**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Ramesh Dadwal**

**Project: Growing Old Gracefully - SubCo**

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*Interviewer*

Interviewee

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**[00:00:00]**

*It’s the 27th of March, and I’m at SubCo interviewing Ramesh Dadwal as part of the SubCo anniversary project. Erm, just for the tape, could you tell me your date of birth, please?*

It’s… my date of birth is 15/7/48.

*And where were you born?*

I was born in India, as, er, like, that part of that, er, India, was divided by that time. ’47 independence was. So I was in a part of India, and, er, I was born in Punjab in them days, but after that, where I was born, in ’62 that became like part of divided into Himachal Pradesh, which is called like mountains, er, Himalayans. I was born there. I [Pause]… I was brought up in three towns: Simla, Delhi, and Chandigarh. Most of my education was done in Chandigarh. It’s a, like, er, ‘city beautiful’, thus they call in India. It’s, er, like design by a French artist designer, and, er, I was, I was in Chandigarh from 1957 to 1968, when I came to this country. Done my graduation there. I came here in ’68. [Pause] I was doing some thesis on my Masters in economics, and I’m still here! [Laughs] Er… I worked… I… In my youth I was more want to do some physical work than the clerical work, so I was more involved in doing some loading this and that, and all that. I worked in them days used to be Idris in White Hart Lane. Used to be like a soft drink company. I worked there coup-couple of years as a syrup manufacturer. They do doing coca cola and Idris, like they used to have their own drinks. Then suddenly I end up in, er, brewery, which is Charrington’s, a closed shop, which is very rare anybody to get in like. I dunno how got in. I was the only Asian face in that, er, centre. I became a dray. Used to deliver beer to pubs and all that for them for nearly twelve years ‘til 1982. Then in 1982 I packed up, because that job is good for fifteen years, sixteen years. Cos I never seen a dray taking their pension, I didn’t want to die that work.

*[Laughs]*

And it’s a hard grafting.

*So what did it involve?*

It, it involved… A dray was like delivering beer to pubs, like Charrington’s, like to tied-in pubs and to managing pubs as well, going down the cellars. With the cellars, some are quite good cellars, some are very deep cellars. So dropping down twenty-two gallon or twenty-six gallon barrels. Doing all that. ‘Cos in them days like the pubs, okay, was quite… So Charrington’s became known as Bass-Charrington’s, now which is known as a Toby’s at the moment, the Toby Carveries, and that used to be like the Charrington’s them days. They have their depots in Tottenham. Mile End Road the centre, where they used to build pale ales and all that. Then they moved all the project to Burton and all that, and Mile End became dead. And they moved to Silvertown. And, er, then I decided to pack up. And… in ’82, ’83 I was involved a lot with Asian people as well to helping them in a day centre in Haringey, to helping people to understand… ‘Cos in them days the people were not… Very illiterate people came in ’60, ’61, then the people came, the ex-army, they didn’t know anything about it, so I was helping them to do their forms and all that. Suddenly I saw there was like a need to the people I was looking. The people were like stuck in small rooms, eight people, ten rooms, and again very, very like dirty places they were, like looking in them. And there’s not good places for them. Then slowly, slowly I found a… In ’89 I found a place, ASRA. I heard of ASRA. They want a few properties. That was Asian Shelter Residential Accommodation. And small form of ASRA. And I thought, ‘Why not I try there to help, if I can help my Asian elderly people?’.

*Was that based in Haringey?*

**[00:05:00]**

Er, ASRA was based in South London.

*Mmm.*

They had about four properties in Lambeth, that time, when I was, er, looked at it. Then they got some tied up little bit, er… They, they came to Canning Town, Canning Town Road. They bought office there. And they… In them days they start flourishing little bit, because there’s a Section 11 coming in for the Asian communities and all that.

*What’s a Section 11?*

Section 11’s were like some bit more support to Asians to, to bring them up to, because they, with the racism and the problems they had. So to bringing them up they were giving like a good response towards that. And, er, in ‘88’ I saw that they, we had in Plumstead they opened up a small sheltered scheme. Then they got the funding to do some project in East London. In Haringey they already had few properties, and East London, the first property that ASRA was building in XXXX [00:06:05] in Clarence Road XXXX [00:06:06]. And there was like few, er, five houses converted into ten flats in XXXX [00:06:12] Road here. And the people were not aware of sheltered accommodation at that time. It was a challenge for us to do that. And in them days like people would not understand the XXXX [00:06:32], the Indian pronunciation. So they wanted me to put some like, er, ‘Court’ or something like that, and I was insisting, ‘No. It’s an Asian… has to be some Asian name on it.’ And we won. End of they day we called it XXXX [00:06:47], instead of calling it Age Court, or something like that. That them days… Like, now everything is okay. Them days was very, very hard to pronounce to pronounce. Like even my name was very hard for them to pronounce. I was never… Nobody could call me Singh Ramesh. They always used call me ‘Singhy’. Right? It was very, very hard in them days. It’s like was very hard. And, er… So that was a project went in.

*Sorry, just to, just to track back: you mentioned earlier that when you were at Charrington’s, for instance, you were the only Asian person there, you were the only Asian person in Charrington’s…*

I was only Asian, yeah. Yeah.

*… Yeah. Er, what was it like to work in a workforce as the only Asian person. Was it…*

It was, to start, beginning, nobody accepted me. Cos like I was a black sheep. And one, one, one side that was because it was a closed shop. Even it was very hard for any native to get in there, local person to get in there, ‘cos like all uncles and nephews working in there, because was a cushy number. Right? So that was very hard for them to accept me as a… I had to prove myself better than them to be accepted. There was like a small group that came in that, one day, I was like a stand-by XXXX [00:08:08] that time, first to start with. So, one day, the one guy didn’t come, so they had to take me on the lorry, although the crew did not want to take me, cos they… you know. But they had no choice. They had to do the delivery. They had to take me. When they saw my effort, that from cellar I could sling a case of empty bottles straight on the lorry, they had a shock. Even they couldn’t do that, what I was doing. I could throw a twenty-two gallon barrel from the lorry into the cellar. I didn’t have to put it on the rope in there. This is like a good muscly on that one. When I came back to the depot, word went around that, ‘If you want to finish early, go with Singhy’.

*[Laughs]*

Next day everyone wanted to take me on the lorry.

*Wow.*

And when I was on the lorry like, used to go on the lorries, you know, they see an Indian, er, face, they used to say, ‘Oi! That’s Paki!” I say, ‘Oi! That’s my people!’. ‘No. You not Indian.’ That’s what they, you know, that’s what it was like. I became like one of them. And for them I was not any more Indian. I was just part of them. Even after one year I was union rep for nearly three years.

*Wow.*

So I was like… I was well… Then they start treating me very well. I was like the… To stay away from XXXX [00:09:42] I became dray. And I stayed as a dray all the time. I used to have small lorry. I could pick my own XXXX [00:09:50], I could pick my driver up, so it’s no problem whatsoever. I never had a problem afterwards. But to begin with, yes, there was a problem. The people were not accepting it.

**[00:10:00]**

*And, and how did you find it moving to England originally, as well?*

England?

*Yeah, when you first came.*

Hah! That’s a, er, history you’d like! I only came here for two months. I was doing my thesis on, er, Masters, as I said, like. I was doing my PhD on economics back home. I was… My tour was funded by government of India… part funded… And when I came here, everything was like meat, and I was born… not born… I am vegetarian from my childhood. Pure veggie: no egg, meat, fish, anything like that. And when I came here, I could not find anything veggie. All I could eat was rabbit food.

*[Laughs]*

So when I came to, er, London, to, er, stay, I saw Gujarati person. Some Gujaratis were from East Kenya. I saw their notice on, erm, newspaper shop: ‘Pay in cash. Vegetarian meal. Vegetarian, Indian meal.’ So I grabbed, er, opportunity: I went to them, I knocked their door, I say, ‘Can I… I’m here for a couple of months. Can I be…’, and the lady says, ‘Yes.’, and she showed me the room I’m sharing. I went in the room there. And, er, I was doing my paperwork and all that. Within a week, I fell in love with my landlady, and she’s still my wife!

*Wow! [Laughs]*

I’m here! [Laughs] I supposed to go back in two months, and I’m still here.

*Mmm.*

I did not came as a labourer or anything like that. I just come to study for a couple of months. Had a good job back home, as well. I was working with the treasury. And I, my friends, they have retired as lecturers from the universities and all that. And that’s what my aim was: to become a lecturer as well… But the fate was that I’m stuck here.

