rights of Asian elders in terms of how assessments were done by social workers, by GPs, by district nurses, and sitting on panels where you actually had influence of how the forms should be collated, what information you could go into there. And, again, I think it helped because I had that social services background when I came into SubCo. So having worked on both sides, I could see the issues on both sides, and I think because of that I was able to probably get into quite, erm, senior meetings, and trying to influence some of that change: not just for SubCo but for elders in general really in the community. And building up strong links with African-Caribbean community organisations as well as Age… Newham… Age Concern Newham it used to be called then; now it’s called Age UK East London. But, you know, all the different groups there would became more of a, erm, er, campaigning group in many ways for rights of older people, whether it’s housing, health, social care, leisure. It’s trying to make sure that services were available for Asian elders. And the language issues and the barriers that were all there. So trying to work with all those, and, I mean, I’ve seen… There’s been a lot of change over the last twenty-five years. Yeah, twenty-five years, in terms of where we were. As I was saying, back in the early ‘90s to where we are in 2018. We are still struggling in certain issues, but it’s, it’s, it’s a different type of battle now. It’s more around resources. In those days the resources were there, but it was the understanding wasn’t there. And here you’ve got a bit of both now. Erm, so even, even today when we’re doing, er, assessments for people to come in to SubCo, we’re happy to carry them out because the social workers haven’t done the right assessments: they’ve gone in, they’ve done an assessment, but somehow they’ve missed so much information around that individual. And it may’ve been because they didn’t take an interpreter in, or it may be, which is sometimes the case, the elders and families say, ‘We can do this things’, because… or, ‘We can’t do anything!’ So you’ve got lots of things XXXX [00:33:53] there, and also to the experiences of the social workers as well. Erm, so, where, where we’ve seen that in terms of health and social care and how it’s changed, it’s, it’s a constant change going on, erm, with how services are provided, how people are assessed, how the, er, and how they’re funded. So again with SubCo originally we had grants from the local authority. So you’d get grants, apply for them four times a year, the money was there, you’d do reports. And based on all of that you’d get the next call to grants. Then the government changed the, the emphasis on grants and said it had to go to contracts. And then that’s when you saw lot of the voluntary organisations actually becoming more suspicious of each other. Because when it was grants it was you… This is the need, this is what I get the money for. But with the contracts culture you’re actually competing against each other in more of a business model. And, before, we also used to sit on each other’s management committees to support each other. But with the contracts culture that came in, it was all about intelligence and people not being able to share that. So, so you could actually see that it started disintegrating, the voluntary sector, because people were becoming more competitive in a business model.

*When, when did that change sort of…?*

This happened around… Let’s see… towards the beginning of 2000. And so it was, it was, er, it was, erm, a shift from grants and then suddenly you could see saying, ‘No. You’ve got to meet certain standards if you’re going to go for contracts. It was much, much, much more difficult. So with grants you had to do an application form, you had to do budgets and job descriptions, that was fine, but now were asked to be using like business models, and voluntary organisations weren’t used to doing that, and doing what was called full cost recovery. So you had to claim everything back. And it wasn’t all about good will, it was about charges, all those sorts of things. So in, in, in, in the end of ‘90s, beginning of 2000 you saw that changing. The voluntary sector how it worked with each other started changing as well, and people started going in different directions and not sharing information. So the lobby we used to do as groups at the council became very individualised. Erm, and with the contracts, by 2005—I know when we got the first contract for day care—erm, it was so competitive that people stopped talking to each other! [Laughs] Erm, because you had to, literally… ‘cos, ‘cos, again, you had to literally fight each other for it, if, in terms of unit cost. So you could justify with your overheads how much you’d be charging the council per individual. Some organisations just couldn’t get their heads round that. And, luckily for us, because we’d already been doing day care (and to quite a frail client group) we, we, we were aware of those costs. Other organisations thought we were making it up, er, and it’s what, and actually what we put in is what the council actually wanted, in their minds, wanted to fund more or less. Erm, but it also became very restrictive, er, and lots of voluntary organisations, you know, if you’ve got a group today fifty, sixty people can walk in no problem, with contracts, if you say it’s twenty-five, your maximum is twenty-five, health and safety records, all those sorts of issues, but also they will only pay for those individuals, erm, and, and so the way people had to think was very, very different, Erm, and they also tried to develop partnerships with, erm… So they wanted a more integrated approach. So they didn’t want SubCo there, an African-Caribbean organisation there, and a White service organisation there. So part of the contract in 2005, when we had to bid, was that we would operate from what was the day centre at Chargeable Lane at the time, which was one of the bigger day centres for older people, erm, and how would we work together. So we had to put in bids about that. But, you know, you had social services centre had all the facilities. Afro-Caribbean community was given one room, SubCo was given another room. And, and then, you know, and you were in that part of the building, everybody else was over there, so it was like, ‘Okay, you want us to work together, but you’re putting us, you know, in different parts of the, erm, different parts of the centre?’ And plus you had to eat and do all of your activities in the same room, so where was the integration going on? So, again, we had to work really hard at SubCo to work, trying to work with elders through events and parties and activities, and, and, again, African-Caribbean community were doing the same. So we had a much better, erm, dialogue going on, erm, and I had some with the senior managers from the social services part of day care, but at the, erm, ground level there was a lot of friction, racism there as well. This was 2005 ‘til about 2009 that we were there. And so under the contract we could operate… Originally, they wanted us to operate four days from that centre, and one day at SubCo. And, but we were able to negotiate two days here and three days there. So that was a minefield in itself. And it, and it… And at that time it was just the day care part of it, wasn’t all the other projects. So we then had to develop projects for, erm, the needs that were not being met, because you could only go to the day centre if you had certain needs as well within Chargeable Lane, whereas here it’s a bit more flexible. And all the sort of, there they were very rigid, you know? If you wanted to go to the toilet you weren’t allowed to go to the toilet on your own…

*MmmHmm.*

… in their centre, and we disagreed with that totally. We said, ‘No! People are grown up. If they want to go and they can go on their own they need to people able to go on their own. If they need support that’s a whole different area. But how can…?’ ‘We see your elders wandering around!’ ‘They’re not wandering around, they’re going to the toilet!’ [Laughs] And they weren’t allowed to go into the garden on their own. You know all those sorts of issues? Staff had to always be present.

*Did that sort of bureaucracy come in as part of, erm, the sort of post 2000…*

Yes it was. And it was also around people very much risk averse. They weren’t, in terms of risk assessment, taking risks. So, you know, if a person went into the garden, were they capable? You had to do a risk assessment. And how many staff you’d have to need to be present if they wanted to do that. The same if they wanted to smoke. All those sorts of things. Erm, and everything had to happen in the centre, and at SubCo we’d been so used to doing things in the community, going on trips, going on, erm, if an organisation is having an open day, if elders were interested organising that with our minibus, taking people out, coaches to seasides and things like that. They never did that in local authority day centres. So, again, that was very difficult for them, because they, they, the service users would know that we’re going away and would want to come along, but somebody might fall, something might happen… They never used to go anywhere. I think they did some pub lunches but by the time we got them that, even that stopped. Erm, but then what we were able to work with activity with the dementia unit, ‘cos we were able to, er, have a dialogue with them to… If they had any, you kow, service users who wanted to go on trips, we would work with their staff to come and do that. So there was a risk involved, but it’s SubCo’s risk in many ways. And as a result of that we started working with the dementia unit, because what they found, again, was that they weren’t getting referrals of Asian elders into the dementia unit. So there were lots of discussions with senior managers in SubCo about if we could second staff into the dementia unit and work around that. Erm, so when Asian elders came in they could see Asian staff.

*Mmm.*

Why didn’t they recruit Asian staff per se in their normal…? But they didn’t. They didn’t even try to recruit. So we had a good partnership for two, three years that we were funded to do that. But, again, you could, but, again, I think the practices between the voluntary sector and the statute was too diverse. Erm, it was too difficult so it led to more friction. So when we tried to set up… Well, we did set up a stroke project with the local, with that centre as well. The way they wanted to operate it and the way we operated was very, very different. Theirs was very controlling. It’s a bit like, I was saying at the beginning, being in a classroom, having to be a teacher. You’ve got to do things in a certain way. It was like there was nothing left to individualising to what that individual’s need was. It was more about what I was saying for the organisation. You might get sued. All those were back of their minds. And in many ways it wasn’t, I don’t think it was the staff, it was their fault. It was more about inherent what the local authority brings down as well. So there was lots of tensions about how you run services. So that was brewing and then, and then the crunch came, [Laughs] as these things do, when an allegation was made of one, about one of our staff who worked in the, erm, the dementia unit at Chargeable Lane, that she was a terrorist. And it was like… And this individual had been working there for about a year-and-a-half, maybe two years she was working. Great relationships with all the staff, used to take them home in her car, whatever, and, and again, this stuff that I’m talking about I think it’s all in the background and all this, you know, setting up the stroke project, and all of a sudden, you know there was an allegation made. And I remember because we at SubCo had gone out for a meal, all the staff team, and I kept getting these phone calls in the evening ‘cos we were all fasting at the time we were going to be opening our fast. It was Ramadan. So at eight o’clock the senior manager ringing me, and I thought, ‘That’s… Why’s he ringing? Why’s he ringing?’ I, I, you know, ‘I’ll sort it out when I go home.’ But after about five missed calls, voicemails, it was about nine o’clock at night when I got home, and it was like, ‘Taskin I need to see you tomorrow. It’s urgent!’ ‘What is it about?’ ‘I can’t tell you over the phone. You have to come and see me first thing tomorrow morning.’ But I said, ‘Can you just give me any indication?’ ‘No I can’t. You’ve got to come and see me.’ And he ran the whole of, er, adult social services at the time, so it wasn’t just for older people. And I was thinking… And we had a very good relationship. So I went in, he says, ‘Do you know an allegation’s been made?’, and I said, ‘Excuse me? Of what kind?’, ‘That one of your staff is a terrorist!’ I nearly went, ‘What the ‘F’?!’ [Laughs] I did say that actually! ‘What the fuck?!’ [Laughs] He goes… I said, ‘Sorry! Sorry!’ I said, ‘What did you say?’ He goes, ‘An allegations been made by…’ I said ‘Who made it?’ They wouldn’t even tell us who it, who’d made it, or who it was against, initially, and what the evidence was. And I… You know it was like a shock thing going on, thinking, ‘What’s going on?’ And I said, ‘Well I need…’ I said, ‘Before I can have any more discussion with you, I need to talk to my management committee. Also we need to know who’s making the allegations or what the allegations are at least if they, if they’ve got to be anonymous. We need to know that. And then we can take action.’ So had to have… So we couldn’t work out why, who this… At that time we didn’t know it was this particular staff member. We were just so flabbergasted. And then this… Within forty-eight hours we got the information that it was this particular member of staff, and it’s a senior member of staff making the allegation, which was reported to her. ‘Can we have the date, the time, what it was about?’ ‘No. But she may refer it to the terrorist police.’ And they didn’t have whatever they’re called XXXX [00:48:22] at the time, all of that, just they were called, you know… The anti-terrorist squad it would be.

