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Name of interviewee: Ramesh Verma

Project: Growing Old Gracefully - SubCo

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Name of interviewer: Francis Ball

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Transcribed by: James King

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**Um, it’s the ninth of April, and I’m er, interviewing Ramesh Verma at her home in Gants Hill as part of our SubCo project. Erm, Ramesh would you mind telling me your date of birth please?**

Er, seventeen July nineteen forty two.

**And where were you born?**

I was born in East Africa, Tanzania – a small town called Tanga.

**And what did your parents do when you were growing up?**

My dad had retired by then but he worked with railways. He came err, to East Africa in nineteen, early nineteen- twentieth century, in nineteen oh nine, and worked in the railways, but then he retired and he set up his own business. Err, there was a big farm and he- he owned his own erm, cash and carry farm, but many things, so it was a business until he left.

**Mm. Erm, and how long did you spend in- living in East Africa?**

Err, we left Tanzania in nineteen sixty seven, at the age of twenty two. Err, we left it because it- in err, all East African countries had got err independence, and my dad being the business man, he was asked to give up his British citizenship and take up the Tanzanian citizenship, otherwise he wouldn’t get a license to carry… And he was a person, said no way, I can’t give my British citizen- I was born a British citizen and I’m going to die- so the best thing is… And at that time there was a lot of things going political, you know political things. And so it was suggested that it was better to get the- if you got a young growing up girl, get your daughters married because things might change. You know there was a lot of upheaval there you know, political. So all this err, my Dad decided to take me to India and get married there you know, even though at that time I was erm, a principal in the school, I’d done my graduation there as a teacher, and I was teaching in erm, err XXX (00.01.54) ‘cos I was the first Asian girl; Indian girl – to teach Swahili in a secondary school, which is not my language but it was… But er, because I studied it so, and err I was for the promotion err, but my dad said no. So I left everything and went to India, that was in July 1967.

**Was there a large Indian population?**

Yes very large Indian population in that part, and yes, there were, mostly there were businessmen. There were some people working in the government office in, but mainly they were business people, and they had all businesses. But it was like a shop to them, and they were asked that you weren’t get license to carry on, and they had been working there for years and years and so, it was really very, very upsetting. My dad didn’t sell anything, he didn’t sell his factories, his shops, nothing – he said I made this up you know, from scratch, how can I sell it even for money? He just left it there. Even today my da- my brother went two years ago to visit the place, houses, farms, everything is there, and the- the Africans who grew up with my- in front of my- our dads house as babies, they are all old – they haven’t touched it, it’s still there – they’re looking after it.

**Wow.**

Yeah its- we, they used to treat my dad as a king because he set up so many schools, he did a lot of charity work and he said not so my dad- my asked my brother to just give it to charities, they can open schools or whatever, you know? They- my dad was not the only one, but many other people went to the same problem and err, we didn’t go back again. I would like to go and visit the place, my brother just been there two years ago.

**Yeah. And so what did you do after you moved to India then?**

So when I went to, went to India within six months I got married, err then I started working as a head mistress erm, in an English medium school, erm but because I had done five, six sub- I wanted to be a doctor actually, when I was studying – err, so I did all this medical like subjects err chemistry, physics, biology, additional maths, and I did er- I got admission in medical school in Delhi, Miranda House. But then, when there were two months for me to go and join you know, my college, my mum, she started thinking oh no. I was nineteen at the time and err, she thought while I’m nineteen, you are nineteen, now you go there, you study medicine for five years then you do two years internship, and then you still- after all that I would like to work as a doctor, so you’d be twenty-six, twenty-seven, who’s going to get you married? She’s an old lady in those days, you know? A girl has to get married by twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. It was difficult for me to accept it, but because in those days we couldn’t fight back our parents, and she went, the best thing is for you to become a teacher, you can get married, do what after marriage whatever, nobody can stop you, so yeah. All of a sudden erm, mind change and I had to get admission in the teacher’s college in Dar Es Salaam which is the capital of Tanzania. All schools, colleges are full, nobody would take me – because they said it’s too late, and my dad has to fight, go run about you know, talk to this principle, that… I got the last XXX (00.05.12) [laughs]. So I did my teachers err, training there in Dar Es Salaam, and err I taught there for two three years, and I went back home to give me another stage in the school to learn outside my hometown. I set up the school, it was a secondary school – an African, more to a village – so I had to start it from scratch, yeah I had to run it when I’d just finished my teacher training, but I did it. So after two years I said no, I want to go back in my hometown because missing my parents. After two years in college, two years this, it was a bit too much – so I went back to my hometown and then they gave me a place in-

**Oh that’s nice.**

-A school nearby. Taught there for six and a half years then went to India. So I started teaching in India again, and then erm, err we came here in err 1976. I had two kids: two boys, so we came here. I started teaching here for about six months, but because it was a big gap between my training in east Africa and my working in India, so they wanted me to do in house training here. Though all my degrees, all my everything from Cambridge, so I passed all college school certificate, my teaching qualifications papers were from Cambridge, but still they would not accept me because there was a gap. So but they did very kind, they examined me, they took my exam and all that, and said okay you can start teaching, but at the same time we have to take some tests as well. So I had to look after my kids, work, at home my mum and dad were living with me, they were disabled, I had to care for them and teach and learn. Erm, continue about eight or nine months, it was a bit difficult – my mum had gone disabled, she was bed ridden, went blind, she’d broken both her hips, bed ridden completely – twenty four hours need, she needed care. And my dad was hundred and two years old, and at the same time I lost my husband as well, and the kids, one was five and a half, one was about seven. It was difficult, I managed, tried to manage to get everything together, but it was difficult. ‘Cos I would- I would feel guilty to leave my mum and go to work, you know, so after six and a half months I said no, I can’t do work you know, so I had to pay attention to my parents. Erm, and I looked after them for eighteen years: single-handed. But those eighteen years, my life turning period. So eighteen- so I gave up my job, err paid attention to the education of my sons, I decided looking after parents, but what I found that err in those days in- it was in Hackney, there was nothing whatsoever for older people from ethnic minorities, especially Asian, I mean I say people who don’t speak English. There was services where- there were services were there, excellent services, I’m not saying they were not there, very good services…. But they were not culturally appropriate as I would say, you know? Like example, meals on the wheels… you know, there was like beans, mash potato – very healthy food, no doubt. But my mum at the age of eighty she has never tested that food, you know. So she said no sorry, I don’t, I can’t. I can’t eat this food, give me a bread and a cup of tea, a piece of bread and a cup of tea – that’s fine. And I said oh my god, my father’s worked in erm, in the army – he’s served the country, we are here today because of these people sacrificing their lives. And at that age, hundred and two, golden age, he should be enjoying, and here he has to say, oh if I have to go to hospital, there’s nothing for him – either I cook or I come and cook, he can’t have that food you know, because that is not what he’d like to eat, you know. So I said no, I’m not having this. So I said I have to- it’s not only for my parents, there were many other older people I saw around where I used to visit you know, so I became the secretary of an Asian association, and from there I started getting this strength you know, we have to change the services, and err, same thing with was like, whatever shall we use, this name – there was nothing culturally appropriate. Example, erm homes, despite care which I wanted to use for my mum, care workers, home help, cross roads, all this is people who are disabled who need help, you know. Everything there was English speaking. There’s nothing for me so I said sorry, they were not for me, you know my doctor said no, no, no you can’t carry on like this, you will die, you can’t look after kids and do- well I said well, I can’t use this service, what’s the point of getting it, and when they come there my mum can’t- she won’t- she can’t even ask someone please can I have a glass of water? Even in hospital same thing- even in hospital where she was- she would to go, she was in and out of hospital, I had to be with her from eight o’clock in the morning until eleven o’clock when I would put her to bed and come home. She couldn’t ask someone, nurse can I have a glass of water, nurse can I have a cushion – just language again, and she couldn’t see herself. And it was getting too much, and I had to come home and look after my dad, and then kids, you know? So it was too much. I was ill afterwards but I didn’t care about myself, so it was like on the go all the time.