*[Laughs]*

So that’s, that’s my… came to this country.

*Yeah.*

I, I was not legal for, er… Because with the student visa you’re not legal. I was not legal until 1976. From ’68 to ’76 I was like an illegal you class it as. But that time I had two children with my wife, and in ’76 I was given, er, indefinite stay. Er, and I’ve been working since ’68, ’69. They had no problem. They gave me an NI card and all that. I was working… I was working legally. And I wanted somebody to send me back, quite honest with you. And that was the reason XXXX [00:13:04] Enoch Powell for that. I said, ‘For God’s sake send me back!’

*[Laughs]*

‘Cos, ‘cos if I go back because accept people who didn’t come back. Because I had a beautiful job there. In them days, when the people could not afford cycles, I had a 3.5 XXXX [00:13:21] under me. I was quite well off.

*Mmm.*

So I had no problem in that country as well. So I wanted to go back but I couldn’t. But then my fate was in this country…

*Yeah.*

… so I couldn’t help. My wife, she’s not Punjabi, she’s Gujarati. They came from East Africa. She couldn’t understand a word of my language. The only language she, because she was four years old when they came to England with her father, and she only code she could understand was English or Gujarati, and I didn’t know a word of Gujarati. And, er, so… But that was the fate.

*Yeah.*

We’re here, and we’ve got grandchildren now.

*What part of London was that in?*

Er, it was in Haringey.

*Oh right. Whereabouts?*

Hillfield Avenue.

*Hmm.*

Near Hornsey.

*Yeah. Yeah, okay. ‘Cos I come up from, sort of, in Haringey, but a bit closer to Tottenham. Hornsey’s not an area…*

Oh Tottenham?

*Yeah, down there.*

I’ve still got a property in Tottenham: Loxwood Road.

*Oh really? Yeah, I know that.*

Yeah, 25 Loxwood Road.

*Oh, wow.*

That’s where I’ve given to… That’s where I spent most of my time, from ’76 ‘til… Now my… I have given that property to my daughter, she’s still got it, in Tottenham.

*Hmm.*

That area, Loxwood Road, that is my XXXX [00:14:34].

*Yeah.*

Yeah. I was in Hillfield Avenue. I was in Rathcoole Gardens, in Hornsey. My daughters studied in, er, Inderwick Girls’ School… Hornsey Girls’ School.

*I dunno that one.*

Yeah. That’s in Hornsey near the police station, Inderwick Road.

*Oh right, okay.*

Yeah.

*Was there a big Asian community in Hornsey?*

**[00:15:00]**

No, it’s not… It wasn’t what it… There’s a lot of Punjabis. They came in. They were… they were like on Priory Road and Hornsey area. There was a first Asian shop was on Priory Road, on the corner. Bal Shop. Bal was his grocers. Then the Turnpike Lane start getting a little bit people, Asian people, in that area. It was a mostly… It was a Punjabi community.

*Hmm.*

Because they… Them days, there used to be two, three, er, big employers. One was XXXX [00:15:26]. They used to make cookers, pressure cookers. No, sorry: the cookers ovens, and all that. That was, that is now Tescos in… Edmonton Tescos. That used to be XXXX [00:15:36]. And there used to be… Next to it, there used to be MK Electricals. They used to do the all the switches and all the plugs. And, in Enfield, there used to be another one: Fergusons. They used… So they had like two, three big industries. And on White Hart Lane used to be Idris, which is now storage company. And next to it used to be Wonder… Wonder, er, Loaf. There was like with the Asians in, er, that. And, in Finchley, used to be Clarks Bakery. That they had their own shops.

*Mmm.*

‘Cos I remember Clarks Bakery, because used to, we used to do job brief. In them days like used to be: you go there at night, you do, do the breads and all that, and you get cash in the morn-, in your hand in the morning.

*That’s nice.*

We done that as well [Laughs] those days. It was quite like a good things, er… Lot of Asian community were there. Er, mostly it was Greeks. Turnpike Lane was like… If you go towards Turnpike Lanes, there was Greeks. And if you come to Hornsey there were Asians. The meeting place was everybody was Alexandra Palace. There used to be Ally Pally Pub on the corner at Alexandra Palace. But that was meeting place always used to be.

*Hmm.*

You have a drink there and, er… The Punjabis, that was the best thing for them, like: work, drink, home, and sleep.

*[Laughs]*

So, them days, like, that’s what it was like Haringey was.

*Yeah.*

Few Punjabi community from areas, like different areas, you can class it. Rathcoole Gardens, Hillfield Avenue, Inderwick Road… Like a few roads in that area. That was area that Jeremy Corbyn used to be manager of Labour in, from that, that area.

*Hmm.*

In them days used to live in Turnpike Lane. I worked with him.

*Yeah? What did you do?*

‘Cos I used to do translation for their in Indian, er, language...

*Oh wow!*

… all the Labour Party, them days. Jeremy and me. ‘Cos he was the manager that time.

*When was that? In the ‘70s or ‘80s?*

Er, ’70, ’71, ’72. When he became MP, he came to do opening ceremony one of my schemes. And he recognised me. He says, ‘You still here?’ I say, ‘Yes, I’m still here.’

*[Laughs]*

[Laughs] Oh yeah. It’s, er… Me, I worked with him as well. But I wasn’t much interested in politics, so I didn’t bother to get into that. But done translations for them, ‘cos, ‘cos what happened was that, er, you know, it’s like a fire really. You can call it classic like… One day I was just sitting there, and, er, one of my, the people I was living with, er, was friends, Punjabis, they were drinking. I filled their income tax form, and, er, within couple of weeks he got eight-hundred pounds refund. And in them days that was a big lump sum, in six-, ‘70s. And next day I knew. I just got up and there was a queue outside my door.

*[Laughs]*

People want me to fill their forms in and all that. We never like, er… So that put me into social work, social element. I did… I used to pay from my own pocket for that. Er, and then I realised how they were, like, even in the factories when they were… I seen them working, you know… They were treated like animals. You know, because they couldn’t speak a word of English, and they used to get that overtime, because they were begging for overtime, because money was the main thing in them days for the people. And they were treated, like, very, very bad, and I was very paranoid. And I want to do something. So when the opportunity came to me… We started the Asian centre in Haringey, in, er, there. I worked on that project, then I done work some, helped out in Asian centre in Hackney as well. So when I was with this… As I said that when ‘88 I found a place with ASRA to do something positive, and I knew there’s some organisation behind me.

*Mmm.*

**[00:20:00]**

So then I knew something… We have to do something. And when I came to ’89 in Newham, and I found some, lot of dedicated people to who wanted to do something for the community. So that’s how the group came in. She… I knew her from before even she got married, Taskin. So she was so much involved in that, to the… She wanted to do something for the elderlies. She was doing some project on Romford Road, and she was doing, er, Carlton Road as well. And…

*Wh-what made you move to Newham from Haringey?*

Newham was like a challenge for me. ASRA gave me a challenge, that: ‘We got thirty properties, and we giving you six months to fill them up.’ ‘Cos when we advertised and all that, all we had was two applicants.

*[Laughs]*

Nobody wanted to know.

*Why do you think you only had two people respond to the adverts?*

Because there was no… See, there was no PR work done. That the people did not know anything what sheltered accommodation, what it is. To them was like… You know the… I give you an example, right? I… When I was interviewing a lady who had come to me, they said, but just so you’re aware we both talk in their language, and she start swearing at her son, daughter-in-law: ‘Throwing me this and that, and throwing me into this home. And I did not XXXX [00:21:23] my son for this.’ You know? Because it’s a myth like the son has to look after the mother, or the parents, we have. But the elderlies did not understand, them days, that the accommodation here is too small. Somebody has to sacrifice. You cannot be like stuck in two rooms, the family, the children, and the parents, and all that. So there had to be some sort of sacrifice. Somebody has to move one. But there’s, er, facilities available. They did not… Nobody is aware of that.

*Mmm.*

So to wake them up, we worked day and night. We used to go to temples, Sikh temples, everywhere. And I filled that place in three months.

*Wow.*

That was my project here. In Newham I start, ’89 I came in. Now they have, all that, these sheltered accommodation, they have waiting lists. Them days we had to drag people to bring them in. We used to work whole night. Taskin knows that we used to sit with them. Two o’clock in the morning as well, we heard the story a hundred times. We used to against… We have to tell them must be hearing first time. They used to swear at their children, specially daughter-in-laws. And the son, ‘Oh! He’s a hen-pecked son, so threw me out and this…’

*[Laughs]*

But then once we built up the rapport with them, they appreciated what we done for them. We put the life in them, er, ‘cos that was like living them. That was different ‘cos I was a residential worker. So I was living with them. Twenty-four hours I was stuck with them as well at the same time. So you could understand how the things went in. And people like, they were not prepared. That, that generation was not prepared to be separated from their children.