*MmmHmm.*

But I said, ‘How are you… We don’t even know what it’s all about!’ So when they gave the name of the person, we spoke to her, er, and said, ‘Well what’s all this?’ She said, ‘I don’t understand!’ She goes, ‘Yeah, I might be a bit different ‘cos I’ve been on a pilgrimage to Mecca, I’ve come back, I’m a little bit quieter than normal, plus it’s Ramadan, we’re all fasting, er, and that’s all.’ So this is all… Try to get it dealt with in forty-eight hours. And then the other thing happened was, they said, ‘Oh she made… Oh she’s made comments’, when they were having a discussion group. What’s the discussion about? The Sun newspaper—why they had the Sun in chargeable Lane I do not understand—they had discussions about papers and what’s in the news, and I think, at the time, there were some front pages about, they’d said, ‘Terrorist having babies!’ No: ‘An Asian man’s having babies because he wants his children to grow up as terrorists to fight the problems in Iraq, you know, Afghanistan and Palestine’. And they were having a discussion, and I think she said, ‘What I said was, I can understand why he’s saying that. I don’t agr-…’ She didn’t… She’s not very articulate, so that’s… More or less that’s what she said, she said, ‘That’s what I said. I can understand why he’s saying that.’ She didn’t say ‘I’m… I agree’, you know? ‘He’s a terrorist and I’m doing that’. They also said that she refused to work with non-Muslim people on the rota. Well, apart from her there wasn’t anyone else. So who would she be working with? And she was very quiet.

*Yeah.*

Er, and then she’d also made a comment about Bin Laden, ‘cos this was the Bin Laden era. So we got all these statements from her. She said, ‘Well, what happens is some… My brother came in to, erm, work. He has a beard. He sat in the staff room and somebody said, ‘Ooh! Are you a terrorist!’’—member of staff—and she goes, ‘No, they’re not. That’s my brother! Why would you say that?’ And then she said, ‘Oh sometimes when my dad’s walking down Walthamstow—because he looked like Bin Laden, tall thin—people would say, ‘Oh, are you Osama Bin Laden.’’ That’s what it was about. That was the conversation. So we… So once we’ve got these facts together, we said, ‘Right we’re leaving Chargeable Lane. There’s no way SubCo is staying there.’ Erm, and he said, ‘No, no, no, you must stay. Give us a couple of weeks. We’ll look into it.’ We said, ‘No. We’re going to leave.’ Now, unfortunately what happened at the same time, my, one of my sons, my oldest son, he caught meningitis and he was hospitalised at Newham, and he was on life support for three weeks. This was all happening at the same time. Erm, and then what happened was, ‘cos I…This started and I was obviously over there at Newham in intensive care, didn’t know if he was going to live or die. And they management committee, they… And I was part of the discussions, you know, over the phone ‘cos I couldn’t leave the hospital, was that we’re going to withdraw from our services and come back to SubCo, but providing five days a week from SubCo until the issues are resolved. Erm, And that they would inform social services. Now, what happened was [Laughs] it wasn’t, it was the staff, they would withdraw the services, then they told the council, whereas with me I would’ve done it the other way round. I’d say, ‘We are leaving now. We’ve told you we’re going. On such a date we’re going’, and then there was a big hoo-ha safeguarding. They tried, the staff there, tried to say, ‘Look! They’re taking everybody away! You don’t know what! They’ve got terrorists working for them! Anything could happen to them. They could blow us all up!’ This was the sort of… This was the feedback I was given from the senior manager, so… You know, we had a meeting with the elders, we had a meeting with their families, we had a meeting with staff—had to keep coming in and out for those—and just saying, ‘This is the situation: we’re moving back. At, we just had… At that point we just had allegations being made against one of our staff, that until we’re satisfied that it’s been investigated we’re not going back to Chargeable Lane.’ ‘Cos we were also worried it would hit the papers, especially the Recorder locally. You know, it could be leaked! Erm, so we brought everybody back, and I’m getting these calls, and then they said, ‘We ned to have a meeting, Taskin, with you, with all the senior managers and, erm, your chairperson.’ And I’m saying, ‘But I can’t come at the moment. I’m actually in intensive care with my son. Cannot anybody else go?’ ‘No. You have to be there.’ So I’ve… I had to come out and, er, obviously I was quite emotional at the time as well, but, you know, I was calm. And it’s like ‘Terrorism?! My son’s dying!’ Which one, you know, do you balance out? But, again, this is, again, SubCo, how people’s perceptions are going back to the Muslim organisation right at the beginning of when it set up. We know there’s all of those things are being dragged out. But when we had the meeting they wanted, you know, I went to the, they did it in the evening for me because, you know. But at least, you know… And then literally went there then went back to the hospital. But we covered everything. We said, ‘This is the allegation that’ve been made’, luckily hadn’t gone to the police at that point, ‘Erm, this is what we’ve investigated. This is, you know…’ We gave them a, you know, the statements and everything. We still did not get a statement from who the… a statement from social services, forget about the senior management. Just a paragraph to say these are the things, like three, four things. That was it. And they said, ‘Oh, we have to protect our source because they think they might be, erm, er, she might do something to them.’ I said, ‘But she’s the same person who’s been taking them home every day for the last year and a half. So if she was going to do something, she knows where they live. She would do it.’ And then it was like, ‘Oh no. It could be other people.’ ‘Okay, that’s fine, but you’ve got all the evidence from us. We do not feel safe about coming back to, erm, Chargeable Lane, and the management committee, and the services users, because if an allegation’s been made like this with almost no foundations, next time it could be around sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and it’s, it’s not the way to deal with it. If they had concerns with this individual we have joint supervision. I have joint senior management meetings. We’ve talked about everything else. Why did they not raise that with me at that level? ‘Oh Taskin, off the record we’ve got some concerns with this individual, we’re not, could you look into it?’ Nothing! Straight as an allegation onto yourselves. That is not what you call partnership working, so we can’t operate like that, so we’re taking our services back to SubCo.’ ‘No! No, no, no! You took them away without telling us and it’s a safeguarding…’ I said, ‘I’m sorry we admit…’ My chair said, I said, you know, ‘cos I was spokesperson, I said, ‘I’m sorry. We do take that on board. It was our mistake at SubCo. But as you can appreciate the situation with me personally….’ They all knew, you know, this is my situation. ‘And obviously, if I’d been involved, this is how I would’ve done it, and you know that. But, obviously everybody was panicking, and they weren’t getting any messages from yourselves about how to conduct anything. So they made the right decision, but they did it the wrong way round.’ So they… They, they accepted that actually. Er, and then, then it went on to a ‘What happens next?’, and we said, ‘We want these allegations to be withdrawn. If they’re not withdrawn, we may have to take it further, take legal advice. Because we’ve done our own investigation and there’s no foundations for it. We know what the comments were, what the context was. We want to know if they’re refuting any of that…’—which they hadn’t refuted—‘…that this is how it happened. So obviously those allegations have to be withdrawn.’ Erm, and they said, ‘We’ll have to look into this duh duh duh…’ And they went on, you know the normal spiel, ‘We’ll look into it, get back to you.’ And you know obviously I’d been talking to some councillors I’d, I’d known and explained the situation: ‘This is what’s happening because they need to know’. And they know who we are, they know me; there’s no way this could’ve happened. And if for any reason this person had been seen as a terror, we’d’ve dealt with it. There’s no way we... We would’ve dismissed her after doing the investigations, you know, or put her in suspension. But not then saying to us, ‘You cannot… You are not allowed to bring her into the, er, centre, which is…’ But, at one point, we understood: ‘You are not allowed to keep employing her at SubCo.’ We’re, we’re a separate organisation. ‘Yes, you’re welcome to Chargeable Lane, but you can’t tell us who to employ if you haven’t given us any evidence.’ And we also have our own HR (Human Relations), er, sub-, we subcontract it out—Peninsula—so, again, it’s not just us: we’re looking at employment law, making sure, you know, we’re following all the right things for her sake as well. Erm, and they said ‘No no no no: you’ve got to dismiss her.’ We said, ‘We’re not going to dismiss her. There is no, there’s no allegations that we can see that are substantiated. So we are all moving back to, to, to, to, to, erm, SubCo at Plashet Road. We do not want to operate from here no more.’ And that’s how we left the meeting, actually. Erm, so obviously they’ve had discussions amongst themselves. They know that we’re providing the services, ‘cos they can’t fault the services. The allegations that’ve been made can’t be substantiated, so they had to give in, because I think they were afraid it was going to be made public, because that would’ve been our next step. And obviously she would’ve, and we’d advised her and HR as well, gone to seek legal advice separate to SubCo. ‘Cos although you’re a member, there are certain things that we can do, but our hands are tied. As an individual you can take it in a different direction. So, as a result of all that, Health and Social Care partnership, working with local authority doesn’t work [laughs] in that setting. You know, all these intentions of, ‘We’re going to operate from the same centre’, unless you’re on the same, you have the same principles, it doesn’t work. As a result of that, they said, ‘Well, what we want to do,’ the council said, ‘We want to have meetings to talk about how we can resolve some of these issues, how we can get people working together again, organisations working together again.’ And, you know, then there was the thing about who were going to be the facilitators and the trainers to do that. And we identified some training, and local authority identified some. In the end we got a good package together. They walked out.