**Yeah.**

So I said no I’m not happy, so I started campaigning. People got together with me, and the time came where they all supported me for, that you’re going, and either put her in a flat, we got a very good council flat you know, because we moved from Dagenham as I said, and it was a four bedroom flat, because my mum and dad, my two sons and myself, it was on the sixth floor with no lift… With no lift at all, sixth floor, can you believe, with older people, you know for me and my kids okay, but when my mum got disabled, she couldn’t go anywhere. So when she had to go to hospital they used to come and pick her on a stretcher, go to hospital, come back and then she is like a prisoner.

**Yeah.**

She couldn’t even go and visit a temple or my brother’s house – nothing. And err this was a bit, very unfair so we- I started asking them please can you give us a flat downstairs on the ground so at least she can see the garden, she can go out, you know. They said in Hackney there’s no, no four bedroom flat or house at all. You know, that’s what they said. So I was fighting for nearly seven years erm, meeting after meeting and then err, there was a erm, association- so what they did there were three hundred organisations in Hackney; err, ethnic minority, black, white, green, whatever. So they all er, chose me as their spokesperson [laughs]. So three hundred organisations and I was the spokesperson for the need of all these people, different kinds of need and I was- I got a place in social service committee. So every month there used to be a social services committee meeting in the evening and they would invite me to bring all the issues of three hundred organisations [laughs]: me, just one person. They were behind me, but I would not- we would be the spokesperson you know? And because I- they understood that I was going through this problem so I would be able to speak better than them, you know? But they would help me, they would support me, and it was-

**How did you first get involved with these organisations?**

Because you know the Asian association organisation was- I went there and they made me a secretary, and when they knew my dad, I asked my dad to go and joy the senior citizens club there, which was were Afro-Caribbean people all used to go together, and err because my dad from Africa he worked with all those people. Although he didn’t speak much English he could speak little few words you know. Swahili was his main language. And so all the other people, he started tracking other people, you know, he would go out, see some older people sitting on the bench and he’d say, where are you from? Africa… He would make them friends. Oh you’re from Africa, we are friends! Because he lives for seventy-five years in Africa, so then they would start trying overcome this problem, we don’t know where to go to get the bus pass, free bus pass, we don’t know what- we don’t get any pension, we don’t know – he would say okay, my daughter would help you – he would bring them home, and at first I would feed them, and take them to this office you know to get them a car. So this is how the support increases, you know, why do we let only one person- let’s all get together. So then the Asian association said oh you become our secretary, we all get together with one voice, and then something will happen – we have to change the services, you know? So that’s when we all came together, then slowly they started supporting me: you are suffering, you have your parents, you have disabled mum and this is not fair, and we have the same problem. So it wasn’t just me fighting for my problem it was fighting jointly with everybody. So I remember one instance, very important incident, it was disabled peoples year. You know the year of the disabled people. And erm, any wishes for people to help people with disability, and it was an evening meeting and I went to the meeting, my other colleague said well, this is a meeting for the disabled people, they’re going to tell us- the mayor or whoever – what they’re going to do about it, you know? How they’re going to change the services. So if you’ve got a disabled mother and you’ve been fighting for just to- to transfer to somewhere downstairs, you know ground floor, you’re even giving up one room three instead of four. I said three will do, my two sons can share the room, we don’t mind, at least it will be good for my mum to get out, get some sunshine you know. So even then they said there’s no four bedroom, there’s no flat that we cannot give her, Hackney is full of housing you know? Council housing, everybody knows it. I knew that myself, but they just said that. So I said okay, let’s tonight you go, speak on them and we’re all behind you. And err, you’ll be on there, we will all- don’t worry today something must happen. So we went about seven thirty and all this people, there was the town hall full of people, you know black, Asian, white… All you know, said today we going to find out what they’re going to do for you. And they were so very supportive toward my dad and me, you know? And very nice, very, very kind of young, old everybody. So I went in and they all stood behind, I was there in front row, and, and the mayor, the mayor, the council leader was on the stage saying oh we had it going- this is they, they said we’re going to do this, we’re going to do, we’re going to do… And I got so annoyed, you know, worked out, with all that. ‘Cos none of that was true, I was grind six and a half year, my file was XXX (00:15:40) corresponding and every time I got negative, negative… So once [laughs] he says something, and the people at the back say now’s the time! So I just jumped on the stage, I just walked on it, even now I say, what did I do, they wouldn’t understand me, what would have happened to my mum, my kids – but I just jumped on stage and grabbed the microphone from the leader of the council – err, it was a white man, you know, nice man – I used to meet him before, many meetings with him – and just said, excuse me sir, just you know, and I said okay, I want to ask a question, do you say this is the year of the disabled? I’ve got my mother, you know, so I said all the problem, and this is, this is six and a half years I’ve been fighting to get a place on the ground floor, I’m ready to give up one room, because our sick you know, at this eighty years she needs to go out, she needs to go to temple, even visit her son, you know, doesn’t live very but she can’t. So in the hospital they have to carry her like a dead person, bring her back and dump her there. Is this really fair, I’m asking this you know? And I been told there's no flat in there: and everybody was like supporting me. [Laughs] Then he says, please you know, calm down, calm down – and we said we want an answer, what are you going to do about it? You say year of the disabled, so this is year of the disabled, what are you going to do for this disabled lady, you know? So the, the, he said, he said to me give me your name and address and PA, she was sitting there writing minutes – give it to her and we, they said yes we will, before the next meeting, which is the next end of the next month that we would like to know what you’re going to- we’ll be here. Oh the people started shouting so I got down, and you won’t believe Francis, one day passed, like tonight, tomorrow no, then tomorrow morning I’m getting a letter in the post off err, offer a four bedroom beautiful house, only four or five-minutes’ walk from where I was. I don’t know if you know Hackney, Gesalund Road near Victoria Park. There’s these big houses, have you seen that?