*How did you find it, living with the elders in the…?*

Er, to me, because I came from a joint family, so I had no problem whatsoever. To me I never treated them to begin with, I did not treat them as, er… I did not want to be professional with them completely, although it was my professional business. But I wanted to deal with them as their own son, as their own relative, as their own friend, to bring them out of their shock what they had coming in. You know, it was very hard. It was hard work, but I had a very good support from my wife, and from my daughter as… I say a couple of daughters. They, they were very supportive. They will help them. Like my… I’ll give you my, er, second daughter, if she’s standing on the road with her boyfriend, or something like that, and she see one of the resident carrying her bags, she will not just stand there. She will tell her boyfriend, ‘Hey, come on, take her bags to the centre.’ And first they would talk about her XXXX [00:24:28], ‘Oh, your daughter was standing with a boy.’ But they appreciated what they done for them. So… But, you had to work with them. I, I was available to them. My door was open 24 hours. I never locked my door. They could walk in my h-, my flat, two o’clock in the morning, four o’clock in the morning… I was still there. For them. So… to talk to them, to put them to ease, sit with them, if I have to sit all night.

**[00:25:00]**

So, we. we used to like work that way. So we can, you know, bring them up. And then we build the ties with their own children as well, at the same time. So, encourage them that, ‘Your son is coming today. What you cooking for him?’ So coming in, taking them out. So they’re slowly, slowly… It took me some time to build it. And we did built it. As Taskin was telling you, that I got the funding for the holidays. I fought for that funding: £10,000. First time, I took them to Spain, a coach from here.

*Yeah.*

We stayed in Estartit. Took… They never went on holidays, them people. We went to Estartit, and, er, there’s couples, there’s singles, all. We’re… There’s no Asian food. How we gonna live without it? We’ll think about it! So I took them to a hotel there we stayed at XXXX [00:26:00], husband, wife… There’s some Asian attendances like they old age people. A couple, husband comes to me: ‘I don’t sleep with… I can’t sleep with my wife. Can we have two single beds?’ I say, ‘Yes. You’ll have it. No problem whatsoever.’ And I’m an idiot. Come the evening I had a double bed for them. To put them… He’s come back to me: ‘Ramesh, I’ve got a double bed.’ I say, ‘Sorry uncle. They didn’t have the two single beds for tonight. Stay there tonight. Tomorrow morning I’ll get you change in there.’ Come next day, I said to uncle, ‘You want to go to the single bed? Can I move you?’ And answer from that guy was, ‘First time in my life I’ve seen my wife. I don’t wanna move.’ He stayed with her on the double bed. That made my day.

*Wow.*

That was like vote for me, to do what I’ve done. And next couple of days, we were walking on the Mediterranean Sea, and I saw like mostly, our Indians, men is going there, and the wife is there. They never walk together. And I saw them, just standing on a corner, I saw slowly, slowly slowing down, catching up with the wife, and he is looking round as well, grabbed her, gave her a kiss. That made my day. Like, that was success for me. And when we came back from that holiday, ‘til now, the first thing that they do, they look at my face: ‘Ramesh, when we going on holidays?’

*[Laughs]*

This is like… This is a success, where we, like, we proud of.

*Yeah.*

So that was like a… Then I used to have like a small group, like senior groups, Asian groups.

*What you mind…*

… local area…

*… telling me more about the holidays, ‘cos they sound…?*

Holidays, you want to know…? [Laughs] Well that was like a… First… That was the first holiday we done, by coach, to the Spain. And, er, there, that time I took them all around like Barcelona, they done Barcelona, we went to Modena, like Modena and all that photo thing. Erm, the food was… The main thing for them was like nourishing food, and I made sure no Asian food. I hadnon-veg and veg, and veg I had like a lot of salads for them, a lot of cheeses for them, and, like, they used to make them like some vegetables, and all that sort of thing, but have them brought vegetables. And the bread: they loved it!

*Yeah.*

But I had a bottle of Tabasco sauce with that. I say, ‘You want a chili? That’s over there. But enjoy this food.’ I say, ‘Makes a change instead of Asian, India... I brought you on holidays. You’re gonna enjoy. Some their food is a bland food although.’ And they were quite happy. Some ladies, like they were vegans and all that as well isn’t it? They won’t touch milk. Okay. They had like tomatoes and they loved it, because Spanish tomatoes and all the salad: the taste is fantastic. So they, they enjoyed that. They got used to… Eventually they get used to it, and, er, it was quite good, like, hotel had a swimming pool. They… In them days there was swim-… Swimming costume wasn’t anything. They were going in their petticoats and blouses and going in the swimming pool. I was quite happy with that. So that was my first adventure with them, and, er, the coach trip was like… That time we went non-stop, seventeen hours. And that was a long journey…

*Mmm.*

… from here to Estartit.

**[00:30:00]**

*Wow.*

So… Was seventeen, eighteen hours. They end up on a whole night driving, so that was… It wasn’t that bad. And, after that, we’ve done a lot of trips. Like done most Europe. We done couple Spain, like, er, then we done Lloret de Mar and all that, then we done Italy, Switzerland, er, Germany… France done so many times, that they done so many times them. Then they got too excited. They wanted to do… Done Dubai with them. Er, then they wanted to go to Far East. Done with them Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore…

*Wow.*

We’ve done that. And, er, lot of trips like then… After that lot of trips went on. But them trips were most involved. Then I come back to them trips once I come into SubCo with you, ‘cos then I… You know… That, that trip was before SubCo, we started SubCo.

*Okay.*

That, that trip was like with them. Then I found like… Yeah, so came back from that trip, and it was quite success.

*Where did the money come from for that?*

Er, there was, er, partly funded by the council. Like, they… Like say that I got a grant ten-thousand, er, £500, er… Yeah, there was like £200 per person, they give us that. The rest of the money, the people contributed towards it. Like in them days it only worked out ‘cos very cheap to go to Spain. I think it was two-fifty… They have only paid about fifty, sixty quid each to… And they were quite happy after that. Then the funding… Then I had another funding where, where I took people on a night cruise from, er, near Clacton, say Harwich, to Belgium. Overnight’s cruise. That was nearly hundred people I took.

*Wow. It seems…*

Big coaches…

*… like a lot.*

So it was… That was another £10,000 funding I had. Not… That wasn’t from council. I stitched ASRA for that.

*Was it difficult to…*

But…

*… look after a hundred people?*

A hundred people like. I had a good staff, good helpers, good groups and all that sort of thing like that. So they… We done that as well at the same time.

*And this was all with ASRA?*

Organised by me.

*Organised by you.*

We do the organising. It’s me and Taskin mostly. I used to organise most these trips myself, but with the help of some like… We sued to get some specialist as well, and, er, some like I do it myself as well. Remember when… We cut the middle person out of that, so gives a little bit of a discount. So used to help that sort of things, was quite good in that. So when we came back like ’90 or ’92, I saw there’s a need for day-care. But I was looking for it like… Taskin, we were as a group sitting together, and we were think-, and we were sitting that... We’ll keep on chatting, we’re talking about, chatting about, ‘There are a lot of day-centres, but there’s nothing specialised, care for the people with the difficulties, learning difficulties, or mental health, or any physical, ment-…’ Because in them days we found that people in, er, ’73, ’74, the Idi Amin when the Uganda problem came out, the people, when they came, came with a lot of mental distress. And that, like that was building in. It was not coming out from them. And that, that was affecting their health. A lot of problems and all that. And we looked at it, said, ‘Why, why is not we are looking at that, er, situation and, er, sort?’ So we wanted to do something specialised. And suddenly, come February, and the is, as she was telling you that, sitting with them and says to me, ‘Ramesh, I’ve got £40,000 in my pot, spend in two weeks.’ I said, ‘Give me two hours, I’ll spend it.’

*[Laughs]*

And, er, they says, ‘Yes! All your forty-thousand.’ Within five minutes I bought a minibus, I bought, er, equipment for the kitchen and all that, I say, do that sort of thing. And that’s how we… SubCo… And then we didn’t know the name, what name should we like.