*Mmm.*

… at one point. Then we walked out another, ‘cos they kept trying to bring up the allegations around terrorism. And we said, ‘No. Unless you admit that this did not, you know, that there’s no case… How can we trust you? It’s all about trust, coming to work somewhere. How… As we said next time it could be a service user, their family, an elder, a staff member.’ So it just, it just disintegrated, all these thousand pounds the council spent times two trying to negotiate just didn’t work. And I think we, we, we did as much as we could, but I think we had to make a stand that we weren’t going to be able to work in that environment to try and meet the needs of Asian elders, especially those who are very frail and can’t speak for themselves. We’re their advocates, and we’re advocates for our staff as well. So, with that all happening in 200-and, er ‘8 and ‘9, ‘cos it carried on for about a, ‘cos you know it went over the year and stuff, we totally separated as a result of that, and we had five day services at SubCo and have thrived. [Laughs]

*Were you worried what’d happen to the funding if part of it…*

We did! I mean, I mean we were worried at certain points that the contract was going to be taken. ‘Cos at that time it was contract. It hadn’t gone to individual budgets. So we were worried that that funding was going to be withdrawn, erm, and that’s why we had to make sure that the elders and their family, once we knew what the allegations were, we were able… ‘Cos we’re very transparent: These are the issues, this is what’s happened, and it could be that our funding is taken away or reduced as a result, but, it’s not just a principle but in terms of how we operate at SubCo, we would try and oper-, carry on providing a service if they did take it away, and we wouldn’t leave you like that. So we had to reassure many people obviously… And staff, their jobs were on the line as well; all of our jobs—‘cos one contract goes, that was 80% of our funding at that time—we’d have a very reduced service here. I think we only had one project and that would literally that would literally be one person, that’s it that was funded. Erm, so once it had all been agreed by them, we had to have assurances that our funding wasn’t going to be… And it wasn’t cut, and it was actually extended for another two years. And then…

*What was, what was the reaction of your service users or, and also like the nature of the allegation.*

Well they… Everybody was shocked, they were totally shocked. They knew the individual involved as well, so everybody, you know whether it’s staff service users… Thank you [Refreshments brought in]… ‘She’s not like that! She’s the last person that you’d think’ [Laughs] But, again, you know, people… But they understood that you’ve gone on a religious pilgrimage, it does change you. You do become more thoughtful, you may not do things you used to for a short while and then you go back to doing them. [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

But there is that change. You’re reflecting, you’re looking at yourself. But how that was linked to terrorism… It was, you know, as stupid a thing. And plus, elders said that if they didn’t know that individual they would come to us and ask us and we would’ve reassured them as well. So it was difficult [Coughs] but I think, as I said, it just made us stronger as a result of that. But the good things is that we had all our policies and procedures in place apart from a little bit of when they took, as I said, they took people away for telling the council, literally, it was like 24 hours, but that’s all it was. It was 24 hours. But, you know, we had everything in place and everybody was reassured they were still getting the same quality of services, if not better, ‘cos they were back home as they saw it. It was more in our control, everything. So it, it, it actually enhanced the service I feel like that more than actually… Although, that time period was really very fraught, but, you know, when you look at six months later, because we came out stronger at the other end, serv-, the council didn’t take away our funding. They didn’t even reduce it. It meant they did respect what we were saying and, and, and, you know, and the status of our organisation. But it was, you know, for a few, you know, for those few weeks at the beginning it was very hit and miss, but we had to stand our ground as an organisation. Erm, and in the end, yeah, a lot of it’s personal as well in terms of every member of staff, ‘This could happen to me, whether I’m, you know, Muslim or non-Muslim, this could be done to me, tomorrow!’ So it’s all about how we supported staff to see them through that as well. So contracts then started… I mean, I said you still have the yearly inspections with contracts, the council comes in, you know, they look at all the paperwork, the files, everything—got our inspection on Thursday again—and then, again, with the changes with governments and issues around health and social care, it was moving away from contracts even. Then the next big thing for SubCo was around, erm, moving from a contract to individual budgets, where service user decides where they wanted to spend their money. So not knowing, again, for a couple of years, er, er—no, six months actually—what was going to be happening around that. ‘Cos with contracts you, you, you win a tender, you get the contract, you invoice twice a year, and that’s it. And you’re inspected and all those sorts of things. With individual budgets it meant that every single service user had to be reassessed, asked what type of services they needed for themselves, who they wanted to put, them to provide it, whether it was homecare, personal care, out in the community, SubCo…. Could be anything. So we didn’t know if people would actually choose to stay with us, ‘cos now it was their choice. They get a budget, they can spend it how they like. And, and when we had the away day we said you could have your gold service, your silver service, or your bronze service, people…. ‘cos may decide they don’t want SubCo, they want something else. But in terms of costings how we work out how we employ staff, we need to have a minimum number of people coming in in order to survive as an organisation. So having lots of restructuring discussions with the staff team, with the elders, with the families, about ‘This is what the government is saying. This is the local authority’s doing. And this is what SubCo can or cannot do. If you decide you don’t want to stay with SubCo, SubCo will close. It’s, it’s, you know? ‘Cos you’re given the budget, not SubCo anymore. And then you can then spend it with us, but they don’t pay us directly. So, for seventy-odd people you would get that money, if you want SubCo to service you can manage the budget yourself, or you can ask Sub-, a local authority to manage it on your behalf, or a third party, but we can’t manage it ‘cos you’re buying that service from us.’ So if for, you know, for six months it was like, ‘Oh my God! They haven’t even done the assessments yet!’ And it’s coming to march and they’re going to start April the first, so badgering them and badgering, you know, ‘Can you do them?’ ‘cos people didn’t know, you know, if they were being assessed and if they could come. Because the criteria had changed where it was called critical and substantial need, so you had to be up here to get the service. So, again, we weren’t sure if people would meet that criteria, because there’s very strict criteria. And then we thought at least sixty percent definitely would, but we weren’t sure about the rest of them. And also with the unit costing, they said we’d only have a certain amount of money, which was £35 per head, but our costs are a lot higher, but that’s what they said, that’s all we got, so if people want to buy a service from you, the care, the transport has to all be included in that.

*Is that for sort of one day?*

One day, for one person [Coughs] whereas Chargeable Lane, the local authority, they were charging £70.

*Wow!*

Big difference! So, again, about, it was about being treated different as the voluntary sector and the statutory sector. And, again, we understood, overheads are higher, whatever. But they said, ‘No. At SubCo it’s £35 or nothing.’ So then that’s when we were doing lots of fund raising to look at where we go to meet the difference so we could keep that quality of service going. Because there would be no change in services per se, although we’d have to remodel it so it was more user-led. But we were doing all of the shopping trips, going out in the communities… We were doing that already, whereas a lot of the organisations, statutory services weren’t. So for us it wasn’t a big change, but the cost was. And also the fact that we, we need, erm, more staffing, because people had a higher level of need. So even if had they had dementia they said, ‘You can still only charge £35.’ But they may need two people. Again, if somebody needs personal care and a hoist, they need two members of staff. So costing that in was quite difficult. But as an organisation we spoke to staff, we spoke to elders, ‘Well go, we’ll go with that for now’, we decided, ‘But what we’ll have to do is then produce the evidence that the needs are higher, so we need to have more funding, so that means monitoring over six months and then going back. But, again, you know it was a real dilemma, because it’s personalisation, individual budgets, means the person has the right to choose where they go and what service they want, but the same time the local authority dictating the price, but it’s not in tangent with what other, what they’ll give you for the same… If somebody wanted to go to SubCo and they said seventy quid, they would be sent to Chargeable Lane. But if they wanted, you know, er, sorry… If they wanted to go to Chargeable Lane they would be… if Chargeable Lane wanted that same, the same person it would be £70, but at SubCo it would be £35 for the same level of care. It just doesn’t make sense. So, again, we saw that as being a Cinderella Service, and them treating the voluntary sector in a very bad way. Because, you know, the quality of service is what you’re paying for whether you’re big or small, and if you’ve already said, ‘It’s an excellent service’, why are you only giving £35?

*Why do you think they, sort of, did that to the voluntary sector, having previously emphasised care in the community?*

I think, I personally think there was lots of in-house issues going on within the local authority amongst, erm, one of the other contracts. And we were being penalised because they wanted to get rid of them. And, and, and, oh, it’s not, it’s not for this conversation. But there were those sorts of issues going on. Also I think in their mind there was a voluntary sector there was no way you can provide a service, erm, at a cost same to the local authority, ‘cos you don’t have the same overheads. So, again, because I’m sure it goes back to the rest of the council that they’re applying for, which is fair enough, but if it’s an individual budget it shouldn’t be that. There should be overhead costs, yes, but it shouldn’t be that much of a difference. If it’s ten or fifteen pounds we would’ve understood, but seventy pound and thirty-five pounds, that’s a massive difference! And we are providing the transport. With the local authority they had their own local authority transport, and that wasn’t figured into that seventy pounds, it was separate. And this is why we were saying, ‘It’s two rules: one for us and one for them.’ But, at the same time, being a voluntary sector, working the way we do, we knew that we would have to do that and find additional costs, and build the evidence. So over the next three years we were able to draw in lots more funding, made sure we were much stronger. So we supplemented, erm, the day-care service with the activities that we got through grants, ‘cos we were showing the needs there and making sure that people who… There was a mixture of service users: those who didn’t come through day-care, and those who were what we call prevention. So you had a much healthier mix. So it wasn’t just all frail people sitting there together and that was it. You had a mixture of people with different abilities and disabilities, you know? Cross-fertilising and all those sorts of things. Er, and then they went up to forty pounds and forty-five pounds… But, but over the last three years we’ve been able to get people up to eighty pounds, because we’ve been able to prove that these are the needs. So its taken us five years to get to this stage, where we’ve been able to say, ‘For this level of care we need this level of funding’, which they accept, but, again, it could’ve been done right at the beginning. But it’s that five years of having to really, erm, run a service at a loss. And we, we, actually went, we lost, we had our reserves, all the reserves were wiped out because, again, the committee, and we all agreed, and the service users, you know ‘cos it’s all a decision, that we would go into our reserves and carry on producing that quality, even for thirty-five pounds or forty pounds. We’re not going to reduce that quality, and we would find that money later on. And so we did that. And now our reserves are much healthier now, because people have chosen to stay with us. They’ve increased their days, we’ve got new referrals coming in. So in terms of meeting their health and personal care needs, we’re meeting those, and where we can’t we liaise with other organisations and we work with them to get the services. So, you know, they’re spending the money the way they need to be spend. Because people get a budget of approximately three-hundred pounds to, you know, the XXXX [01:13:13] around forty, forty-five pound a day now. Erm, so if they need to have high level needs, it’s got to go to a, a separate panel, and that’s where all the evidence has to be provided, all the monitoring and everything, and then it’s agreed. But when we did it once we knew it would be easier to do it the next time, the next time, ‘cos you’re setting a precedent, and you’re also acknowledging that SubCo can provide that level of service around dementia, particularly, and people who’ve survived strokes, and learning disability, schizophrenia… We can do that, as well as working with other projects with SubCo to make it much more holistic, and still get out in the community, and not people just being, you come to SubCo and that’s it, you never leave the building ‘til you go home, three-hundred-and-six-, well it’s not three-hundred-and-six-, fifty-two weeks or fifty weeks of the year or whatever they go out. If they don’t want to go out that’s fine, but the opportunities are there. So we’ll link that in. So, I think, in many ways personalisation, although it was seen as a big threat for many voluntary organisations, and a lot of the research has shown that it has been. And when we had our Investors In People, erm, er, inspection an all that they were doing, they were surprised that they, they… We were the only organisation that they’d come across where we actually said personalisation had worked for SubCo.