**Yeah.**

Victorian houses… one of that, and here I was on the Morning Lane, all those big flats, we were in there, big flats you know? Morning Lane. We were there and if you walk from there down the road, four minutes walk is the Gesalund Road. I got a letter I said there’s seomthing wrong, it can’t be true? I opened here, opened this side, looked here, looked there, look at my name ten times and said my dad, I said, this is what here. My dad says I must be some mystic, you know? You’re not looking properly. I phoned my brother from err, he was living in Tottenham, and he came over, I said this is what I got, do you think it’s true? He said yeah, he said come on lets go now and see this place. So we went to the office, their office the lady said, this is the office, you can get the keys to view the house. I just still couldn’t believe that this could be true, I said because I was in such a problem, you know, I was so stressed out, I just said no, this life is – there’s nothing for me, nothing positive, everything is negative, negative, negative. So on the day they gave me the keys, took the keys down the road, my brother was, my dad was with me – had the keys in my hand, and I just see this house standing on the road looking at it. Still couldn’t believe- look at the letter, number is sixty-three Gesalund Road, and then my dad said- my brother said go on, open the door – I said maybe there’s some people there, can’t be this house for me. He said no open the door, if the keys don’t fit it means it’s wrong but if it fits then it’s yours. So we opened the door: that was the right house we saw. And there were nice neighbours who saw the house, and we moved there. I said to my dad they might give it to someone, tonight we should bring some stuff and put it- I just couldn’t believe… So we put our stuff there and we moved there and we lived there for nearly thirty-three years. In that time my mum and dad passed away there, but as I said so this was one my problem house, but then many others started campaigning, said no we have to change, we need to respite, care for people who need a break because I have to take my children to holiday or I get, go to hospital. Erm, I have to put my mum somewhere I have nobody here to look after her, so err they put err they had to open respite triangle, it was named, then we stopped them to have some homecare or you know, workers who could speak language you know. Though I didn’t need anyone I said no, I look after my mum single handed, I didn’t let anybody come and give her a bath, or I did it myself, you know? But for others it was other people. So we- they change our services, in hospital- catering in hospital was really bad you know? When I went my mum used to go I used to cook food, not for her but other people round her, and give it to them, because they won’t eat the food of the hospitals, it was horrible, horrible, you know? Even English food was not good, so I said to them no, I can’t have this, so this- then the question was about prayer room, my- I wanted to, something when I go and sit there for six, seven hours – somewhere to give me somewhere because I’d just lost my husband, I had no time to grieve for myself – wanted to sit and have some time to- there was no place. So I said no we need some place, you know? So they said oh no, you can share the room, you know? With the erm, room Islamic studies room, I said yeah fine but everybody’s religion is different, they want to pray five times, if I go interfere with them that’s not good, why can’t we have something separate? So I had a room which Hindus and Sikhs can share. So it was nice, and erm, so it- how things change and err, started working with the council and then, then my mum passed away, so then my dad passed away, but err [laughs] the council thought, first they thought I was a trouble maker, really trouble maker, that’s what they were calling me: that woman is a trouble ma-. See me walking down hall, she’s brought some other problem now. They would respect me, listen to me, but then they knew I wouldn’t.. and I said yeah we had problem, but we have to resolve this problem. If you, if you don’t resolve then I’ll be here; if you resolve – it’s not for me – it’s for older people who have worked all their life, they pay their taxes, now when they’re old they need something, but there’s nothing for them, just sitting the benches out there, you know? They have no money to go anywhere, so I used to – they said okay fine, we have some workers in the offices who can speak the languages, help them you know, to do form- fill the forms and things. I did as much but then I said no, you have to do something. So then my mum passed away, and then I got a letter from the council: we would like you to come and work in the council, we’ll give you a nice office, posh office, but we like you to support in work- how can- how can- how can we provide services to people XXX (00:22:35) we don’t know what to do. That’s why we, we have no idea. And err, I- so I said no I’m a- I’m not a person sitting in four walls, I’m a people’s person and I don’t like- even the salary was quite good, I said no. So, and that centre in Newham- they heard about my work[laughs] bad word spreads faster than good, you know? So it was like, oh there’s a woman there, and she’s sympathetic [laughs]. So that was contacted, but it wasn’t a erm, how can I say, Taskin knows, she used to be the manager and community member of that Neighbourhood Care Project, it was called. And I, somebody erm, the manager, he, I don’t know if through somebody, I got a message that there’s a job there, err in Hackney, in Newham there was forty-seven persons of ethnic minority. But what was happening, the people who- all the people who were ethnic minority, they were not taking up any services. They were not accessing any services whatsoever. So the council didn’t know why, your- in spite of knowing just forty-seven per cent of older people are ethnic minority, of the two thousand people who were older people, but nobody was accessing the services. And this organisation Neighbourhood Care Project was providing the funding and support to older people like getting them together, picnic, bingo whatever, so people- to reduce isolation. But non e of them were people of ethnic minority. So the manager, the director who was an Englishman as well, but he used to mix with the Asian and he wanted to know why, so he’s wanted somebody to come and tell him, and tell the councillors why the reason, why are they axing the services? So somebody approached me saying well they want somebody like you there, why don’t you apply? And they really forced me I, forced me, really forced me on the phone, and came to my house and said, fill the form now, you know? So my, I had my dad, I said no I don’t want to go to Newham, I don’t know what Newham- I didn’t even travel anywhere I just know Hackney, but Hackney I said I don’t like this because they want to- me to sit in an office and write and I don’t like- I want to go out and meet people. So I was just in that dilemma, and then at same time my dad was with me saying look, you looked after your mum, you look after me, I am fine- he was hundred and two but he was quite healthy, he said you just go. Don’t waste your time. I am so much in your life – go and work, you know. Make use of your talents and help other people. And he said fill in the form now [laughs] fill it! Send it away! If you don’t get it you don’t… I just felt erm, double minded and next morning I was called for the interview, straight away. And I went to the interview, Taskin was on my- she was on my boarding, she was on the panel. She and there were other people, two or three other and err, I got the job straight away, you know. So when I came and made the job, I was told no support, nothing okay, your job will be err, actually community