**[00:35:00]**

We wanted some different name; not just Indian Organisation, or something like that. And Ramesh Verma and all that, we were sitting in there, all of that. Suddenly Ramesh, er, Ramesh came out from, er, Ramesh Verma, ‘cos she does all the XXXX [00:35:13] work, and I used to do like, because of the same name, I used to get the credit as well! [Laughs] And, er, Ramesh Verma, she came up with this name. Er, she says, ‘What you think SubCo?’ Said, ‘Subcontinent’. Everyone says, ‘Yes! That is it.’ And that’s how the SubCo came out…

*Wow.*

… from the, er, that. So we’ve got completely different name. In them days was, er, Asian Workers Association, East African Association, this and Asian… And we didn’t want that. We wanted like cosmopolitan. And we, from the, we, as we were all together, we said, ‘First of all, keep the religion out of the centre. You can do religion in religion places. Let’s mix them, put them together, and give them a service.’ So this was like… that’s all comes up. And slowly, slowly built up with one person. That used to be… She used to be in council that time. We have a girl called Anjum Mouj. Erm, and XXXX [00:36:18] they… We started that, the kitchen that… I think she… XXXX [00:36:23], she was my first kitchen cook. Because I don’t specialise and all that, and er… We started this centre from the day one.

*Was there, erm… You mentioned getting all the people of different religions together; was that challenging at times or was it…?*

Huh?

*Was it challenging to…?*

It was. It was challenging in them days. What was happening… Because people were have their own small igloos. Like small communities there, small community there… They didn’t know. Very hard to mix them together. You know, it was like you can class it not, not only racism like when we work in like, ‘Oh I smell fish and chips, oh I smell this…’ ‘Cos in between as well, like Punjabi six in and all that. It was very hard.

*Mmm.*

Er, the people who came in ‘60s and all that, it was hard to bring them out to this sort of conception. The people came from East Africa, they wanted to explore these services. So very easy for us to beginning. I had a lot of Gujarati people, clients come in here, even XXXX [00:37:29]. Very hard to get the Punjabi clients, or the Muslim clients, er, ‘cos they thought I was a Hindu and all that. The Muslim, what they gonna do in… It’s like religion was also, in them days, a lot of play the game was playing and that. But, slowly, slowly the people, the needs, they understood what we meant. We were not just a walk in centre; we were, like, trying to do something specialised. And to begin we had a problem like, er, first food problems, meals on wheels problem. We started that as well, ‘cos, er, Asian meals was a job and a half in here. And we won the tender. The meal we provide… They called us for the tender. The dish we cooked, none of the councillors or anybody seen in their life. It’s called, it was like a mixed vegetable. In Gujarati they call it undhiyu. And the staff came to me and said, ‘So, Ramesh, what should I have.’ I said, ‘Take undhiyu’. We took it, and they loved it. And straight away we got the contract…

*Wow.*

… doing that. And, er, then Taskin joined me, er, as well, because she was, she was looking for a job share, and she wanted to. And, er, I could not find better person than her, quite honestly there. Although we had like choose other people, well she was a gem. And she… We wanted some people who are dedicated to do some work, not for the just for the… Everybody needs money, don’t get me wrong, but dedication is something which you need as well. And this girl had a dedication. And, er, so… Since she started with us, think we’re flourishing. We have… We had a bad time as well; we went through bad patch.

*Wh-… How come?*

Er, when the council, er, change from funding to the individual grant, that was a very, very bad patch of nearly a year-and-a-half, and we didn’t even have a pot, money in our pot to keep salaries. Well, some of the staff they stuck with us. They stood with us that time when we needed… We explained to them, ‘Look, this is what is happening. Although the money is owed by council, but we not getting it, so are you…’ Some of the staff, we never paid them for two months, three months sometimes, could not pay.

**[00:40:00]**

*Wow.*

Or sometimes like, er, we could pay them for ten days salary. But we stuck together; we came through bad patch. We came through that as well, and… The name built is like the… It’s not only that. We are a paper organisation. They deliver the service. What we meant, we delivered. We did not know… We extended from that. So even like you can see these things coming up, because of their hard work, and as from the beginning I said like holiday that was my craziness. When I came to SubCo that was, again, it was my madness. And Taskin was not in that… Then I had to force her. I said, ‘Look, darling, you doing that as well, yourself.’ So she helped me in that, and I’m most probably I think I’m the only Asian organisation which has away days in Dubai, Sharm-El-Sheikh, and in Marrakesh, and also in Casablanca. And on 4th, I’m having away day. Where? In XXXX [00:41:23]

*Is, is that something you still do, the holidays and the trips?*

Er, it’s like when we do that, we do… Because what happens is I take the away day. We do away day.

*Uhuh.*

The management committee and the committee. Erm, I’m going to Tunisia on the 4th. When we do that, we have a budget.

*Yeah.*

This is my budget for, er, away day. Right. Now, I XXXX [00:41:51] Tunisia, so I can pay that much in the budget for your away day, rest, if you can contribute, you can have a holidays plus away day. So what happens is the committee that contributes like, for example, now, if the holiday is costing me £500, and I’ve a budget for £200, for my away day: I say, ‘Look, I have a budget for £200; how about you putting in £300? And you have seven days there, but three days are mine. You gotta give me three days to work for the SubCo...’

*Mmm.*

‘… And evenings and all that is yours.’ That’s what happens. So they contribute towards it, and we pay that. So instead of having away day just round here we take them away, and they can’t go nowhere. They have to work. [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

So this is why that’s what we do, like. We done Dubai, er, Casablanca… Dubai I’ve done twice. Casablanca… As I said, on 4th, I’m going to Tunisia. We’re back on 11th.

*Wow.*

So… We done away days mostly places… Isle of Wight… We done local explore. We done in Paris as well. So this is what we do, like, you know, encourages them to travel as well, to enjoy, plus work. And, once you are away, your minds are more fresher, you can come up with new ideas, you can come with some… we get some new ideas what we can provide better service to the elders, how we can make their lives better, how we can [Pause] give them a good satisfaction in their last days. You can class it like. Or you can say it, I’m preparing them for myself! [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

I’m 70 years old, so why not I have something to look forward for? This is like, this was like, er, exclusive services what we provided, I think, XXXX [00:43:54] organisations. As you can understand, the last year where we were shortlisted for the silver award.

*Mmm.*

And we were the only Asian community there… centre there. And we were the fourth to receive the award on that one. So it shows that we have… The staff, the s-… The group has done so well. And staff… The stability in the staff is quite good, yeah. Very little movement. They love it. I don’t know why, but they still stuck with us.

*Yeah.*

And I’m stuck with the chair since from day one. I’m still in the organisation.

*How did you, erm, get the building here?*

Building? What was happening like when… This used to be an Asian centre before. When, er, when, when they, when they offered me the 40,000, they said like, ‘Spend it on all that.’

**[00:45:00]**

‘Cos there was a opportunity for the… because we were going on the, er, that there’s a need for the elderlies, and the Social Services (Deborah Cameron and all that), they were looking at it. ‘Cos there’s a need for it. And the centre was… This is a social services building. So the building was a part of it, with the funding, that you’ll get the building.

*Oh, okay.*

So that time like it was on a five year’s lease, ten year’s lease. So then they carried on from that. So this is on a leasehold property. It belongs to the social services. We done work on it. It was a very small building. We have done all the… All the work has been done, like extended you’ve seen, five-star toilers they have built it. So we have like, bring it like… We tried to bring some, er… It was like you can call it like dump yard when I, when we took over this building. So we worked hard. We had some volunteers. Taskin’s husband is a plumb-, a builder. He helped us a lot. He used to give us free of charge. He worked so many times with us. So he, like… The community has helped us a lot. The… They… Not financially, but physically they have helped us a lot. So… In financially as well, sometimes I get fundraising. Sometimes I get quick money from people as well, at the same time. So, so that’s what it is. This, this building has been like from scratch we have started and built up into that centre.

*Yeah.*

So social services… This was a run-down building when we have it took over. I mean, social services were shocked when they saw what we done to this.