*The only one?*

The only that, in terms of voluntary sector they were inspecting last year in November—2016 not last year, it was 2016—that they’d come across that it’d worked for us. And we were really surprised because we saw it as something that was quite natural, and they’ve, if you make a service that people want they will stay. But you have to draw in funds from elsewhere. So, my salary for instance, I have to make sure some of it comes from elsewhere. If it all came from the day opportunities funding [laughs], you know, it wouldn’t be, it wouldn’t, we couldn’t have four workers in equivalent working part time. So we’ve got to make sure we keep other things bringing new funding in where I supervise and fund stuff, I take on social work students, so, so we can keep it going. But what they were saying is that other organisations don’t actually do that. They’re very, they’re very much, ‘If the local authority’s not giving it to us, that’s it, we’re not doing it’. But you’ve got to diversify but keep it in certain parameters that it works. And we are financially a lot better of, ‘cos we’re able, we’ve been able to build up our reserves. Erm, because we have made sure that we’ve recovered the full costs of that service now. Because we were able, not just the thirty-five pound initially, we’re able to make sure that when staff have, you know, they need, when somebody needs two staff we have staff on the floor. It doesn’t mean they’re in for the whole day just sitting around doing nothing, they’re also looking after other staff. But those period of time, those staff are looking after service users. So you can have that sixty-five, seventy, eighty pounds as well, and they’re not left on their own. But it doesn’t mean we can employ staff thirty-five hours a week, per se. That’s why it has to be on, erm, er, er, on a rota basis. But they’re fixed hours, it’s not zero contract hours. They know exactly what hours they’re doing, each… well, it’s not changed at all, well they get extra hours not less hours, because the money’s coming in. Because what I’m saying, if the money’s coming in we can afford to pay staff to provide that, that level of service. With contracts you never had that same flexibility, or with grants. So, you know, erm, it was always once cost and that was it, so, and the fact that some people come in five days a week on quite a high contract, oh, high personal budget and they’ll come on medium it, it, it balances everything out by the end of the week. Erm, so with the health and social care, it’s… I suppose there’s as we said provide a very good service, and people’ve said it’s an excellent service, but I think we’ve got a lot to improve on. ‘Cos, again, things are changing all the time. It’s gonna change again we’ve been told. But because we listen to the people that we’re working with, what they want, how they want it to be provided, and we’re very proactive. We haven’t got a long bureaucracy, you know, like local authorities or other organisations. And I think Eastside probably very similar to us. You’ve got user reps, you’ve got a management committee. You can make decisions. It’s up to you. So, you know, if we decide to do something, we can do it. Might take us two years to get the funding, but we will do it. But in the meantime we’ll put some more measures in place that we’re meeting individual needs. So, again, having consultations regularly with individuals, having service user questionnaires. And now we’ve started staff user questionnaires because Investors In People have said that’s a very good way of feeling the temperature. But, erm, yeah, just making sure that we’re constantly getting feedback and that we’re always changing the way we operate. Erm, you know, so you, you know, you, you, there’s ways where meeting the needs of elders is, is always changing, but when we’re working with them we look at, ‘Right, they’re gone into hospital now. We need a befriending service for when they’re in hospital, when they come home.’ So it becomes a holistic service. Whereas other people would say, ‘No, we’re just day care. We’ll leave it as day-care. What they do outside is up to local authority.’ But we don’t operate like that. So we will then, ‘cos we’ll’ve identified a need, done the evaluations, we’ll go to funders and say, ‘We need a befriending service. We need advice, information service. And that’s why we’re delivering it.’ So, yes, day-care is there, but around it we can still meet the needs of individuals in different ways. So we’re forever involved with [Laughs] as you can say. Erm…

*Apart from befriending, what other services have you been able to offer?*

Erm, we do quite a lot of advocacy work as well in terms of people’s welfare rights, housing, social care. And over the last year we’ve done a lot of end-of-life work as well. We got some funding from, erm, the lottery. It’s one of the small pilot projects .You get up to £10,000. So we, we started talking with elders about end-of-life issues, ‘cos, again, we’d been coming across some of those issues when people go into hospitals, erm, or into hospice. Who makes the decision about what happens to them? And a lot of the time the families were making a decision ‘cos they didn’t want to let them go, but, actually the people we in a lot… You know, the elders were suffering. So we started doing work around, ‘While you’re reasonably healthy, if situations arose, have you got things in place? Have you got’, er, ‘A living will?’—as they call it in the slang language, or as attorney, power of attorney in health and social care, which is not the same as something dealing with your finances—‘But does the GP know what your wishes are? Does your consultant know what your wishes are? Your family? Does SubCo know? So if something happens to you, we’re very clear about what your wishes are and who you’ve appointed to make those decisions on your behalf. But you’ve already said, ‘This is what I want’, and it’s their role to carry it through. It’s not about them changing what you’ve said. So it all becomes legally bound.’ So we did some workshops last year. We did about four workshops, thirty, forty people attended, talking about end-of-life care, what it means to them, if you’re going to hospital, if you’ll die at home, or what you want to leave behind. It was quite problematic as you might imagine, ‘cos elders are saying one thing, the families are saying something else, and trying to work with both sides really. But it’s, it’s a difficult area, but it’s to start thinking about it, because that’s the next stage in life really. Erm, we don’t get involved in drawing up wills or anything that is done by the legal, solicitors. But we work with Compassion In Dying, which is based in central London—they’re the experts around it—who supported us in the training and everything and did workshops with us about taking advice around certain areas of work. So, again, you know, an elder has with the, you know, we did one to ones with them. So we did about twenty one to ones, ‘cos when you’ve done group work you need to then see it through. So it’s almost like, you know, ‘This is what we do, here’s a booklet’, you help them fill it out, take it home with their families, bringing it back, or we can work with their families of what their wishes are. And it’s only health and social care, it’s nothing to do with any of their finances. That is totally separate. So everybody knows what their wishes are. Because when you’re frail and you’ve got dementia, people’re gonna make decisions for you, so now we’re looking on that. One of the areas we’re looking at this year, next year, we’re trying to get some funding to, you know, proper funding for staff and, and, and doing that one-to-one work with individuals, but also carrying on doing some group work. And then we’ve got the reaching communities programme, which we’ve got for five years—we’re in year three—doing prevention work which means working with Asian elders who are younger, older young people, who’ve got some needs but don’t fit any of the social work criteria. But the idea is that they take control of their lifestyles, their lives, in a fun way, whether it’s exercise, socialising, having peer support… Erm, and doing advice and befriending in that project, but also getting people to become peer mentors. So because they’ve been through certain experiences themselves, it’s how they then go on to support others in similar situations. So we’ve had a training programme with Reaching Communities to do a mentor, er, peer support work. So we’ve trained up about twelve peer mentors now who are now doing some of the befriending work, doing some of the group activities, erm, and leading on certain programmes with us as well. Erm, so, again, it like, ‘We’ve been there, we’ve done it, we can support you to do it.’ So it becomes like supporting each other. But obviously staff are there to support them, but they’re taking the lead. And then from Lloyds we’ve got the funding for three years—we’re now in our final year—for working with Asian older carers. ‘At’… It’s called ‘At Critical Transition Points’, because that’s the criteria, which means when there’s ever a change for an older carer themselves or for the person they’re caring for. So supporting them through that. So whether it’s somebody’s going into residential, er, care home, or going into hospital, or needing a new service, or their health deteriorates as a carer, it’s supporting them through the system, whether it’s a carer support assessment, group work, advice work, erm, and looking at them as a carer in their own right, about what their needs are. ‘Cos many times they get left out, ‘cos they’re seen as an older person but they forget that they’re also their carer. Because we have a number of people who are carers for each other as spouses. But some of them are carers for their own children who are now in their sixties who might have learning disabilities, mental health issues, and sometimes it’s more than one child that they’re caring for. And they’re themselves in their seventies or eighties. So it’s founding out how we can support them. So in the past we used to work with older carers, but only as a part of the day-care side, but now we’re working with them in their own right. So we want to extend that project and get funding for that in the future, because that is a real area around older carers and getting lack of support. Erm, and then after that we were always dipping into small bits of funding where every… The Cloth Workers—or the Livery Trust they call them—five-thousand here, eight-thousand there, two-thousand there… Er, depending on what the projects are to meet any shortfall that we want to do. So, again, like the end of life work, the older carers work, there’s some, er, application I’ve been putting together this year so we can get them in. There might be a little time gap, but we can keep things going for a while. Erm, and then we just look around as well to see whatever, erm, the… We call it the XXXX [01:25:35] Trust, will normally fund older people, services like City Bridge Trust, Tudor Trust, Comic Relief, looking at what their criteria are, ‘cos it changes every couple of years, and see if we fit into that, and then we have a project ready to go almost. Just have to tinker around with it. As I said, we’ve got all the evidence so it’s just bringing that up to date as well. And I think, you know, nine times out of ten we have been successful with some of the bigger grants. It’s the smaller ones we’re not so successful with. And again, that’s again because people don’t understand the concept of having Asian services. Some of the funders are very traditional service grant givers, so it’s about, ‘Asian elders should be mixing with everyone else. Why have they got a separate service?’, you know, ‘White elders, African-Caribbean elder, Eastern-European elders should all be sitting in one room, having a great time’. We’ve been there, done it, it doesn’t work in that way. But there are different ways it works. And, again, if you’re talking about individual choice, it’s about that. Some, some of the smaller grants that we get, the funders are understand that. And they understand the diversity within the Asian community. Other funders don’t understand that. They think, ‘They’re Asian, they’re all the same.’ But like we said, the languages, the dialects, the culture, the dietary needs, religious needs, the country’s they’ve come from, it’s all very different. And then we also have a mixture of people who worked in factories, who’ve run their own businesses, who’ve been doctors, teachers… They have very different needs, and how do you meet all those needs within SubCo as well. So, sometimes the grants like the mentor work, people would become natural leaders, like they were shop stewards when they were working for Fords, but they would be seen as a blue-collar work, but you use those skills, ‘cos they want to use those skills within SubCo. So looking at ways that we can develop that as well.