development worker: that was my title. What you do: the research, you have to interview older people, and find ethnic minority- means, as you know, a big umbrella name, err darkish, Afro-Caribbean, Indian, and in Indian there’s so many different communities. You have to interview all these older people in the community, and you have to come and tell us why they are not accessing the services. This is the- this is what I was told my job- with no support, I couldn’t- there was no organisation I could go and ask, please tell me, nothing. So I said okay fine, but because, you know I’ve done that bad work already [laughs]… okay. And then I said, I was told in Canning Town it’s very racist area… you have to do the work there, but be careful they said this a racist area, they mug people, they might do anything to you. I said why you give me the job, and then you also try to scare me? Well I’ll do the job but I’m not getting scared, whatever happens we’ll see. So I started my work and I interviewed three hundred and fifty older people, from oldest communities, I’ve got everything in my office, err from darkish, Afro-Caribbean, Indian, people asking each older people see get hold of the person, ask them the reasons, you know, visit them at home and err, that it took me three and a half months to do all this work, so then I submitted a report to my committee and found all the reasons: shocking, shocking, shocking… There was so much bad things happening in the borough, and err, so I interviewed older people and I interviewed the service providers, like council, social services, err XXX social security err, the health, you know, all these fine organisations and then I said, look, this is what is happening, because I visited cases where people were dying of hunger, they had no money, yet they work, some older people had roofs leaking, cold houses, no beds and nothing, no food, nothing… and they were living in hunger, yet they had workers in the country getting old here, but they didn’t know where to go, they didn’t speak the language, there was no one to tell them, no one to help them. So this is the bad cases. When I went to the council I- I said I want to interview the directors. My- my, my director from er, from Neighbourhood was very good, no? So he was supporting me and giving me all this information, so I… we wrote letters, I want to come and visit the director. I don’t want to visit anybody’s secretary of whatever, no. I want to visit director, the top most person who’s in, who’s responsible. And when I went to interview them there was a director of social services, Mr. Skinner – I still remember him, very rude man, you know. And I said to him, I went in and said look, erm I want to know from you- there’s so many people living and this is what they’re suffering, going through, and why does social services not doing anything for them? And you know what he said to me? They don’t need it, they don’t need this services. They’ve got their families, they look after their own. They don’t need it, they got food at home, the family there, why you there ask, why should we give them food- err, all the services, they look after their own. That’s a phrase, you know? Just a false perception, and that really made my blood like boil, you know? I was seeing those people suffering and here this man is telling, well, got very angry you know. So I had big argument with him and said look, my father worked, paid all his taxes, you know, and whether he but he should be there, but you should provide a services. So I said well, I, I’ll show you now whether they need it, whatever reason I but, no you give them new reason, and I leave it to me. So I interviewed all of them then I wrote my report and they thought was ready for present to my committee, then I said fin e. So they supported me, they all supported me, and then other people from the borough, other you know, organisations, colleagues joined me, even though they were not in the older people service but as it was always they were doing , they all joined me, all support me. So we said let’s have a big conference, so we invite all these people and these older people, let them speak to them you know? All themselves rather because they might think I’m twisting things, I know, and I got a bad name also [laughs] like a bad person. So we all get nicer conference, in St Marks Church, St Marks Church and err, there we took er buses full of people, you know, older people there. At the same time I said to, I wrote to this director, four directors, I said I would like to invite you to be on the top table on the day. I want you, don’t send me any rep or anybody, I want you yourself to come and listen to this people yourself. What they’re going through in your borough and then you’ll see whether they're being looked after their own or not. I got so angry with the word he spoke to me, no… so on that day with a house full I had- we had organised four workshops on different, you know topics, and all, and on the top table people were saying how could you do this Ramesh we’ve been working this borough, we never got this, they never come to our conference, they send somebody, or they will give us feedback. [Laughing] At least my bad err, Ramesh for all the four directors were sitting on the top table. And we had four workshops each workshop housing, housing director, social services, social director, social skill he is there, all around the table, and I had a lot of support from my colleagues in the borough, Taskin was there as well, Ramesh was there, Ramesh was helping the housing thing you know? So we were all there and err, the workshop four o’clock when the workshops ended they had to come and you know, for the feedback, these people’s faces… could see the faces of this directors completely change. And then they started giving their feedback and the director of social services stood up, the same man, you know. Oh my god, he said, I’m so sorry I didn’t know what was going on in my borough, I didn’t know, I thought that they all happy, nobody comes to us, so they don’t need the services. But listening to people in the workshop, people were crying, we haven’t eaten and we’re on food for I don’t know how many months. We listen everyone XXX (00:31:50) but we haven’t seen, we haven’t gone, some said we haven’t gone out of our house for six months, we are disabled, we couldn’t travel, you know. So all this kind of sad story, so he said we are so so sad, we would like to help this people now, but err, we don’t know how to do it, we need support. And so all this discussion with my committee members all this went on and I said well, we’re here to support, we are here to support you if you give us money. All we need is money, without money, you know? And after that a report was written and err, things they started, I made friends you know, they were my friends, you know, people in the social service. We all started working. So we said- but my, my research, I researched on many different issues, but one- my main research showed me that more was missed, mostly the people were suffering, the main problem was isolation. Loneliness. And that was a cause of depression, and depression linked to mental health problem, and then you can see what happens, because lifes destroyed you know. So I, from my own er experience, I said first thing is to tackle with isolation. So for isolation, all this people – I set up, we set up a committee with the help of my colleagues and Taskin was one of them, and we called it err Sub Committee… so yeah, then er when I said because I first my principle I agreed my committee I don’t want to work on religion, I don’t want to work on politics, I want to work on people. All everybody saying because my, my previous er way of life in Africa- you worked together, there was nothing you, you or me or so on, so… and we named the project Ekta.