*How long did it take you to make it into a nice place?*

We’re still working on it! [Laughs]

*[Laughs]*

We’re still working on it. It’s… The building work never finishes. You know? Every time the new things comes up, like we used to build small back garden as ever, we had to, we had to extend it for the elderlies, ‘cos our numbers were growing. And now that even the numbers are growing, so we are growing our hands a little bit outside as well, ‘cos we can’t afford to have a new build-, other building and all that. XXXX [00:47:19], so we’re renting somewhere else. Like we start renting Trinity Hall. Trinity Centre we started there a couple of months ago. That’s where I’m coming from this morning; I was there. And, er, on this one we, we have extended, explored, as much as we could. But there’s always a need. Little bit more need always to do a lot more. And, er, hopefully we’ll do some… Because I’m trying to get some like lift as well, like a walk-in lift on top and bottom, ‘cos there’s problem with the stairs here. The people cannot go up and down, up and down, so we, we’re looking at it. Because a stair-lift is not working out on the here. So I, we’ve been looking at ways to do the fundraising. Like they can build a hole in the middle, near the wall, so we can have like a small platform to bring them up and down. So, hopefully, once we fund raise it, it’s definitely…

*Yeah.*

So I’ve got a good… Everything boils down, comes down to money as well, and the fundraising and all that sort of things, and, erm… Now we have quite good funders coming up. They are supporting us. There’s a good support coming out. And the support is coming because, I can say proudly, work of the staff. ‘Cos the staff has worked with the trainings, with their, er, skills polished. My kitchen staff are did not able to be, er, helpers, supporting, learning, they’re doing NVQs. So I’m proud of that, ‘cos they are into trainings. They want to learn. They want to expand, and they want to expand their knowledge as well ,and they want to get into that, and, er… ‘Cos this field is so much expanding. And it’s such much worse, available, in the market. It’s how you can explore, and how much you can explore. So if we can keep on exploring and keep on going ahead, you know? ‘Cos I was talking to a group of my friends: I said, ‘We’ve done most of the things. We have reached up to end of life project as well. What next?’ Right? I’m looking at it. What next? I’ve done from ‘A’… I never call it ‘Z’. I think I’m still at ‘C’.

*[Laughs]*

**[00:50:00]**

So there might be something else to explore, as you never know. So that’s where it comes in, you know? That’s where we look at some young blood coming in; the young, er, young generation coming and telling us what’s in the market, what is needed, all this. Some people telling us what the need is and all that. This is all we see somewhere. And you can see more when you’re traveling as well, at the same time. Like, er, this Jan we were in Egypt; we went to Luxor. And, er, I saw something: they were like, er, stone grinders and all that. How they were enjoying… While they grinding the stone they were singing and clapping and all that. And it was a very good therapy, so I brought it back for them.

*Wow.*

So do that like they’re grinding the stone, and they were clapping and going on, and there was music, and she made a video, Taskin made a video from that, from Luxor. And so you get ideas when you go out. So that’s this is the main… Also it helps us in there, and people can get that. That’s what I’m… That’s what we’re like. And, er, now people are asking me again, when I’m doing the next holidays, and I don’t know what to do. [Laughs]

*[Laughs] You mentioned a few times, erm, about food and cooking: is that something that’s always been important at SubCo?*

It has been, because what’s happening this… Although the food… It’s nourish-, they eat… You can class it as spicy and good and that, but there’s, there’s some foods are, which are good in a country where is the heat. Right? Where you can burn them calories, right? Over here you can’t burn them calories. You have a habit of eating that grease, ghee, butter, and all that sort of thing, because that’s how your elderlies are told a generation… ‘You get stronger if you drink milk. If you stronger eat ghee.’ and all that sort of thing. When you come over here they don’t understand that they’re not burning the calories. Over there they’re walking in the sun, or doing that exercise, walking so much in the fields and all that. You’re burning your calories. In them days I’m talking about. Now they are too modern. They are more modern than us in a way. We still… In this country we still live in 1960s. When the India and Pakistan and all Bangladesh has advanced. They are more into nourished foods and all that. We are not.

*Mmm.*

So this was a need here to tell people that what the ideal foods are. We have no objection eat, you eating that food, but in some proportion. To bring into that we had to do some education, to bring them, to bringing them to that sort of… Because if got some restaurants and all that, oil dripping off, because they’re still doing that traditional. And the new generation or anybody, even I myself, I will not eat that stuff. To me it’s too greasy, too oil, and you say, ‘How am I going to burn the calories?’ But because that’s their tradition and they people were over here the same thing was. They, that was they should be. So to bring that to the nourishment and also to give them the same taste as well you had to work on it. You had to educate the kitchen staff, because kitchen staff, again, was in the same tradition, that lot. Put lot of oil XXXX [00:53:41]. They do not understand, so we had to train them into that. We had to go into the books, we had to go to the literatures, we had to go, ‘How we can cut the calories? How we can cut the calories?’ But cutting not only that: at the same time give them the same taste. Taste should not differ.

*Mmm.*

To do that it was very hard job. To bring that in we had to work like experimenting ourselves as well. And some staff was experimenting as well. And we get some idea as well while I was traveling abroad. We were traveling with them, and if you see some places in India… India I’ve seen like… Thailand, how they cook, steam it and all that, as to bring the taste out. And even Malaysia, Malay, er, how they cook Halal food and all that. I’ve been to… In Kuala Lumpur I went to some mosque where they’re doing a massive cookings, and how they were cooking… Although they were, er… They hot countries but they XXXX [00:52:54] little bit oil… Less oil… XXXX [00:54:55]. So these, these sort of things you learn, and you talk to them,

**[00:55:00]**

and, er, staff also bring in something, and committee members also bring some ideas in. So we put them all together and tried to bring that out. And it, it start working. Although at the very beginning it was very hard for the elderlies: ‘Oh! There’s no oil in this!’ ‘Don’t worry! Taste the food, not the oil!’ So the people start loving it. Now they elder people tell us, ‘We don’t want the oil.’ So this is… That’s how you can change them, but not adding the oil you can’t be have that taste. You’ve got to give them the same taste, but in a different variety. But, slowly slowly you’ve got to do it. You can’t do instant change to that. As I told you that time, when I took them, I said, ‘Sorry! No Indian food.’ So they didn’t have no oil. For seven days they had to have salads. They had to have like salad, they had to have cheese, they had to have bread. Or the best thing they could cook was the cauliflower cheese, er, cauliflower cheese. And I made sure that he cooked it nicely in a pot, small, er, small, er, balls, each piece, individual pieces, nicely done, the cauliflower cheese. And little bit, sprinkle bit chilli on it, and, and etc. Yeah? And for the Muslims like it was Spain there’s no such thing as Halal.

*Mmm.*

Right? We did. They call it… They don’t call it ‘Halal’, they call it ‘special’ food. So we went… You couldn’t do the lamb, but you could the chickens. So we went to the place where they call it ‘special’, and they do the Halal food, and we brought it to the restaurant and they cooked it how we want it. W-we, couple of my staff, my wife, Taskin, myself, we went in there; we showed them how to clean the chicken and how to cut it and how to roast it. And they done it for us.

*Wow.*

And then they done it. And when we were… When I next took, ‘Oh, Ramesh! Special chickens!’ So that’s, you know? You teach them as well, and you satisfy the customer, and also at the same time give them something different so they enjoy it as well. Instead of having all the time chillies, they have something.

*Taskin, erm, mentioned, the first time I came, she told a story about when you went on one of the trips—I think you were on a cruise ship—and some people were cooking in their cabins. Can you remember that?*

Yeah. That’s, er, it’s always happens like that is cabins cooking as, er… They started doing that… We done that from, er, Cyprus to Alexandria.

*Yeah.*

… Doing that as well. And there were people cooking in their cabins. Er, that, that, that has been a tradition. You see like in olden days, they used to be like when their ships goes fr-, used to go from India to Africa (they used to take the labour) the people used to cook when they came in. But our cabin was like cooking in there. We done twice like that. Al-Alexandria we done that, one from, er, Limassol to Alexandria, to the port Alexandria. Took them Egypt. That, that, that on the Cyprus trip. And then we, then we done another one from Portsmouth to Bilbao. People… You cannot stop that. You can do what you like, you know? And you, and you find like, there, I had, er, a trip, like a, er, er, cr-cruiser lying in there and the staff, one of the kitchen staff, they came to me… Because, you see, you can identify, because a hundred people are there. Now they took some bread to their, er, to eat later on. And the staff come to me and says, ‘Oh, your people are taking breads.’ I said, ‘What do you mean my people are taking bread? Everybody’s taking bread! They’re not going anywhere; you’re right in the middle of the sea. Where the hell they gonna go? They can eat only on the ship. Where’re they gonna take it to?’ He says, ‘No, they’re not supposed to…’ I said, ‘If you want to find somebody, go and tell them. It’s not ‘my people’, it’s the same people as others are. So, if you don’t like it, go and tell anybody who is taking it, ‘Please do not take it’. Do not come to me: ‘Your people’. They have paid the money as I’ve paid the money.’ So we had to put them in their places as well. Otherwise, like, he has been like similar a couple of times like that way also, but there has been on trips as well, like, where ship people, they have done effort to cook Asian meal for, because they know the group coming in. They, they made an effort to cook Asian meal for them as well. They put samosas and curry and all that on the cruiser.