*Why do you think you’ve been able to bring the Asian community together so effectively given all these needs, when it can be harder to integrate, say, Asians with Caribbean elders or White elders?*

Yeah, yeah. Erm, I think it’s probably, again, the way we work with, again, it’s how you work with other organisations. Erm, showing them you’re not a threat, you’re not trying to take over. And looking at the population in Newham now, it’s, it’s, you know, the biggest population is Asian. So the older population is going to be much bigger than it is now in the next five to ten years. It’s looking at as we call it ‘breaking down barriers’, so doing things jointly with other organisations, so working with Hibiscus which works with 99% it’s African-Caribbean elders, SubCo is 99% Asian elders, and looking at how we can work together in activities, in health information days, erm, in some of the projects we do around arts and crafts, funding sports days, dance, looking at what the similarities are rather than what the differences are, and working around that. And the staff have an understanding amongst themselves as well. ‘Cos I always think if, if from an organiser, if the staff… Like I was talking about when I was working with Social, if the staff managers or the workers on the ground are not sold on the idea, it’s not going to work. So it’s making sure they have a good relationship. And in the beginning it was quite tense, erm, but, again, over a period of time, people getting to know each other, and that we deliver. So if SubCo says, ‘We’re gonna work with you. We’re gonna do this with you.’ We’ll make sure we do it. We don’t just pull away thinking, ‘Oh, it’s too hard!’ and, ‘Why aren’t they doing their share.’ We make sure we turn it around. We go the extra mile. And with the African-Caribbean elders, White elders, when I’ve had to stand up and talk about personalisation, talk about our services and how it could benefit them and their management committees, erm, I think what they say it’s the passion that comes out, [Laughs] of wanting to make things better for older people per se. So although we’re dealing with Asian elders, ‘cos we’re seen as a role model, and the quality that you can actually try and aspire to. So trying to get them to raise their game if they want to survive. Erm, and, unfortunately, I think I mentioned in previous meeting, a lot of the organisations have closed down because they haven’t been able to ch-, make that change. Er, and some of it, it goes against their principles—totally understand—but then what happens to the people who are their service users? Where do they then go for their services? So working with management committees, staff, around about the change. And it takes time. I mean we’ve been doing it with them, I’ve been working with them for the last five, six years before we had the Reaching Communities project. And it takes time to think about, ‘Okay, we are now going to have to monitor everything we do: take registers, keep records, have qualified staff…’ We’ve been doing that for the last twenty-five years. It took time for us to get there, so they’re not going to do it over night, but just being there to support them and they come to us for advice and support, which they do, er, and, and, and, you know they’ve come and spent a day in SubCo to see how it works. I mean that’s the only way. There’s only things we can offer, ‘cos we can’t afford to spend days of training, and they can’t afford to pay us. But if they come and shadow other staff, and come and spend days on what we’re already doing, talk to senior staff within SubCo, we’ll support them as much as we can. And I think they see that that’s what we’re there for. It’s not just about SubCo wants to take over the world and wants to provide every single service for everyone. It’s in partnership with, that’s how we see it. Erm, so there’s certain things we do well. We can share the certain things that other groups do well, which we then work with. And we train ourselves up, like the end-of-life work, we’d’ve never touched that. But in the last year and a half we’ve done a lot of work: our staff, our service users have been trained up. We are much more confident about talking about it. ‘Cos it’s very emotional, a lot of the work we would do. Erm, and, and, and, you know, people are going to die while they’re with us, so working through a lot of those issues as well.

*How do the staff and the other people here, sort of deal when, when someone does pass away?*

Yeah. I think we, we’ve got a process and policy where we talk about it very openly, and we, and we, we, we, we remember them, how they were before they got ill. ‘Cos again, everybody know them, ‘cos they might’ve been involved in the gardening project, they might’ve been involved in some of the art work. Having photographs, talking through, remembering them as, as a person, rather than, ‘They’re a dead person now’. You know, ‘Do you remember so-and-so? They used to do this, they used to do that.’ Erm, acknowledging in our reports that I’ll put, you know, people have died, or at meetings going to the funerals, whoever wants to go, we’ll make arrangements for staff and service users. Having that space and time to talk about, I think that’s very important. And for staff, again, for instance we have, er, there’s a, there’s a line, a telephone line that staff can go and talk to somebody, up to four sessions, on the phone as a counselling support session. So if they need that external support, they can have that. And then with us we have supervision meetings with staff, so again, if they’re, with their line managers they can talk through that, supportive staff. And, again, because it’s happened over the many years we’ve developed that practice, it’s almost become part of the process. So it, I mean, I know for our social work student who, who, you know, who will come across someone that will probably die while she’s here, it’s preparing her for that, so it reminds us it’s not the same for outsiders when they come in. But making sure that that, that space in supervision is there so they can have that one to one. And other staff will support each other as well. Erm, and, and, you know, in many ways it’s celebrating that person’s life, rather than celebrating death—if you see what I mean—or ignoring death. Er, and so just finding different ways. And different things work for different individuals. I mean, some families will say to us, ‘Please don’t donate flowers or gifts. We’d rather have that you give money to their charity.’ So, again, it’s just having that dialogue, open dialogue with the families. And sometimes the families say, ‘We’d like to donate something’, you know? Whether it’s a television or if it’s a bench, or pay for peoples’ meal on that day if it’s an event. So it’s just having that dialogue, what works for individuals.

*Are the fam-…*

No one’s left us thousands of pounds! [Laughs]

*[Laughs] Shucks!*

Yet! [Laughs] Sorry.

*Are the families quite involved with the provision you do?*

Erm, it’s a real mixture. Erm, the majority of families are find it very difficult to engage with SubCo because they feel the guilt of, erm, not being able to provide the support typically of an Asian family should provide. So sometimes they can get quite aggressive because of that guilt. So we understand that. Erm, but also why we’re trying the carer’s project and the other work we do is trying to have a relationship with the families. So at times, and initially we find that’s very fraught in the beginning because of the quilt, but over months we do find the change when they come to trust us. Erm, they become more open about what the real issues are for them as an individual, and finding out how they can support the person they were, they were with. Erm, with other families we have, er, where, where… Quite a few of the elders we work with live on their own. The families, there’s a lot of friction within the family, erm, both amongst siblings, but also with their, their father or grandfather or grandmother. So, er, it can be quite fraught at times. And sometimes the siblings are having issues with each other because of the, because of the house, the gold, the money, the benefits. And, you know, sometimes squandering all the money, and the other one says, ‘no we’re not!’, and is it a safe-guarding issue and all those sorts of thing. And trying to find out, again, from the elder what they want, because we’re their advocates, and we always have, you know, remind ourselves, ‘We’re there for them.’ And, unfortunately, people play on their, on their, on them as well, but as, as, as objective people, we can try and resolve some of those issues. Erm, and we have found that, at times, it’s been successful. Erm, ‘cos all, wh-, for us, it’s that when elders come to SubCo, it’s about relieving that stress and strain that they’re facing. So if that family’s part of that stress and strain we have to work with them. But there is a limit of what we can do, then we refer them on. So if we think that that’s not right we will do that. But it’s trying to make sure that when they come into the building, or when they’re doing the befriending at home, that’s a safe environment for them at all. And there are times they will disclose stuff to us that we can’t take forward, ‘cos it’s not quite a safe-guarding issue, but it could turn into one. So it’s about, more about monitoring it, and supporting the elders to make those decisions. It’s like when they’ve had elders physical abuse, it’s about taking out injunctions against their family member, er, taking it to court… It can take quite a number of years to get to that stage, and they’ll change their mind quite a few times in that process ,similar to domestic violence for women. So it’s about being there with them and for them, and knowing that there’re options available. And, and also, for them, it’s like, ‘What will the community think, that we’ve taken our children to court?’ But, if they’re abusing you and do things, you’ve got the hard evidence, you have no option.

*Mmm.*

I mean, we’ve had service users where they’ve lived in the same house, they’ve paid for everything, but when they go for a bath, the heating’s turned off, the water boiler’s turned off, electric’s turned off… You know? Why are you living like that with them when you’re paying for everything and they do it deliberately, and they know how vulnerable you are, and you’re living in the same house? So it’s getting them to think about, ‘Is there another way I can make this life better for me as an individual?’ It’s about having them there. If it is, it’s about having certain ground rules, and you may need to go to court to get those ground rules. Others, you know, where they can’t use the toilet at certain times, because if they flush the toilet it disturbs them, the other family members at night. And, you know, and then it’s cooking in the kitchen, you know, all those sorts of things. It’s, it seems quite minor, but when you build it up over a number of years, and the effect it’s having on that individual, you have to support that person to say, ‘Yes, it’s, you’re ready. Take them to court. It’s your home.’

*Mmm.*

And, yes it does estrange some of the family members, but then at least they get peace of mind in one respect, and they’re able to build up the social links. If you can’t have people to come and visit you at home, whether that’s SubCo, or friends, or family (other members of the family), then, then what sort of life are you living. So… Families can be very, very challenging, but there are some really good examples of very supportive families. But then, again, we know that if they don’t get the services in place it could, you know, deteriorate as well. So making sure that they can advocate for services for themselves and the people they’re looking after for. So, again, making sure it doesn’t come to a crisis.

*Yeah.*

‘Cos then, again, they will have to spend more money, the local authority, or the… We were talking about thousands then, hundreds of thousands for putting someone into care, when you could’ve resolved it in a different way. So, families, you know, it’s, it’s, it’s a, it’s a real mixture of what support is needed. Erm, but they can be, as I said, they can be very supportive, but they can also be very challenging because of the way of the politics within the family. And we know elders are not saints! [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

We’ve got no illusions of that! So we know with some of them, and because of their personalities and what we’ve read and what we’ve learnt from them themselves, they were very difficult to live with. They, you know, they were probably say, say they should’ve not done certain things that they done in their life—and you can say that when you’re in your eighties or nineties—but the damage it’s had on the rest of the family, you know, where it’s domestic violence or physical violence or, you know, the way they’re brought up the children, or were at work 24/7, seven days a week, hardly saw their children, never had a relationship… Of course there are difficulties there, and, and, yeah, they’re strong individuals. Even though they’re old they’re not sweet old man and lady. They can be at times [Laughs] but hey can be very challenging themselves, so you can understand where the families are coming from. So, again, we can see what it’s about, but it’s also being an intermediary, trying to repair some of those damages. And sometimes it can happen when things are on a better level. You know, when services are in place, when people have got their own flat, you ow, they’re not, you now, or got their own accommodation sorted out, their own house. Erm, you know, they’ve downsized, you know, releasing equity and thing. But, you know, it’s jet getting it to a point where they, they, that friction is not as challenging as it was, and they’re not as, erm… You know… As hard as they used to be [Laughs]

*Do you think that the needs of your service users and the community have kind of changed since you started your involvement at SubCo?*