**What does that mean?**

Ekta means unity, oneness, solidarity, coming together. It’s a word which we use in err, muslim language in Pakistani in English, in Guajarati, in Punjabi, Urdu – it’s the same word. Ekta means unity, solidarity, oneness. So named the project Ekta, and err, I said fine, now first thing is we have to tackle isolation. So we set up this erm, err centres as-

**What year was this in sorry?**

This was in nineteen- by that it was nineteen eighty eight, took some time, you know? So it was ninety-eight we set up the err… the group, called first group was Milab, means meeting – so erm, and then what we did in that oh, we, we had buses which have community transport, pick up this people- we, we know when, were spread and I made so many leaflets and this and that, we had one big, big, big party you know, you know how five hundred people came. Just three parties [laughs] I remember bringing food from everybody helped me we used to- everybody was even Taskin’s mum became my volunteer, remember that. So there was so many volunteers, because volunteers were not a concept, you know, in Asian communities until then. Concept of volunteer – no it wasn’t there. So when I set up the centre I needed somebody to help me – I would go and ask director become my co-volunteer, they would look at me and say why would I come and do something for free for you? I have so much work at home you know, because that concept was very difficult for Asian communities to go and work for free, so I had to- it took me, it made me angry at time, but it made me understand why- their side of, point of view. I said look if you come to the group, come and see, you’ll make friends. And then the, I’ll help you, if you’re looking for a job, I will help you no send you get training or something, and once you get the training, maybe there's a job and I can give you reference, and if you get a job I can support you as well, at least try, you know. So it was difficult but once they started coming, there was a flat of volunteers because we had things for them how- picnic, getting friends together, and this is after their sovereignty. So we set up group and we used to bring members there, and once they there first was to sort out the problems. As I said they didn’t know where to go to get the pass, how to get err a food, you know, apply for things, there’s so many different services, but they were not taking part in it. So then the people in the borough, that was great thing, people in the borough, people like you, young people working in whatever different you know, offices, and I said look I need your help. They were ready. So they were say, I said look I need to apply for all these people for whatever their rights is, I don’t know what they can claim, I don’t know, I don’t know, I’m not expert, but I want you to come and apply. So these- they used to come to me once a month, have a surgery, young people, and they would- we would fill forms for everybody, you know, I said if they don’t get it’s no harm, just fill and send it to them. Amazing, end of two or three months, they got- started getting money, some would get thousand pound to buy a fridge, to buy a bed, to get their roofs done, or just for, you know, ‘cos that was their right. They didn’t apply so money started getting and they said oh my god, we’ve got money in our pocket, we could, we used to ask our son and daughter for ten pence to go to temple so we started and these people help me, so- we apply for the bus passes, whatever thing was there available, and social services to come and hold a surgery in the groups every month, to do whatever they needed, you know? So changes in the houses, whatever, disability were things, you know? XXX (00:37:28) used to come, you know? So things started changing, you know? And er everybody had like a new life. Dan, Dan… so what we, we had this project, we all get together, all the my colleagues and we said let’s all have together, I won’t- I always believe working together, you know, even now. So we set up this err, group called err, Elders in Newham: Know Your Rights. That was the team of my conferences were, and we set up this small er orga- like a committee so once a month we all would get together, sit down there perform, it was like a forum, and erm, what we did we together make a list of things, what to- gaps, and there were thirty-two of them, I still remember, thirty-two. And the top first of that, err meals on the wheels, how we going to change that. Then leisure services, then sports, then housing, you know all like just thirty two of them. And we would meet and say okay, so we decided we will err, tackle with one issue at a time, talking too much won’t help. Twen- you, you choose one issue and see, we have some collect sample of information, proofs what is a problem, how can you resolve, who will take part in that you know from our side, and then go and target this person whoever council whatever, ask them, bring them here, talk to them you know, and last put pressure on them. They have to do something to resolve this problem. Come back next Monday and they should tell us what they’ve done. Oh my god, where these people have come from all of a sudden [laughs] come to attack us, you know. So we chose one, I remember in, because my group had started getting bigger and bigger by then, and Asian proper started coming up because they would expect us to resolve a problem. Oh I’m not getting food or what can I do but- so we said okay fine, it’s not our problem, but we- we’ll fight it too. So the first one that was erm, meals on the wheels, then it was like housing and others then it was leisure services- there were many others but we said we’ll tackle one. First is some everybody wants food to eat you know, so that’s a main one. And we’re all sitting I think, how many, I think ten or twelve of us sitting together and we used to discuss. So we said look, we sort elector to the office you know, social services – the director was Deborah Cameron, Taskin knows her. Good friend but she was very rude as well. So, and we me, no, she no friends at all… But I said I don’t get, I don’t need friend, it’s not for me personally, the help is for the older people. I’m going to work on their behalf and im not getting scared of people saying she’s very rude, she’ll say something. I said well let her say whatever she’ll say to me. It’s not my personal thing, I know how to handle it you know. So they said yeah, we know, you got black magic, you come from Africa, I said say whatever you want, we going to tackle this [coughs]. So we wrote a letter through my organisation of course, they were behind me, helping me – they would care for that. So we had got a letter to them, it said well, we would like to talk to, to you know, one of the person, err and err I had a meeting with Deborah Cameron and said we have got a problem with food, I need them to change the food, I need you to change the food, you know. Food for the people who don’t eat this food you know, I’m not saying the food is bad but they won’t eat it. My own mum won’t eat, why I’m blaming other people. If I was her mum for two days I’m going hospital she said no put the bread and butter I’ll do that. She wouldn’t eat it, you know. So it’s not what she’s eaten for eighty years you know, so I said no we- you because being such a big person for the people, she said, err, I said err, she said I’ve only got one Ramesh- I’ve got only one chef in social services; Italian chef, he can cook only one kind of- I don’t have, I don’t have money to have another chef there, and she was rude like saying, Asian food are so differ- there’s so many different kinds of food from so many different countries, how can I get so many chefs. I said okay Deboarah don’t get in to panic, can I meet your chef? Can I have a word with him? She’s saying no, no, no – what would you like to do? He’s only one chef and he needs to cook so many din- lunches, and err… I said look, calm down, just let me meet your chef you know, I just want to meet him, you come with me, no? I would like to meet him, you come with me I just like to meet him, you come with me and I just want to… she was, she didn’t want to but when I wouldn’t just give up no, said you can’t just say no to me. So she said okay come, alright, she said, so she sent me back saying okay, all these XXX (00:41:58) so in such time came there in social, it was a big social service kitchen in Newham, erm Stratford those days. So I went there in the morning and she was standing there, so I went and said hello, yes, okay here. Went in the kitchen and this big, tall, big you know, Italian chef came over in his apron, very scary until he came very nice man, shook hand and err, what can I do for you lady? I said I want your help chef, I need help. I said what kind of help you know? She was just watching, I said look, this is my problem, I’ve got so many people, older people, who can’t, not because the food is bad, food is very good but because they haven’t eaten that food, you know, I would like to them to have something to eat because they said that age they need some food, you know, healthy food to eat you know, and that’s where I need your help. I said it in such a nice way, you know very friendly. He said that’s no problem what’s the problem he said, we chef’s we can cook any food in the world. You just tell me, give me an idea. I said at the moment to start with lets sell lentils and rice. He said is that all? Let’s start with that, I don’t know how many people will eat, I don’t know in the moment, I’m just starting this from me they need to eat healthy food. So I said let’s do it, he said okay, let’s come in the kitchen. She got shocked. She said he’d fire me or say something to me rude or something, she was just- she couldn’t say a word. So we went in the kitchen and he showed me the lentils, you know, I said no not this one, those other ones, the yellow ones, so I said yellow ones are mostly- it gets cooked very quickly, I said I’ll get you that, you know. So err I said this is all you boil and then this is you do, and rice anyone can boil rice you know. He said that’s not a problem. I said fine. So he said tomorrow I’ll do that. So he did, and then back to my own people they gave me a headache as well, the older people, so I said to them, now we’ve done this. You were saying we were dying of hunger we couldn’t get food, now you get the food, you know. Please eat. So they, two or three days they eat lentils and rice [laughs] every day is the same, we get fed up of your food, they were after me. I said to them, listen, I’ve started something, at least something is there. You eat, when they bring food to your house, you know, those disabled people, err you eat whatever you eat, you can- even if you don’t eat, don’t say I don’t want it. They say there’s no need, they stop it, I want to carry further and improve it, but once you- you don’t want to stop it once you started. So eat what you want, if you can’t eat leave it there or just throw it out but don’t say no, don’t send it back. And there I was working him you know, I said can we start some vegetable, can we do this with- I didn’t even tell Deborah Cameron, I went there, took a nice big box of chocolate for him. So he was on my side, said okay fine fine darling. So he started cooking vegetables, I said put some you know kind of like masala, they like spices, they’re used to spiced food. So he started putting some vegetable in the rice, vegetable rice is the same, why don’t you throw some vegetable, it’ll become dishes, different dishes. So it started working but people were grumbling you know? At the same time, err I wanted to bring this – redeuce this isolation as well. So we started, a whole committee of us, we started discussing that we need a place where all these people who, who can walk you know, disabled is okay, they can get food at home, those who can’t go out- but those who can, why nothave a place where they can all sit together, have the food, so in that way they become friendly to each other, make friends, that isolation is reduced, plus we can also give information with other services for health, whatever. And that’s how we started thinking of place. And then we started thinking of the housing, where we can this, there’s no place whatsoever here: there’s no place in Hack- in Newham to have a centre, they completely rejected. Very centre service first question was no, but we didn’t give up we still went and said no, no, no then this, SubCo- you know, the building belonged to a gentleman, Mr… Mr. Banojee. And he was big tough man you know? And they said he wouldn’t- only let people of his f- either favoured people in that house, it was a centre for the public, but only some people his favourite people can enter there you know? Very tough, very rude man – and slowly we started working with him you know, slowly, friendly. We used to get inside by bribing money, you know. And slowly the council said look, you are- this place is lying empty, make some use of it, why don’t you work with people. He didn’t- he thought maybe people just take his place away, but slowly, so happened that he wasn’t well, he couldn’t afford, whatever, and then the council took the pla- building, gave him money whatever, I don’t know that bit. But we had the place you know? So when we had the place, erm first we started we had the food from the council who err, err cook and provide and send the food there, you know? And then all this people from my group, from other groups they would all go there and er, they fully free and first it was completely they could sit down, have this food there, so they make their friends, you know, people they hadn’t seen, or they hadn’t known, you know, living the same borough for years. So they make friends, but then at the same time we know, find out what is- what else we can do for them. What services we can do, what is their problem, you know? And there was some volunteers helping them, their language. So it’s, it’s a reduction of isolation plus many more thing: to help things as well, you know? When you know people you talk, oh some people found their friends they didn’t know they were living in the same borough – who came from Africa. So it started from-