**[01:00:00]**

*That’s nice.*

So… You know they, that, they… Some ship people have respected. Er, some they did moan about it as well. Doesn’t make any difference. You get used to it. And not only get used to it, you gotta put them in their place, simple as that. Like you could tell them what we’re... resistant. Where they are right you are right as well at the same time with the wrong. So everybody… If they were taking it home I would’ve said, ‘Yes. That is wrong.’ When you eating on the XXXX [01:00:36], all inclusive.

*Yeah.*

If you don’t feel like eating now you might want to eat later on. So you’re not going to come back to the restaurant to eat over here. So you’re going to stay in the cabin, or you might want to go to the board or feed the fish. Never know what you wanna do. So what’s wrong with it? So I didn’t think something wrong with it, so that, that’s the reason we didn’t. Well, the people do cook, like to cook something. Like I had some people take from here half-cooked, and they start have their gas burners with them. Some had electric heaters somewhere. You do find that. But you got to put up with that. Doesn’t make any difference.

*When you first started SubCo, what were the sort of services you offered?*

At that… When we started first it was like a standard services, put it that way. Because that time was not like specialist services. So, to start with, you, you just have to show that you’re a day centre, ‘cos the day services… Because I was already working 24 hours with the elderlies. She was, Taskin, was doing elderly projects as well. Most the groups were… The group we were together, like Ramesh Verma and all that, XXXX [01:01:54], we were involved in that sector, to elderly care, at that time. It was very important, elderly care, because that was not available in the market, that time. So we are all working on that, okay? Now there should be some sort of respect for the elders. There should be some elderly care in there. So that’s what we’re look, and that’s what we started from. To gradually we built up to a specialised, specialist, organisation. We did not want to just stay as a, just kind… Because I said I had Tahira coming from Age Concern to give advice on Age Concern funding available. I had some people like Palvinder coming in, giving advice on social care policy and all that sort of thing. I was here to give them housing services. Social services were providing them with some sort of… And in them days DSS, I had a few girls coming from DSS to tell them how they can claim benefits like, er… In, in them days it was like mobility allowance, or attendance allowance. Now it’s a different name: Disability Living Allowance they call it now. In them days it was like no income support. It was a pension credit, pensions and all that. So they benefits and rights, what their rights were, because they never knew about their rights. They always lacked behind for the care projects and… So that, that, that was a… Initially it was like advice, and provided day services to anybody walk in, but that, slowly slowly, we found that now this is provided everywhere; we have to specialise in something. And that’s how we were meeting up, together, to provide… And soon Taskin started with us. That clicked. Right? Like, before, it was just a centre… And also meals on wheels we started before Taskin came here we started the meals on wheels. But once Taskin came in then we started a specialist care as well at the same time XXXX [01:04:02], because she was awarded respite care projects and all that. And she said, ‘Ramesh, there is a project: elderlies with no housing or day-care.’ And, er, ‘Yes, that is not available so let’s…’ The group decided, ‘Yes, let’s specialise in that!’ And also we had a council backing as well at the same time. They backed us on that: ‘Yes; you are providing that.’ So that is the reason like, even as I said that went through a bad patch. We pulled out, because everybody had their funding cut. Because we came to that project that we are not a funded project, we are a care project, so we had no… We have come back from red to, er, black. So you can call that we are back in the market to provide a service to the people, the needy people.

**[01:05:00]**

*Are there any particular needs specific to the Asian community that you addressed?*

Asian community, we see they, first of all, it was like when, when we started he was like, as I said, like, er, people came from East Africa and all that, they had like a lot of mental disturbance because they could not even explore… They could not explain to the children, they could not explain to anybody. We were here to listen. There’s a lot of, er, stories in the, you know, that people used to come up with: how they were, and how they were treated, and how they were… Like, so it’s, it’s… You can call it like a reminiscence as well, at the same time, you know? You talking to the people to find out what the hell was going... One project we went through that. Then start, now, in the second generation the people who’re retiring from here. Because the people came here, all they knew: go to factory, work, come home, have a drink, go to sleep. And that deteriorate their life… health. And in them days, in ‘80s, ‘70s, ‘80s, if, er… There was classed Indian person gets older ten years before any other, because they took, they too much inside, nothing comes out. So, even like in ASRA, like an old age, er, elderly schemes and all that, it’s all sixty-plus. ASRA was the only we were allowed to take fifty-plus.

*Really?*

Yeah. Because there were statistics there were there in the council and in the government, that Asian elderlies get young, ten years older than any English or any Black man. They become older ten years before. So that’s, that’s how XXXX [01:06:56] would stand, of ten years, to take them to shelter. You could take them to sheltering scheme ten years earlier, then in fifty-plus.

*Is, is that something that has now sort of…*

Now it’s over.

*… changed?*

You see with third generation, ‘cos second, third generation, now the people know. Now the people are educating themselves. Now people are getting into that. Now people are prepared to live on their, in their freedom. Before, it was dependency.

*Is there…*

When you’re… When… Pardon? It was in the blood. Nothing you could do about it. Like, it was like when you’re younger dependent of your parents, when you’re grown up your parents are dependent on you. So you never independent. Now, everybody wants to be independent. Parents want to be independent, children wants to be independent, grandchildren when they will be independent. Every everybody wants to be independent. So to do their independence and all that, they prepared for it, so now that fifty-plus is gone. Now, you see, everywhere is equal ops. You, as you mentioned Section 11, that’s where you came in as well. So now that Section 11 is gone, and now it on everything is equal ops. So them days are speciality, and preferential… Had to give them preferential treatment, because they were not treated in a right way. So to do that, the government done that Section 11. Okay, I give you that, little bit… You know… [Pause] I give you sweet penny, right? So that, that was, that’s all it was like a penny. You getting a penny…

*Yeah.*

… in your little pocket. ‘Forget about the pound.’ they says, ‘Forget about ninety-nine pence. You got a penny in there.’ Right? So this, this is, this is how that came in. Now everything is on equal ops, everywhere. There’s no such thing anymore like specialised in Asian, or anything like that. You are all in equal ops. Even here we are on equal ops. Must welcome anybody else, even though we are a specialised thing, Asian care and all that sort of thing. Anybody walks in here must be welcome. Anybody that’s referred by the council must be welcome. As long they can adapt to our requirements and whatever we have providing services. So they are like… With the elderlies it is very hard at the moment, but with the third generation which is coming up now it will very easy to mix them together, because they will understand one another. These people they not understand, everybody had their own ways.

*Mmm.*

**[01:10:00]**

So it’s very hard, it was very hard, for them. But now it’s getting, slowly slowly, it will get easier. Slowly slowly people will get… But the needs are getting bigger, the demands are getting bitter, the lifespan is getting bigger, and because of that the needs, like centres of this type of things, are needed more. Because all the, most older generation now if you’re looking at it, seventy-plus, they are living on pills and pension and all that. Physically we are going down. Mentally depressed, getting mental depression coming in. Lot of depressions coming in. But lifespan is getting longer.

*Mmm.*

So as I say like, I told you that in my line, when I was working as a dray, none of the brewery people seen their pension. And the government was laughing because they contribute all their life. Come 65 they kicked the bucket.

*[Laugh]*

Right? They’re gone so the government got the money.

*Yeah.*

But now they’re living longer, it’s hurting the government, because they’re claiming pensions. Right. Now, a person who is about dying a hundred and, er, hundred-and-one, hundred-and-two, they work less in their life when they claim from pension more than that, so that hurts the government. They don’t want to pay the money. They want to grab the money.

*Yeah.*

So, to do that, like the, that’s where the care comes in. So if the caring now, people do need the care. You don’t want to kill them, you don’t want them to die unnecessarily. But the time comes, you know, it goes… I’ve been to Israel. Believe you me. Over here the response ambulance is one hour, two hours. Anywhere in Israel the response time is eight minutes.

*Really?*

Yeah. And you can be operated within five, four hours.

*Wow.*

That’s a country where there is a Russian Jew, who’s a doctor, sweeping the roads, ‘cos they haven’t got a job for him as a doctor. But if it’s needed, he’ll be there. Right? That’s what I class them like a… Mostly they talk about sheikhs and all that, for their treatments they come to Israel.

*Really?*

Their medicine, medically, if you’re time has come to die, nobody can stop you. If this is time is not there, best country is Israel, you can be treated just like that.

*Yeah.*

That’s how the treatment is.

*Do you think…*

What?