Erm, the needs have changed in terms of as people get older their needs have changed, erm, also in terms of mental health and learning disability services, we’re finding as the last few years we’re getting more people referred who have now grown older with a learning disability, whereas twenty-five years ago they might’ve been in the twenties and thirties, but now they’re in their fifties and sixties they age much quicker, and their needs are higher. And people with Down’s Syndrome as well. Erm, because the way the model that services have changed is going from providing as adults before they hit sixty, or sixty-five in Newham, they were getting quite, I would say they were getting very good services around learning disabilities and mental health, but, now, because of the cutbacks over the last five to ten years things have really changed. So it’s only those most in need who’ll get a service. So we catch people at the higher end of dementia, of, of learning disabilities, where the needs have been neglected for a number of years really. And so trying to find space within our day-care services for people with those needs, and where it’s very challenging needs in terms of being physically violent, we have to turn people away unfortunately, erm, because we don’t have separate rooms where you can have smaller groups of services or restraining services either. Erm, we’re, we’re quite clear that we’re not that type of service. Erm, where they go to I don’t know, ‘cos I, you know, have to reach a mainstream services. I don’t think there’s any other Asian services gonna meet those particular needs. And, and, again, with people who’ve got high levels of needs where they’re living at home, but they need nursing care type services and day-care, administering medication, being able to lie down during the day, those high level needs we can’t deal with either. But what we’re trying to do is making sure we can do that at home when we do our befriending services, where the services are in place in a residential setting trying to get access there, or in hospital. But we’re finding that, in terms of the level of needs—because people are presenting a lot later, erm, because there aren’t the prevention services to pick any of those up, those low level services in the voluntary sector—it’s very difficult for some people. So we thought we were delivering, erm, just the high end of the last five to six year we’re looking at working with people on a much more prevention level, when they were younger trying to maintain their equality of life before they hit that. Erm, so, so it’s almost going back to preventing services at a younger age, er, because of the level of needs around stroke, diabetes, cardio-vascular disease, erm, smoking I forgot about that, and cancers: that’s another area where we’re doing quite a lot of, we’re noting quite a high level of people coming through as cancer survivors as well, and again where it can re-occur. But, again, we’re quite clear we’re not a medical service, so, again, trying to work with, er, the health authorities around how to provide those services. It, it can be quite, quite difficult at times as well. So the needs have changed quite a lot. Funding for those have definitely changed. And the funding streams of where you actually get the money for certain things. So the next stage now for the next couple of years will be health and social care budgets merging, so there’s one point of access. So what that means in reality we’re still waiting to find out. But at the moment you have health on one side, social careo n the other, and they have separate budgets. But in the future they’re going to be combined and how do people access those budgets, and do you have multi-disciplinary teams? So, again, SubCo will have to change again in terms of meeting those particular ways of working, of how you do assessments, how we take on referrals, how we do risk assessments, who we liaise with… So it’s always evolving really in terms of that. Erm, and we’re getting a higher level of people in crisis by the people we’re working with now in their late eighties and nineties. Ten years ago it would be very rare to have Asian elders surviving into their nineties and eighties, but, now, there are more and more people surviving there, so looking at how we meet their particular needs as well.

*Is there more pressure on you as an organisation then because of that?*

Yeah, there is, there is. But, again, it’s looking at in terms of with the cases around health and social care, the models and the funding, access to services, how, how we then develop into that. So some of the end of life work that we do is more about having getting people prepared for certain things, and being there as advocates. It’s not about providing that high-level service. Erm, and, you know, does SubCo want to go down that route of employing nurses? I don’t know. I think it’s… To come in and do day-care or whatever, day hospital type services… Well, do we work with the day hospital locally and go and preserve services at the day hospital. These are things we’re now going to have to start thinking about. Because as were getting elders reaching those points where we’re doing work with them in those situations, we have to then think about what is the best for the, for the organisation. But being mindful that we don’t overstretch ourselves as well, that we’re not trying to do things that we, that we’re not capable of doing. So, again, looking at what those partnerships would mean with those statutory services really. Erm, again, having experience of Chargeable Lane I think we’re much stronger in terms of if you’re going into other statutory environments what our expectations would be from them, and that, and them of us, and how we would provide that service. I think having it on a contract is much better, you know, it’s just with them, it’s not local authority trying, trying different models that didn’t work in the end, but saying, ‘We’re quite clear. We’re here to deliver this service. This is what we’re gonna do, and we’re responsible for our staff. Duh duh duh duh.’ And you know, being a bit more savvy about some of that, now, I would think! [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

Er, it is there. But I think we don’t have, erm, the equipment or the space provide that type, but it’s needed, erm, as people are in long term, on long term hospital wards.

*Yeah.*

‘Cos there they’re just meeting their medical needs, there’s no stimulation going on there. But how you do that it’s having all those dialogues where, where XXXX [01:48:38] have to think, think differently about how they provide services, but how they see voluntary organisations, ‘cos they still see us as not being qualified to do certain things. Well, we’re not asking to do those things. We’re asking to do the things we’re good at doing. But we will notice things. We go into a service if it’s not being provided well, we will be making comments, we will be making issues of them. So, nobody likes to feel like they’re being watched. So, you know, it’s those sorts of issues that we would have to deal with. Erm, and, you know, at a senior level we had to make all these decisions, but it’s the ground staff: they’re the ones who have to deal with it on a day to day basis and make those relationships work really. With different personalities involved it’s not easy! [Laughs] And different. You kow, career backgrounds and expectations. Butm yeah, I mean we can see ourselves evolving, but, er, you know, what we look like in five to ten years’ time, it’s probably not what we look like, what we looked like five years ago. And other opportunities a well, if there’s opportunities to do something we’ll probably grab it, because we will’ve had the evidence to say, ‘These are what the needs are.’ But, but not being out of our depth, that’s the most important thing: working with other organisations to do things.

*Would you mind if we just go over… So obviously your involvement with SubCo started when you were still working at the council.*

Yeah.

*How did you become sort of actually involved…*

With SubCo?

*… in SubCo…*

As a staff member?

*Yeah.*

Erm, yeah, I mean, I was working at the local and I had two young children, and it’s one of those personal things as well which comes in personal professional, and I wanted to spend more time with the children, but at that time you couldn’t… working part time for them, it was either you have to do 18 hours, or you do 35 hours. There was no in between. There was no flexi-working in those days, and childcare was horrendous in terms of the cost we were spending on childcare. So I, I was looking around. I did go to social obviously, you know… they said, ‘No, no. Either 18 or that.’ So I was looking around for work, and at SubCo, the chief exec, she was working and wanted to go part time on a job-share, I thought—and flexi-working—‘Ooh!’ So I applied for the post, and, and, and got it, and my children, ‘cos I lived locally the other side of the park, picking them up after school just made total sense. So I just wanted, ‘cos they were very young at the time, I wanted to spend more time. Erm, so I came in as a job share just to work up to 18 hours, but a more flexible way. So you could spread it, uyou know, over seven days or whatever it was. But unfortunately after six months she left. [Laughs] So I ended up not working full-time, but what’s called flexible working now, I had flexible working there. So started off as the chief officer on my own, which was quite difficult at the beginning because it’s not what I came in to do. And the staff team was quite small there as well—you didn’t have a senior management team—so it was just me and everyone else [Laughs]. Literally. So you ended up by doing everything. Erm, so we had a luncheon club at the time, and we had the day care service as well, and we had another project that ran activities. Er, so that’s how I came into it, and we also had a very supportive management committee that, that had been there at the beginning and been through all the difficulties and was very supportive to me as well, so I think that made a big difference. Erm, but unfortunately when I came in after six weeks, er, and this is when my other job share partner was still here, we had some staffing issues with a member of staff… Two members of staff and one volunteer, er, and that was around the meals service that we had. One of the service users had actually made a complaint against one of the cooks, saying the food was inedible. And they had a petition going round. Now, it turned out that the cook was also… Her husband was the volunteer here. He got very aggressive with the service users, and said they weren’t allowed to do, say or do what they wanted, but they did in terms of the petition or challenge the fact that his wife cooked in the way she did, and were very rude and threatening. And unfortunately another member of staff who was a volunteer co-ordinator who backed him up. So we had to suspend them [Laughs] all three of them.

*Wow.*

[Laughs] Taken advice… At the time we didn’t have any HR. It was going to solicitors, talking to people in council who we knew about what steps to follow. Erm, and they felt aggrieved that they had been suspended, because when you suspend people it’s not a very nice process because it was seen as threatening elders. So a letter… When they came into the work that morning, letters were ready for them, erm, and management committee members did that with me, it wasn’t just the other person who was the job share partner. You have to… [Knock at door] Come in!

[Hi Taskin, we’re just off now.]

Alright, okay, thank you.

[Alright, alright. See you later.]

Yeah. Erm, where was I? yeah, so, so, erm, you have to escort them off the premises, you have to take their ID badges… Because it was thought that if he could be threatening to service users, that was totally unacceptable behaviour. The fact that the other member of staff backed him up as well, you’re colluding. And his wife was also in that situation, so it was the three of them. So they were suspended on full pay pending investigation. Unfortunately what they did, they went to the local press. Unions, unions were involved, which is fair enough. Unison were involved, which we expected anyway. Erm, and they made it an issue that they, that they ‘Don’t know why’ they were suspended. It was ‘Out of order’. They became the ‘SubCo Three’, you know? Placards outside, all of that. And they were supported unfortunately by some other key members of other organisations who were, you know, for their own political reasons going back to the whole Hindu fundamentalist and Muslim thing all started playing a part in that. It became very much, ‘Taskin’s here now. She’s trying to turn it into a Muslim organisation, and we’ve been suspended.’ And we were very clear, and the management committee, it was because of the threat they made to the service user in particular, and those around them. Threatened them that if they signed a petition they would, ‘Sort them out.’ So we… Obviously we had to do our own investigation, get all the statements from other service users who witnessed it, but also those who signed the petition, and also the person that made the original threat to, and who was involved XXXX [01:55:51]. So we XXXX [01:55:53] we, we were quite clear, ‘We’ll do our investigation.’ Erm, Unison were involved, had meetings with them, very clear about what we did and how we did. Acas was involved, couldn’t come to any sort… ‘Cos they weren’t letting go, and we, as an organisation, ‘No, you cannot threaten service users. That is zero tolerance whatever happens’, took us to tribunal, employment tribunal. Again, some other key members were involved in the community, who never should’ve been involved, and were involved in setting up SubCo, so they should’ve known better. But they, as I said, they had their own agendas. Erm, it got to tribunal, erm, it got… We had very good legal advice, I must say. And Unison were right to the… 11th hour we were negotiating, ‘cos, again, having worked in the council I was in Unison; I knew some of the people who were there, and they, they were in, ‘Don’t do… I don’t, I know I don’t do things like this’, but you represent the people you represent, but try to negotiate, so we did have an out of court settlement before we went back for the second hearing. So they thought they’d won. [Knock at door] But… Hello? Oh no, I thought it was someone still knocking.

*[Laughs]*

But, again, it was because we were looking at the service at SubCo we didn’t want to see the organisation’s name dragged through, losing the grants at the time, impact it would have on service users. And if we lost on a technical point, which is what we think we could’ve, what they said it could be… The issue always with tribunal is not whether what you did, whether the service… It’s all about the service. It’s about whether you followed particular procedural points at the time, and being a voluntary organisation we didn’t have legal advice at the time we did certain things. I t could be said that, you make, you know, I think at one point they said, ‘You gave a letter at a certain point, the second letter, but you should’ve given it at an earlier point’—something as stupid as that—‘but what they did was totally wrong’. So we did settle with the three of them, erm, ‘cos if we’d gone all the way and we’d lost it would’ve been three times that much money, and there was no way we could’ve afforded… The service would’ve closed. So that was the first year of my life [Laughs]

*Mmm.*

Er, of coming to SubCo. So it’s always something’s happened!