**Wow.**

-And then this, this started and then err, we found a committee, you know like I was one of the committee members and other people, and then the question was err what should we name the centre, so there were things and I put my name for SubCo. Then it was chosen and won five pound but they never gave me those five [laughs] I still say Taskin my five- five pound but that interest is going to five hundred now you know? So SubCo, err SubCo is a Hindi world as well. Sub: everybody; co: for. For everybody. But at the same time SubCo is a short of Subcontinent – so it’s got two meanings. Subcontinent: everybody from subcontinent can be part of that, can go there, and it’s for everybody. So then it started. We were all part- I was a member for nearly nine to ten years? Nine or ten years? Management committee member, so we used to meet and you know, how the services increased, went through many changes SubCo in those years. And we did so many different services there, so many different things happened there, but then at the same time my own process Ekta was also flourishing fast, so first for one centre, then two, we had eight centres in different catchment areas. One err, four were for totally women, two for mixed men and two were for, one for Bangladeshi men, you know, ‘cos they don’t speak Hindi, they’ve got their own language so they don’t mix with the other people, so we had Bangladeshi men, and same thing Bangladeshi women. Bangladeshi men wouldn’t have women with them, women don’t like to be with men, so we had to separate one and they wouldn’t mix with other Bang- err, women, Asian women because this language barrier. So we had one in Windsor Park in XXX (00:49:23), so there were eight centres and a flood of volunteers, we had so many different projects, you know. But I soon stop doing my research, I was still doing research, what is the lack? What is needed, what is needed in our community? What the problem? [Coughs] And at first my first thing which was why that erm, good or bad, what you can say, I was known here and there, new… different projects came and sat and working with us and it is, whatever you call it. So this people came to me er from erm, it was called Health Promotion, look department they said erm, there’s a lot of problem with er breast cancer, where screening, especially the Bangladeshi women, they don’t – er sorry – they don’t come, err go for their appointments… for the mammography, and they leave it until too late when crisis stage comes. Oh, and then sometimes it’s too late so they lose their lives leaving very young families. And can you tell us how to help them, can you do something? And erm, well I said look, erm, you tell me what you do to, to inform, inform them that they should go to see the doctor, or they should go for this appointment? They said erm, er we translate the letter in Bangladeshi and we just drop it through the letter box. I said that’s not going to happen, er I’ll help you. First thing because they can’t read and write their own language, ‘cos I know from experience even their very young, still very few, they come from very more kind of regions in Bangladesh, they can’t read and write their own language. First thing, even if they write they don’t get back and forth, sometimes they don’t pick up, they have some pick up who can’t and they think oh, even if they can read English, they say what is asking my wife to go mammography? In the bin. So I said that’s not going to help. So they say can you tell us a way where we can you know, try to make them aware, this is for your life: question of your life and that. So I said okay I can give you an idea but I had no money, you know. Because we were a voluntary sector, and my money was coming for different projects you know, I can’t just, not millionaire I said. So I said all I can do is give you idea, and give you my volunteers for free [coughs]. And erm, well why not we produce a play? The message through a play. So this gets people see it and then they get it in here, you know, they understand. Because I had some experience from my Hackney thing, we did so many different plays over there, and I knew it was a play on incest and so many, other things. And it really worked you know, so I said I can do that. So there was a lady err, my friend from theatre err, so she said okay, she was an actress, director – Asian woman, she said okay if you give me an idea I don’t mind writing the script, after asking. And I said to Health Promotion, you have got money, you’re just wasting your money on this leaflets, why don’t you use that money and we, we produce this play, and then we take the play around, show it to people. And err, see what happens. And like I give them my six volunteers who became actors, they were actors. And this lady, er I mean we had workshops of course, different stories, so different people, and we sort of like produced this play; first it was very funny, first we produced in Asian language, mix of Guajarati, Punjabi, so everybody can under- not just one language, Asian language, but not one so everybody can get the message. So it was only half an hours play with a question and answer at the end, and err it was like funny in the first few minutes, then least, like the story, the story was of woman trying to hide, you know. Oh, no it’s the husband who’s trying to hide from the woman that she’s got a letter to go, because he thinks she- the doctor would have look at her breasts, she- he will look at her naked, will he? And then you know, this kind of wrong kind of thing. And err so he is just teased- but- but the cancer doesn’t stop there, so it is something you know, and then it’s too late, she loses her life and then her young children, very sad. So this play was giving message that if you have any lump, first you should know it was teaching her to examine your breast, if you think you’ve got a lump and you get a letter don’t stop, even if they don’t- just go to your GP. If you get a letter go there, you know, and err, lump doesn’t mean you’ve got cancer, could be just nothing, just a lump, you know, but you should not ignore it. It was a very funny and very nice exciting thing you know, with a song in it. And erm, and we sort of started touring you know. We got money from them, it was so exciting people liked the play, enjoyed it, the volunteers who had never acted before you know, so we employed somebody for a short period, artistic director, she used to come and have workshops, and was a worker taking them, talking to them. And then the English ladies came to me and said you think this problem is only for Asian women? That they don’t keep up there- oh no, English ladies don’t go for their appointments, even they ignore it. So really you should have this play in English as well. So the play in, on err that Asian language was called Rasmir’s Secret, because keep it a secret, don’t tell them. But we have another in English called Invitation – it was in different story, bit different, though they can read and write, but still they were hiding it you know. So what will happen, this and that, the other thing. So the play was very famous, and we got err an award for that from the Health Council, so the- so I still, my research went on and then I just went on and then err my surgeon showed me another problem in the Asian community like any other community was elder abuse. Elder abuse happens in all the communities you know, err so it, Asian communities is no different. But it’s again, hiding under the carpet, don’t talk about it, because it’s their own people who abuse you. Your own family members abuse you, how can a mother say my son, taking my property, my money, so it’s very difficult. But suffering is there, pain is there, you know, loss is there. And I interview so many people and found so many very heart-breaking stories, so then we applied for money from Awards For All, and I got good amount of money because as a problem nobody wanted to touch it; don’t talk about. And I said no, you can’t just keep quiet you know, this is something that has to be- people are living longer now these days and older people are one who are caught up with this, you know, problem. So they said oh, you will have problem Ramesh if you tackle Asian community will be in uproar you know [laughs] XXX (56:16). People will- won’t like you, and how you going to tackle. I said I’ll tackle it, I’ll tackle it – if I see somebody I can’t just keep quiet, I won’t. So yeah, we, we had that project, again we produced a play, because from our experience we knew this is the only way to raise people’s awareness, give the message. This leaflets won’t help. You have to have somebody which really punch something you know, really gets them you know. Maybe it’s too much, but still they will think about it. so this was a play called Dignity. So I had an artistic director, I had erm, a people you know, very err, like erm, err people who had done things in the past you know, qualified people – so they came and worked with the director, actors, some new actors came in: one or two were professionals, and the other were volunteers. And the project run for five and a half years-