*Do you think, erm, that the care you provide is becoming more important therefore, because of, you know, other government services are getting cut, and stuff like that?*

It’s cuts and all that, er, sorry, ‘cos I didn’t get you, ‘cos I’m a bit on this one…

*Yeah.*

…hard.

*Are you, are the services SubCo provides more important today than they have been previously due to these added pressures?*

See, what happens is that, in SubCo, when we provide a service we provide not… Although, as a professional, but not ‘us and them’. To us, it’s ‘we’. Doesn’t matter what colour, what creed you are, what religion you are. It’s we. When the government provide services: ‘us and them’. You’re there for eight hours, six hours, and you’re gone home. Soon as you walk out of that door, you’re washed out. This staff and us, they live with them twenty-four hours, believe you. They go on holidays, they talk SubCo, they talk their clients. You, they, go for a dinner, they don’t talk about families, they talk about SubCo. So this is what ‘we’. That’s where we are successful in providing a service. This is how we have given them more lifespan. We treat them as ‘we’. We do not treat, ‘Oh because I, the book says I have to do that.’ I don’t do, they don’t do by book. Although they take the good things from the obok, where they provide the service, service is needed by them. So that is where we become a unique organisation, providing a service to the people. Yes, we are here twenty-four hours. I had a meeting over there and they talk about how we can handle that person, that we got some new client, ‘Oh she shouts too much’, this and that and all the other, ‘How we gonna…’ So it’s just in them; they will not talk anything else. So this, this is what I said to you. Even away day, as a said, I’m going on holidays. Even if I be lying on the edge of the sea, all they’d be talking about is SubCo.

**[01:15:00]**

*[Laughs]*

So it’s, it’s gone in their blood, put it that way.

*Mmm.*

So that is the reason my staff turnover is very low. See, your staff turnover would be higher if you look, erm, looking for myself only. Everybody needs money. Everybody needs opportunity. I would love them to go out of here and explore more, and bring some ideas back to us as well at the same time. Some of the staff are so stuck. For them, it’s like day and night for them.

*Yeah.*

And it couple of staff I sit with them, like XXXX [01:16:05], she was from the day one. And I said to XXXX [01:16:08], ‘You’ve XXXX [01:16:09] for the last twenty-four, twenty-three years.’ She said, ‘I’m gonna die here. I don’t wanna go nowhere.’ So it’s some of them are there that way. Some who have gone out, they have given us, er, back ideas came. Nahid, my wife’s chair, she used to work with us, she went out (she’s a care worker and all that), she brought me lot of opportunities back as well. This… Other people are here: I have my treasurer Ashok, he used to work with me in ASRA, and he comes with ideas as well because he’s an architect, so he brings all the ideas I said like developing and all that. So everybody is there, like Sunder; he used to work in the social services here. So people do come with back with idea, and we do put them together, and we want them to feel that they’re part of us; they’re not just clients, although client is client. As that’s the professional way to saying is, ‘Client is client’. If anybody talking to me in professional ways, then that the professional is, ‘Client is client’. But we have client plus. One step ahead in that. In, er, Tas-, Taskin knows 99% people by their names. You take me to any of the people, sixty-four people are here at the moment, she would know every single person’s name, and, 99% people, she would know their history as well. That’s my chief executive, and that, that’s what I’m look at it. If I go to a day centre like anywhere run by social services, they will not even know the ten people’s name and addresses. They link with their next of kins, their link with their families, their, we, we do sit with them in the bereavement, we sit with them their happiness... Sometimes we leave them in the happiness on their own, but the bereavement we are there. So they, the staff does live with them, and that’s, that’s what the beauty is. So to know, so you, you talk to her any client and this is what is happening. She can exactly tell you that is the person. So that’s how all the staff is. So that’s, that’s, that’s what, er, make my life easier.

*[Laughs]*

I don’t have to conduct for, er, you know, ‘cos I got my job, my break as well.

*Yeah.*

I want to enjoy my retirement, and it’s far for me to come from.

*What’s your proudest achievement with SubCo?*

Achievements? It’s in front of you. All of them are in front of you. Achievement started with one staff, one me and one my staff, and today: twenty-six staff, three XXXX [01:19:06] and are black and running smooth. People are happy. I had the first management committee meeting today when they say, ‘There’s no issues’, The user’s reps say, ‘Everything is running smooth.’ I never heard them saying that before. First time this morning they said to me, ‘Ramesh, everything is running smooth. Nothing to complain about.’ What else can I hear? That’s the achievement. As long as they are happy, as long as they feel better, feel comfortable… See, we see them when the day they came in, ‘cos, er, there was a case, er, Pakistani gentleman, and, er, Taskin’s husband, he was working in their house, and he was like run down. The guy was completely run down, never shaved, nothing whatsoever, sitting down. And he knew from very old used to work in Ford.

**[01:20:00]**

And he said to him, why don’t you go to SubCo then? First he had a drawback. One day he came, and, er, for the last three years he has been here, and, apparently from what I heard from the family, he gets up in the morning, shave, tie, suit up… He wants to come to SubCo. See, that’s an achievement: that people want to come… If they can help it, they want us to open seven days a week. But, again, everything comes down to money. And also staff is ready. Staff is no problem, because, as I said, because they live 24 hours with this. But we have to look at it how we can break it as well. It’s not only that: staff, er, to look after them as well, their families as well.

*Mmm.*

So not only that, yeah? They are 24 hour here. I’ve done my bit, but they have to have their families as well. So we’re looking at the same prospects as well. We want to increase hours, we want to give more service level, so that, this was the reason why, when the opportunity comes at Trinity Hall, so I could do some more service to the people, because this is getting bit more congested for us now, and there’s not many places where we can move on to.

*Yeah.*

So, so that’s what it is. That’s, that’s an achievement, sure.

*Yeah, certainly, I mean to have it still running after all these years, and sort of ever-expanding is, you know, that’s really good, isn’t it?*

Running quite smooth. The main thing is always is, you see, organisations run because… Sometimes what happens is that when you have unprofessional people, and they’re looking at their individual benefits, that’s where there come the crunch comes in. When you provided service, and you’re providing it open-hearted, and you’re open—like, we are completely open with our accounts, everything financial were are like an open market. Anybody can check the account, can do everything to go through that—that makes you flourish. That makes the people… The funders are not fools. They know exactly where to fund, and how their funds are being used: either they’re used properly or not. Where I can get Lottery money without even filling the forms. Only one form, and in no interviews, and they second time they’re saying, ‘We don’t need your forms. We know who you are; your money’s coming.’ So it means we are delivering some service. And, as long we keep on delivering the service, we don’t get into the greed.

*Mmm.*

The greed is that what kills an organisation. We should not be doing that. What you are money for, what the funding is, providing a service. I’m not saying like… No organisation will take people on away day on holidays like me. I do, ‘cos I keep in budget. And I show that budget: ‘Look! Here is the chairman’s budget.’ And this is the budget because these people are providing a voluntary service. They need a break.

*Mmm.*

Staff, this staff, is working; they need some support. If I don’t support them, where they gonna go? They gonna crack up. That breaks, I take them on a break, let them get their steam out, prepare them for the next six months. But that’s money which I spent on them, that returns, comes in there.

*Absolutely.*

And if I don’t spend that money, and I just want to grab from them, you’re going to go mental berserk. Physically and mentally you’re going to go [Throttling noise]. Gone!

*Yeah, yeah.*

And I do not want any of my staff to go in that way, ‘cos I don’t believe in that myself, ‘cos I never had any place where I could get my steam out when I was working with elderlies. I found a place. As I said, I went to Israel, I used to go to Jerusalem. I sat there near the Wailing Wall, on the top, and, er, I don’t know I, er… I showed Taskin and all that, I took them there as well. I sit near the Wailing Wall, and one foot is there and this is there, and I sit there, and a Jewish café there, he gives me coffee all day long, right in front of the mountain. It’s about two-hundred, er, monuments of the elderlies that pilgrimage. And two-hundred God-fearing people born in that 2-mile radius of Jerusalem.

**[01:25:00]**

There must be something there. And that is comes to in the picture, give me relaxation. I used too much I’ll goes every six months there one year. I used to go there, sit there, talk to them, was for nearly couple of hours. And I could take it back. So that’s what I wanted my staff to be, understand them.

*Have the same sort of opportunity to…*

Yeah.

*Yeah. Do you mind if we take a quick pause?*

Please.