*[Laughs]*

Erm, but, but again it made us look, you know, the service users, again, like anything they were kept informed of what was going, and staff as well. It showed that we cared about them. That, you know, even though they’re staff we, you know, suspended them, we took action against them, all those sorts of thing. So, again, people remember that, those sorts of things that, ‘You were there for us.’ Unfortunately some of them have died now, who were there. Think actually no one’s there now who was there. But they were, at the time it was like, ‘No.’ And they were on the management committee, service user reps are on there as well. So, you know, we did what we needed to do. But I think that’s the nature of the voluntary sector as well, that, you know, there’s some things we’re very good at, some things we’re very poor at. I think after that when we, we came across Peninsula, they approach us, because I think that what they do when they go to tribunal they look for customers, isn’t it? And they, they, they came to us, and, and then what they could offer us was really good, because it’s like if you take all their advice and you’re taken to tribunal, all the legal costs are covered. So which is quite good in one respect, not that we’ve ever had to do it since then. [Coughs] But it just meant that you had that peace of mind that you can’t stay, as a small organisation, you can’t stay on top of employment law, you know? We’ve got more important things to worry about. At the same time we have to support our staff. So by having Peninsula it just, sorry I keep looking at the certificate ‘cos it’s on the wall! Erm, but you know, just having that as, as, as a safety net for SubCo is just so important. And the same with Health & Safety: we’ve got them as our Health & Safety safety next as well. It just means that then you can concentrate on, on, on doing the services.

*Doing what you’re doing.*

So, again, it’s always been difficult times in every, every few years something will come up and SubCo will have to go through it all. And having a very good management committee, and having understanding, I think, from service users and most of their families and staff and other organisations that we’ve worked with. You know, it, it does make you stronger because you’re able to make clear what you’re doing, and also reflect on some of your weaknesses and try and plug those.

*Yeah.*

I think that’s very important for us. We do that. And, er, we do that at least, you know, you do it in a formal setting once a year at our away days with staff and service user reps and things: what we’ve done well, what we haven’t done so well, and what where we want to go in the next few years. So you sit back and think about, you know, what you want to do and be as an organisation. So that’s why having this 25 years celebration is so important to us, really, because it’s capturing all those histories and memories and stories, and, and photographic exhibitions just pulling it all together. And I know there’s probably loads of things I haven’t spoken about, but it just depends really, and, and other people will pick up stories and the anti-racist movement at the time, I know other interviews will be happening with, with other people, so they will talk about those sides, and then I’ll remember! [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

‘Oh yes! I was involved in that! Oh yes, we did that!’ But again it’s just… it feels we’re in a different place now to where we were twenty-five, twenty-six years ago. But the fact is that we’ve developed and we’ve stayed strong. And over time we’ve grown even stronger than we anticipated. And we’re still here that’s… And providing a really good service. Otherwise people could take their money and run; go somewhere else. ‘Cos you don’t, you know, you just don’t know unless people walk through the door. It’s like any shops people used to say to me, ‘If you don’t like a service you go away, I swear.’ I hope we’re not like a shop, but, you know, in terms of, you know, the money is with the customer. But we don’t call them customers, we call them service users. But it’s their budget. They can do what they like. And if they stop coming that means we’re doing something that is not right, and we’re not on top of that. So we encourage complaints. I know it’s a weird thing to say, but we do, ‘cos if we know where we’re going wrong then we can do something about it: change our practice, change our policies, look at staff, you know, job descriptions, how we operate… And a lot of it is the stuff that we know: food, transport… And there’s very little we can do about it ‘cos it’s not in our control. But there’s somethings that we can make changes. It’s like developing services, meeting their needs at different levels, erm, working with families, how we communicate with people—that’s the most important thing—and, you know, listen to them when we make mistakes, as we do. ‘Cos not all our staff, you know, we’re not all 100% fantastic all the time. We have our moments. But, again, getting staff to recognise when they’ve made mistakes and how they could’ve been different. And on the other hand the service users have been very bad to staff, you know, have been very, you know… And, and they’re *compos mentis*, that’s the other thing. You know, we do take that up, and we have banned staff, and suspended their services when they’ve done certain things that’ve been, you know, out of order. But they, you know, they’ve understood that they’ve made mistakes and they’ve come back, you know, they’ve been reinstated. But, again, it’s sending messages out to, to other service users. And a couple of times we’ve had to do that, it’s been around sexual harassment around other service users and staff, so you’ve got to take a stand on things like that. Erm, or when people’ve been verbally and physically to each other as service users, you know?

*Yeah.*

So it’s not like [Gasps] oh you know, hunky dory like I say, yeah, we’ve had to… You think about schools and youth clubs and all those things that happen. It happens here as well: you have to suspend services. But we’ve never had to suspend a service user for ever. It’s only been for a short period of time, one to two weeks. But we’ve always made sure they’ve had space, you know, services in space, and their families—if they’ve got family—know about why and what. But, you know, it, it, you know, it has to happen. We’re not perfect. You know, unfortunately people who physically abuse and mentally abuse, they grow older. So they’re going to be doing certain things at an older age as well. Where people have, erm, dementia or other mental health issues and they’re not aware of what they’re doing, there are some allowances made. But, again, there is still a line where we, we say we can’t meet their particular needs. But, again, you know, when somebody comes up and strokes us, one of our staff, and carries on doing it and carries on doing it, and they’ve got mental health issues or they’ve got dementia, there are still sometimes ways off getting through to people what’s inappropriate behaviour. So it’s actually working with them, with their dementia and having you know, certain, you know, signals that they understand, that you don’t do certain things. But, yes, we have to be reminded again and again, because they’ve got dementia. But, you know, they staff have to be strong and say, ‘No. That’s inappropriate. You can’t do that.’ in their particular language, er, and just make a stand, or, you know, physically remove themselves from that situation. So, you know, we’re having to look at all those sides of things as well.

*Yeah.*

And, again, ‘cos we do quite a lot of intergenerational work as well, we’re quite aware of particularly aware of very young, you know, youngest primary school children we have to be very clear that we’re that the people who are working on those projects we’re 100% that they’d be okay with them. And, and when we’re working with teenagers as well. ‘Cos, again, you just don’t know; allegations can be made as well.

*That’s something we haven’t actually touched on. Could you explain a bit more about the intergenerational…*

Yeah. Erm…

*… stuff you do.*

I mean, again, being part of the community and having a youth-work background and having young people, children that’ve grown up in the area, we’ve seen how difficult it’s been for young people in the area, particularly over the last ten, fifteen years with stabbings, gangs, Asian gangs and Africa-Caribbean gangs, you know, fighting against each other. So a few years ago we, we recognised, again, a lot of that was happening, but the council wasn’t doing very much. Er, in terms of the youth work provision that was in the area, it was getting cut back and cut back so it was almost non-existent. And I’ve got three boys, who’re now young men, who grew up in the area, went to school (primary, secondary, everything), and when they were in their sixteen, seventeens, right up to when they were nineteen, they, there was a lot of violence in the area, particularly around this area: Stratford School, St Bonaventure’s, the park… Erm, a lot of African-Caribbean and Asian rivalry. Erm, and there were, and there was a stabbing in the park. Erm, unfortunately my son was, er, with his friend, two friends when it happened. It was over a mobile phone. And even after that there was nothing put into place. And that young person died in my son’s arms, so it just triggers you off again, all these things happening. And, and there was still nothing going on, you know? There was still no services in place. Wrote to the local authority, talked to St Katherine Road centre…. You know, some of the community and some of the councillors: ‘Oh we’d like to do that but we don’t have any funding.’ And some of the youth groups were very church orientated, so we knew many Asian young men, particularly Muslims, wouldn’t go there. So we talked to some of these young people—and there’s a lot of drug dealing, and there still is, but at that point there was quite a lot here, and there were young Asian boys, a lot of young Bengali boys, that were drug dealing around Plashet Road, round the corners. And of course… So I’ve been in the area, ran youth groups, and my sons have been, you know, quite open about what goes on here. So, and again, just talking to some of the friends of, of, of my sons, and what was going on, and they’re saying, ‘Yeah, we’ve got nowhere to hang out. There’s nowhere to go, nothing to do.’ Er, and the council wasn’t forthcoming, and so I had a discussion with the management committee, we spoke to staff, er, we talked about opening a shisha caff here.

*Mmm.*

Erm, as a community café for young people, and bringing in young people, keeping them off the streets. Erm, we had no funding for it. We’d volunteer our time, and you know, you know, some of them, well myself, my family, some of our friends, some of the managing committee staff at that point were really in that situation where they could, a couple who could help out. ‘Cos it would be evening and then weekends and stuff like that. And shisha caff you’ve got to be very careful and who you let in and all those. And, again, ‘cos a lot of the shisha caffs there’d been some stabbings, so the council was very anti shisha caffs as well. So we got a pool table. You know you’ve got all those things? You’ve got a football table, it’s got table tennis, got the shishas in. We were having 40-60 young people here. It was like ‘What!’ [Laughs], you know? And it was like, ‘Okay… Didn’t quite anticipate some of this…’ ‘Cos, again, the word got round it was reasonable. And there was a cost, nothing was free. The shishas were, you know, they cost ten quid a head, you can have food, you can pay for the football. You know, the snooker you’d play, and the slot machines, buy drinks, have a snack when you come. And it was chocker chocker chocker. Er, so like from half past three, bumph, the schools, the college, universities. Of course nobody under eighteen was smoking shisha…

*[Laughs]*

… or cigarettes, or anything else. That was all outside. But they would have the food and things. Police would be coming in regular, said it was fantastic, you know, venture, blah blah blah. So, ‘Oh, this is really good! It’s really working.’ So it started in June, October we get visit by enforcement of the council: ‘You have to close down the shisha caff; it’s illegal.’ ‘What’s illegal? It’s outside.’ ‘Cos we know the legal requirements, air pollution… ‘Okay’ Had no choice. Police were obviously devastated, because it was keeping people off the street. We’d made a, a really good relationship with these young people. And, er, we’d done trips like to Thorpe Park, Alton Towers. We’d set up a young football team for young players as well. We started doing that, and intergenerational matches and things, tournament… And thought, ‘Oh my God. This is going down the drain now’. Wrote to councillors. We did the normal thing like lobbying. We didn’t put anything in the papers, ‘cos it wasn’t worth it, but we wrote to them. And they were threatening to shut SubCo down because we allowed young people on the premises, just stupidness, you know? Erm, in the end… And we said, ‘What’s air pollution? You said they could smoke outside. So they can smoke at the front, out the back’—it wasn’t all covered then, ‘cos we kept it… But you had to have it 75% open or something like that. We did all of that. ‘No. No. No. Gotta close it, gotta close it. It’s illegal, it’s illegal.’ Enforcement saying they’re gonna knock down things here and there, ‘cos we made the benches outside and the covering on the roof. It’s a charity keeping young people off the street. Violence, crime rates have gone down in this immediate area ‘cos they’re occupied. It was open ‘til 11 O’clock at night. After hours 11:30, you know?