**Wow.**

-We have toured all of the country up to Scotland- we were part- the play was shown on their erm, err you know, the policy writing days. They had to write in the policy, the play showed this is a lack- why? Because the elderly people as you know, there was five or six times of elder abuse, it could happen, could be happening anywhere, you know? Even doctors can abuse, you know hospitals can abuse, even centres can abuse. People don’t know their because knowing their abusing older people so they have to know what is it. So we organised training for people, we were the first ever organisation of Asian err, or charity to organise training. So we trained nearly a hundred and eighty people, we trained err, people you know volunteers, low level like volunteers. We trained nurses, doctors also, I even went to doctors surgeries – this is how you should be opening your eyes. A patient comes to you, very depressed, doesn’t sleep at night and say, when you see there’s some kind of marks on the legs and hands, you shouldn’t just be giving sleeping tablets, you should know why- what is all this happening. You know you don’t understand this could be elder abuse happening and she doesn’t want to hear, she doesn’t want to tell you about it- being abused by family. So we tried to resolve it in many different ways and erm, the play was all over the place and we got er, again we got award for that. So that play then, because the funding finished twice with them. One different plays, you know – one was on financial abuse, you know finances, the other was abuse in the care homes, and the third was finished shortly because money ran out halfway, that was elder abuse, properties, and things like these, mainly family members, you know? So it was very, very good you know, people got the information that helped them, use to go give talks to small groups. Older people’s groups, tell them this is kind of things happen to you, don’t just take it – it’s abuse [coughs]. You should do something about it [coughs]. And so when that project ended, then my – as I said – my goes on you know, I can’t sit still. The other my- so I was doing my research and found er, dementia. Dementia is another err, challenge- it’s in all the communities but many come to Asian communities, again it’s the stab wounds, people- whatever you call it, don’t talk about it, don’t tell anybody about domestic violence- people keep on suffering for years, and years you know? And err, XXX (00:59:51), which is dementia as you know, erm, it’s a progressive disease, doesn’t go away, there's no cure for it- so even now at the moment, still the need – but we started in nineteen err, sorry two thousand fourteen I applied for funding- I’ve been working on dementia since nineteen ninety six but was just like talking, err there was a conference in err Leeds – a European conference for which I was a part – Dementia Matters, is a big document, you can get it from somewhere and read it, I was part of it. So we started working in nineteen ninety four on that, to raise awareness of dementia they say it’s because people talking, doctors come from Europe, but nobody did anything practical about it until now it’s come to like a front. So in nineteen- in two thousand and fourteen we applied for funding, Rewards For All, and we got the funding and so we started writing a play, and er a lot of workshops and the play is called Dementia’s Journey. You know you can look on my website and see it, and erm the play was very, very popular erm, err it got international award for that – we won international award for that. First time ever, a small, small charity like Ekta, you know, so was the award picture – so in that year, two thousand and fifteen, in Birmingham we got award, international award, for that play. And we done a hundred and forty plays all around London and neighbourhood boroughs, and err we, the last play was- our last showcase was in the Cineworld Cinema here in the center of Newham in two thousand and sixteen, so that was our last play. But still people are asking, you know, because the actors were all volunteers, some had gone on holiday, so the play had to stop. But until we get a new, new actors the replacements. So that is how erm, then I retired- two thousand and twelve. Two thousand and twelve slowly the funding, the social started cutting funding. Two thousand and twelve they cut our funding, Ekta’s funding, main funding I mean. So- and then, that’s the year erm, I retired: officially on paper… [laughs] not from work actually, but err, so err for the last six years I’m doing the same work, as a volunteer, running erm, Ekta – but our members are decreasing because they’re getting older, frail, most of them are becoming disabled. And we are, we are now er like drop-in centre, people come and sit and then go. We are care, care organisation be friendly and support. When somebody is referred to us by social services, by health, anywhere, word-of-mouth, then they become a member and we know the person from A to Z. What’s the problem, you know? So they are our member we are responsible for them. We do everything that we can for them to help them. So it’s not like person comes today and tomorrow gone. There are people with us for the last thirty two years, who are members, and they’ve grown old with us. But with the cuts in social services, the funding has become very big problem for us. Also I used to have ten staff. We lost them , now I’ve got one lady who’s again working with the volunteers with me, and we’ve got volunteers you know, and although we, we- it’s very, very difficult now. So I don’t know how long it’s been but we’re still running it, trying to help, but I’m at the same time, as I said, I’m not the person just keep quiet, so I’m trying to do as much as helping other charities. I’m part of many charities you know, which is a way I can do, you know, just being there, helping, home visiting, talking, giving you know help. But at the moment my main interest is dementia now. Because dementia is something people, see are not aware of it you know, so we try to encourage them and err, because it was very close relative of my family, my daughter in laws mum, she died four or five weeks ago from Alzheimer’s. And erm, I- I tried to inform the community, er the family members, tried my best to inform them, tell them but nobody would listen because again, question is people know, what would people say? They link it to madness, people might say oh, they are so rich, they have all this and people, how can they get dementia in their family? How can they get- you know, hide her. So they would hide, they would not tell anybody, and progress, she went through hell of a life, you know. She died only four or five weeks ago, so yeah, that’s what at the moment… And there are other things in my mind, so I don’t know, there’s no money we still carry on you know? But I like to do something erm, just to see if I can pull people away, I’m getting old myself- I’m old anyway, but I try to see that if I can do something erm, ‘cos erm people are as you know, people are aging. They’re living longer, but as they’re living longer there are so many health problems, you know? And with this so erm… council or government saying there’s no money, there’s no money, who’s going to look after them, you know? These are the people who worked this country, you know, they pay their taxes, and now this is the golden time they should be sitting enjoying their life, you know, rather than begging, and they have to think of either I have food or I have pay my heating bills, because in this weather, they need both, they need hot food, they need heating as well, but they have to try to balance you know, why? They’ve done all this for this life. And that really makes me angry you know? So yeah, but erm, I’m going to stop there [laughs]. Yeah, so that’s my life [laughs] yeah…