**[Interview paused]**

*Er, well I was wondering if you have any particular fond or cherished memories throughout working at SubCo. Any sort of standout…?*

Mmm… It’s lots and lots of memories. Recently it was a memory that, er, one of my, er, user rep, she died, and, before she died, in her will she requested us to be her executor will. So we, I am the executor XXXX [01:26:21]. And she told her children that, because she was a gardening fanatic, and she wanted all her gardening tools to come to SubCo. All the rest of the money, whatever the will is, has been taken care by the solicitors, but it was that one of our client that think that, yes, we are the people that can be trusted. So that’s, that’s I could class as this. Another achievement for this… That’s a recent one. There’s lot lot for last—you can understand—twenty-three years. It’s full of that. I’ve just given you an example, the recent one.

*Mmm. Also something else I wanted to ask about was you mentioned how the change in funding, erm, was a difficult period. Erm, I was just wondering if there were any other patches you went through which were sort of challenging.*

Er, every year is challenging in this centre, because there is no continued funding. Every funding has an end. And you don’t know whether you’ll be here next year or not. So it’s a challenging for you ever year. So every six months, year, we are thinking or we are looking for the next year, next two years, three years, because there is no such funding which can give me a guarantee that this centre will continue for ten years, or fifteen years. So maximum staff guarantee comes in six months. You have six months funding, you have a year funding, year-and-a-half funding, and myself, my chief executive, most of the time goes into doing applications for the future fundings, or looking for money, where we can get the money to keep us going for next coup-, few more years.

*Mmm.*

So it’s a challenge every single day, so you can class it. I cannot sit on a chair, and say ‘Yeah, for the next ten years I’m laughing now.’ Every day is a new day for us.

*Erm, oh, sorry… Oh, oh yeah, er, could you tell me a little bit about the intergenerational work you do, ‘cos that’s something we’re sort of interested in?*

Intergeneration work, it’s just, it’s just as I explained you that we kept the religion out from here. Generation, intergeneration is like we’re mixing the youngsters with the elderlies. We have a youth project here; the children come in from the schools, colleges in, er… We do a youth centre as well. We used to run a youth club, and, er, there was one part, one part was happy and the other part was not happy running the youth club, because they did not like having the shisha club or something like that. The youth wanted to be like stay away from the streets. That was the only way to attract them into here, to give them a light… Like not heavy smoking, but light, say apple or something like that, small small smoke, which they enjoyed, and there’s some grounds in the evening, small cafeteria. Er, but the council did not, wasn’t happy, so we had to close that eventually.

**[01:30:00]**

But we’re still working on that. We have like students coming from the colleges working here at special, er, training sessions. So it’s intergenerational like they understand, and the elderlies are also going to their schools and all that. We taking them to schools. So, trying to mix them together. So, thirteen… One generation, third… First and the third come the second in the middle, which was like… Say grandfather and the grandson, and grand-, granddaughter and grandmother or grandfather. I don’t want to be sexist so take me like that [Laughs].

*[Laughs]*

Don’t get me about boys and girls only. Erm, to me, equal ops is XXXX [01:30:43], and the person believes in that equal ops. And, er, so this is what we have like generation. So the young generation understands elderlies. And with that is what is happening they start respecting elders. And elders do understand also the needs of the youngsters as well, what their needs are. So they are also, they’re both working together. We try to put them sometimes, like we bring the schools here, the students comes here, they sit with them, they spend a day with them, or they go to a school and spend a day there. So it’s, er… So that’s the generation gap we are covering that all, that aspect as well.

*That’s great. Erm, I’m really… Sort of my final question, er… Would you mind telling me a bit more about what Newham was like, sort of generally, erm, in the early ‘90s just before you set SubCo up?*

In ‘90s when we set up there was a… Because there was a funding towards, as I say, the Section 11. So they wanted, as I said, give a penny and keep ninety-nine to that. So that was the, that was the game that time. That if they didn’t give the penny they was not able to give ninety-nine.

*Mmm.*

So it was not fully funded organisation. We were getting a bit of it… The major part was kept by the councils and all that. It was like a little, bit little bit drop here, drop there, drop there… So that’s what the council were playing.

*Mmmhmm. But also what about, er, the area as a whole?*

Area by the whole… Because what happening in them days, although this is a very highly Asian populated area, Newham is I find like, I think it’s 32% the population is Asian population here, and but it was, although the councillors were mostly Asian councillors, services for the Asian, them days, as I said, I had to work hard, we had to work hard to get from them, but, but it was not the councillors we got it from, it is the officers we got it from. We never had support from the councillors. Very rare we had support from the councillors. They never looked at us, it was like, to me, I thought councillors were just like a… Now there were no say from them coming in the social-, the staff, the, the mainstream staff, they had more say than the councillors, and it was how we approached them, that’s how we, as I said like we had no funding coming in, and like, if I got a ten-thousand, I don’t know how I… I know how I got it: from them. So it’s, it’s all… So even like, er, it came back to us as well because them days like they started, because we fought for it that everybody gets a holiday money. In them days you, they used to give a holiday money to everybody that, er, £50 year, something like that holiday money.

*Yeah.*

And we said to them, ‘Look, these Asians can’t do this, sort of, Por-Portsmouth and what. Like to go to India, so can you give them a lump sum money?’ So they got two-hund-… that’s how I got the lump sum money: £250, but had to use on holiday. Well, we had to show that holiday, because some people they took the money, but they never went on holidays. But we proved it that we took the money and we took the holidays, so this, this is how that was in them days was the, the… How you approached the officers of the Newham council. The council, councillors and all that, they never had no policies, honestly. That was very hard to crack them, because the, they… I don’t think 90% of the councillors they knew what they were doing there. Although, I’m… We didn’t want to be in politics, and that’s the reason we kept ourselves out of politics, and we do not involve politics in ourselves, that’s why. We just want to provide a service to the elders who need the services. This is what it is.

**[01:35:00]**

*Were the, erm, the council workers sort of receptive and understanding…*

Er…

*… to what…?*

As, er… You see what happened that the we had a good team, which had some likes with XXXX [01:35:27]. In them days it was like work… Still it works with the links, how you approach, how you put your case. See, them days, a person decides, used to decide, whether you are capable to do that service or not. Today a computer decides whether you can do it or not.

*Yeah.*

Right? So that’s a difference. In them days you didn’t have to do the computer language; you had to impress the officer, you have to impress Deborah, you have to impress them to get the services off the ground, and then you got to deliver. And if you are able to deliver… Some it was all within them was, some councillors had, ‘What am I gonna get out of it?’ That was in them days, and we told them where they can go.

*[Laughs]*

We were not ready for that. We were here to provide a service, I was not here to do a business.

*Mmm.*

We are aa charity and we wanted to stay that way. Even we used to put money from our own pocket. Going on holidays is not easy. You take money: there’s always contingency plans are there. There’s some XXXX [01:36:54] comes in, which you want to do, and you can’t ask the money, so what you do? Spend your own money. We done that as well. But to bring them generation up. And, honestly, we as a group, and myself, have no regrets, never bad. I’ll never be rich, but we done that bit. We gave ourselves satisfaction, satisfaction to the, er, people, like… I’ll give you an example: like I start here, there’s no… Suddenly I decided to do a boat trip there, to take them to show them fishes and all that, glass boat and all that, it’s not fun-funded on that, sort of to the, the er, XXXX [01:37:45], he was mayor of that town as well XXXX [01:37:49], and I said to him, I said, ‘Ramsay, what you want to do?’ He gave me a discount price. Paid from my own pocket, took them all on the boat. So we do that, we doing that sort of things. So that’s what the councillors did not want, that.

*Mmm.*

So that is the reason, you know, you won’t see no politician in this centre.

*[Laughs]*

We don’t allow it. The only thing we take is the professional people to be on the executive. Mostly we depend on the user reps. So if you look at my, on that there are twelve user reps. It’s got to be six male, six female. Again, it’s a six chief ex-, er, executive committee members, out of them, got to be three men and three women. We call equal ops. But, unluckily, the men quarter is full, the women quarter I haven’t filled. Not able to; I’ve only got one; I’m still looking for more, but we’ll not... But we keep that way. We will not put men in there.

*Mmm.*

That still stays there. The day… Women could be more than 50%, but men has to be maximum 50%. This is what it was decided from day one, and we kept, kept to that promise we are keeping.

*Erm, I guess I’ve sort of run out of all my questions, so thank you for your time…*

[Claps] Thanks.

*… it’s been…*

Thanks, Francis.

*… really interesting.*

Thanks. Thanks for bearing me for last two-and-a-half hours, two hours.

*Yeah, no. It’s been a real pleasure, thank you!*

Yeah? Thank you!

**[01:39:21]**

**The End**

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**Interview Details**

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