*[Laughs]*

I remember doing 12-12 shifts, you know, those sorts of things. But also ‘cos I had, ‘cos my sons were here they knew everyone and everyone knew them: you don’t mess around with them. You know, it’s them sort of thing. Job opportunities for some of these young people, volunteering opportunities as well, put something on their CV. So you’re creating employment as well, and experience. But they said, ‘No.’ We had petitions, the normal stuff. But unfortunately we had to close down the shisha caff. So… But on the basis of that, what we did, we had the evidence, we did some reports, got feedback from the young people. We applied…. Comic Relief had an intergenerational funding pot where el-, where you could have elders as mentors to younger people. So we turned that into a project. We got three year funding from, er, comic relief. So we had an intergenerational project. So we had an after school youth club here, and also and in the school holidays we had intergenerational work with older people as mentors, ‘cos what we’ve recognised, what’s happened with that particular generation is that you have the grandparents, you had the parents, and you had the young people. But the parents had no time for the young people, ‘cos they were working all the time, so their relationships were with their grandparents, so they had more respect for that. So again, from our discussions with the young people, they saw more of their parents. So we thought elders and mentors, respect, one to one, group mentoring. And we revived the community café without the shisha! [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

People came for drinks and snacks and the youth club. And the elders would talk to them about their issues, their problems. They would do activities together. We had intergenerational football team, erm, the SubCo football team was in the South Essex League, on Sunday League. And they were there representing SubCo as well. And it worked really well. Sundays it was like, ‘Oh no! It’s another football game!’ you know? But… I mean, I… After a while I didn’t have to do any of that, ‘cos the young people took on the lead of organising and everything. But what did happen is there were fights would break out [Laughs] at the football matches. So we’d get these complaints sent to us by the referees and the South Essex Football league. Erm, because, obviously Essex is very white [Laughs], and there were these Asian young boys from Newham [Laughs]. Things were said, you know, very racist stuff, and young people… bang bang bang, fight here, fight there. But we were always in the wrong. SubCo youth team was always in the wrong. Nobody else. The referees were never in the wrong, the other team was never in the wrong, they made comments but they were never in the wrong. It was so sad, er, but we kept it going despite that for a long time. Erm, I think XXXX [02:14:36] nearly two years. Erm, and I think with that intergenerational work, because the young people would be sponsored and supported by the older mentors as well, when they had those discussions about what happened, how it happened, and also some of the coaching as well was from, well the older people were in their late 50s, early-60s as well, so they were good at football and things. And so, so you know, that intergenerational project was at quite a lot of different levels as well: the advice and support. And it gave confidence to elders that they were feeling they were being very useful, they were doing something, and, and younger people felt they had someone they could talk to if they needed to. But also it was about join activity together. I mean we had an intergenerational sports day at Plashet Park that was just brilliant. First time we’ve done that. We’ve done it twice since, and I think we’ll do it again this year. Er, and that was really, really good as well. Like all the different abilities and disabilities and age groups that worked at. So… And, and, and, you know, out of that we then developed the work with the local schools and some of the other youth groups as well. So we’re carrying on elements. Although it’s not funded as such any more, we still keep elements of that going. Erm, very small pieces, of five-hundred pound pieces or pockets of funding. Erm, and then we’ve, er… The challenge who… It’s a bit like the Prince Of Trust, Princes Trust, where young people go and do things in the community, whether it’s activities, painting, volunteering for the day… They will come in for two days and they will be here with their lead mentors, and they’ll do intergenerational work with people at SubCo. And they’re from all communities as well: White, Eastern European, African-Caribbean, as well as Asian. And they’ve made a couple of films. So what they did a couple of years ago, one, one, one group—and every year it’s slightly different—they would, erm… One day they spent in planning what they would be filing, who they would be interviewing, having all the equipment ready, and the second day would actually be doing all of it: interviews, the dancing, the group activities, and then bring it into a video. So we’ve got all of that that the young people have made, so skills of media and printing and stuff like that. And the elders love showing off and dancing and talking and singing. So keeping that intergenerational stuff going is very important. Although we’re not funded for it, finding small pockets of funding so that we can keep it going. And this year they’ve got it in July on the 25th actually, we were talking about the day today, it’ll be the intergenerational sports day, so that’ll fit in quite nicely with this project as well. Could do some filming that day as well.

*Yeah, that’d be…*

As long as it’s a nice day…

*[Laughs]*

We’ll do It the park, but otherwise we’ll have an indoor sports day, and we’ve done that before we’ve had to do that. So we can work something up around that as well.

*Excellent.*

And normally there’s about ten to fifteen young people, so it’s quite a big group.

*Yeah.*

And normally they come in the first day, they look around, ‘Oh God! What we gonna do?’ By the end of it they don’t wanna leave: ‘We wanna go back! We wanna go back!’ But it’s, it’s again it’s just breaking down those barriers that we’re talking about ‘bout between different generations. Because, again, with the project we did originally with the elders, er, elders, it was that thing about fear that young, young people are always about violence and crime and, you know, drugs, and this and that. But it’s only when they realise the similarities: the songs, the music, the sport, the films… Everyone knows how to laugh, you know? It, it just breaks down so much of that, so it’s really brilliant to see that happening. So, again, we wanna keep that going. And we are, and you know, we’re luck, we’re very lucky: the local school, a couple of the local schools—Elmhurst, Sandringham, and, er, Welwyn—that they work at us at different stages of the year and things, and produce things to, to show as well, exhibitions, get families and parents involved. So, again, that’s being part of the community. So you know, and those old people’s day centres, ‘Oh there’s an old people’s day centre there… Oh! It’s not what we thought it was!’ Because you say, ‘Yes, it is primarily, but also this is what we do with old people.’ You know, it’s not that you grow old and you grow in a corner. Bring out the skills, they’ve got so much.

*Yeah.*

And it’s not every single elder will get involved in every single activity, but they’ll all have been involved at some point, even if it’s just the planning and the involvement of being in the group when discussions have taken place. So they’ve all had some sort of input. It’s not the usual five or six in some organisations that keep doing everything, you know. Just make sure that those who try and dominate: ‘It’s very good, but let auntie have a turn, let uncle have a turn…’ and the staff are very good at, and Shapla’s brilliant at doing that as well, like diverting them away from that. But, yeah, it’s just keeping that going. And it gives that energy to everyone as well.

*Mmm.*

And then we take on, er, you know, you people from work experience from the local schools and colleges. SO, again, there’s a through input throughout the year of young people coming and going. And that means elders can tell their story again to somebody new each time…

*[Laughs]*

… who’s never heard it before, and it, you know, it’s great for them. And, and hopefully with some of them they may start thinking of it as a career, you know, working with older people in some sort of setting, which is possible you know. Good role-models with the staff here as well. It’s like youth work but for older people, so it’s much more glamorous in some ways than they thought.

*Yeah.*

Yeah, so that’s quite nice really.

*What’s, erm, your sort of proudest moment or favourite project work that you’ve done at SubCo?*

I haven’t got one. Seriously, I haven’t got one. Arm, I don’t think I have. Because I think, over the years, there’s different things we’ve achieved, and at the time [Gasps] ‘Fantastic!’ but then we’ve always gone and done something even better. So it’s difficult to say one thing. Erm, in terms of… I mean, I think for me personally, it’s when we get grants or contracts for services I always feel, ‘Oh my gosh we’ve got that! I didn’t think we’d get that!’ At that level I could say getting certain grants and contracts. Erm, and then I suppose Investors in People if you’re looking at that level, when we got that the first time round—how many years ago I can’t remember now—that was something else. We just thought, ‘Oh! SubCo’s got that!’ And then last… In 2016 we got Investors in People for the next three years, and then we were nominated to be finalists [Laughs], which is that blue plaque. We went in, we went in November and I wasn’t gonna go for it, ‘cos it’s very expensive tables. It’s like two-hundred-and-fifty pound a person. And I thought, ‘We can’t afford that!’ ‘cos if you’re taking key management committee and seniors you’re talking about two-and-a-half thousand pounds. And, er, so I mean, ‘negotiate, negotiate, negotiate’: we got them down, and we did take ten people. And I’m glad we did, ‘cos we didn’t realise how high profile it was [Laughs]. It was at Old Billingsgate, and, er, you have organisations internationally and from around the country, local authorities, hospitals, prison, probation services, international companies from Dubai and Philippines have all got Investors in People, ‘cos it’s international not just not national. And we’d been nominated as a finalist up from fifty, you know, employers from 50-200, 0-50 employees as a finalist. It didn’t hit us until we were actually there, sitting at the table! When they started, when we saw the brochures, which we’ve got everything. ‘What!’… It was just the shock. I think it was pride, pride for all of us, and proud I would say, but we didn’t realise that that’s what it was, that what was XXXX [02:23:03], ‘cos we we’re just in two minds of going [Laughs]. And it was, it was amazing, you know, that we got that far as a small voluntary organisation from Newham, As-, you know, BME… But we’d obviously met the benchmark and over, overdid it as they said. We were excellent in certain areas and we’ve got the… What did we get? Silver? Yeah, ‘cos after silver there’s gold and plat-… Gold, I think. Yeah. And platinum somewhere as well, so… We were really silver finalists, and it was 200 organisations it was out of, we were the top four.

*Wow.*

And the one won they’re a multinational organisations. The list… ‘Cos when we were looking at the booklet we were going, ‘Oh my goodness! We didn’t realise! We weren’t going to come to this? And they’ve given us this?’ But just having our names read out and everything on, on, on that, and we didn’t have to go to the stage ‘cos only the finalists went to the stage ‘cos they had so many different categories for, for it as well. But we, we were like, ‘Wow! SubCo’s up there!’ So that was a shock XXXX [02:24:10]… I suppose… I wouldn’t say it’s the proudest moment, but it’s one of the proudest moments I think we’ve got, yeah. I think it’s winning our contracts and things and getting grants that’s where we’re, you know, do that. So it’s a group of things [Laughs]. Erm… And, and I think the other side of it is when… I know it sounds a bit ‘bluh’, but when we get letters or cards from service users and their families to say what a difference we’ve made to their lives once a person has died and we get these. So, ‘Oh wow, we did make a difference!’ So it’s that as well that we’ve done.

*Yeah. Well it’s nice that you’ve got the sort of ongoing kind of, you know, relationship with your work and remember people that use your service.*

Yeah, I think it is. And I think, you know, that makes a real difference for us as well we’ve got that.

*Well, I mean…*

Oh yes, sorry! [Laughs] Gone on a long…

*It’s been, it’s been absolutely great, erm, so, yeah… If you don’t have anything more to add I guess…*

No, I think I’m all talked out! [Laughs]

*All talked out, yeah. Well, thank you very much Taskin for all your time…*

No, thank you for all your time as well.

*… it’s been excellent.*

**The End**

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**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Taskin Saleem**

**Project: Growing Old Gracefully - SubCo**

**Date of interview: 06/03/2018**

**Language: English**

**Venue: SubCo**

**Name of interviewer: Francis Ball**

**Length of interview: 02:25:25**

**Transcribed by: Francis Ball**

**Archive Reference: 2018\_esch\_GrOG\_01**