**Well thanks for saying that, that’s really nice. Erm, do you mind if we take a break now, and maybe I can come back and ask you a few questions-**

No problem, do you want any more tea, coffee?

[Pauses for few seconds] [Restarts at 1:05:54]

You know was telling that we had made a list of things erm, different issues that were lacking in this borough and wanted them to do something about them, erm we- I told you about the meals on the wheels, the food, the next one was after a few there was leisure services. And this is something which the whole country knows about it. The leisure services, so we went to the leisure, it was nothing whatsoever, the leisure services, for older people from Asian community. There were things, yeah, swimming pool was there, everything was there, but when I ask some women, do you know the swimming pool, they said do they have it? Do they have it here? We don’t know if it is here I know it is not for us, it is for the white people, because that’s how- this is colonial thing you know? Can we use them? Are we allowed to go there? They didn’t even have a clue that at the leisure centre there was a swimming pool there, they can go and have a swim there. And we said my god, you know this is bit shocking. So I said okay, now we all got up, now we going to do this, you know, why not? You know? So , there, again because it was my list, I was setting up new project, I was trying to campaign for this services, so they were pushing me for everything, Ramesh, Ramesh come I need to get the stick you know, I don’t mind. So again, I said to Deborah, the lady – the director of social services, she was from Fred Parson. I said- and there were two support development officers working in the leisure- uh in the council in the town hall. So I approached them, and I said to them I would like to set up a session, this, listen a session, swimming session for Asian older women: Asian older and then women. And they both started looking at my face and they thought I’d gone crazy, you know? And err, I said here ,I want to set up one, you know. they said are you sure Ramesh? You think Asian older women would go swimming? Are you sure about it? I said that’s not your problem, that’s my problem, but I want you to give me a slot. But slot only for women, and only for my women. I don’t public this. Only for Asian women, only for my Ekta women, and I want one hour for it. And then the other condition on top is that, the, you know the, the pool at that end should be women, the instructor she should be a woman. And now the, oh my god, this woman is asking too much, she’s really gone crazy. No, no, no – Ramesh this won’t be allowed. I said to you all these years they’ve never been given an opportunity, I want to do them. Oh no they won’t come swimming, they won’t- err, how can you get them for, where their swimming costume? I said that’s not your problem. They haven’t even seen there’s a swimming pool in this borough. They don’t even know what it looks like in their life, some might have seen one in their other countries, but not here. So I don’t want you to mention swimming costumes at all, I want first them to go and see the swimming pool, what it looks like, and you don’t, if you want to come with me you can come with me, let’s see what happens. I don’t know if they’ll like it but I want to give them what you haven’t given all these years. So they said well you’ll have to ask Deborah Cameron, so I said fine I’ll ask her. So then we went and she took me, I went there as well to Deborah Cameron, and you know, like I said I’m a woman who can’t turn back, you know, so I said okay Deborah, we’d like to have this. She’s saying, look I don’t want you to mention costumes for this – this is very funny story – it was in the papers in the country. I said I don’t want you to mention costumes, you know, let’s see, I want them to see the opportunity first. She said okay, she gave me the day, such and such day, Monday morning, it was Monday I remember that, Monday morning, ten till eleven. I said first tell your staff to put black bags on the windows so nobody can look in the women because they have never seen this. So I said all that, and the women should be- the instructor should be woman, the staff should be women- and only for my Asian ladies, ten or twelve, whoever comes. I have a group but I don’t know who will turn up. So I said only for my women, no outsider. She had, she tried to reluctantly say okay, because she knew I wasn’t going to say yes to whatever she said. So I said okay, you come if you want to, and I said to those other two ladies, you are welcome to come you know. And then I went back and I told my ladies, this is another bit you know. I said to them, on Monday morning we’re going to swimming, she’s saying Ramesh what’s gone wrong with you? Are you alright? I said what’s wrong? Swimming is not for us, it’s for our grandchildren, who go swimming every week, you know? It’s not for us, we are old ladies, our time is to go up there, go upstairs. I said no, you’re going nowhere until you got your pass from upstairs. There’s no pass, so you are on this planet, when you get the pass you know nobody can stop you, you or me, we all have to go. But you haven’t got a pass, so why don’t you enjoy your life here? I said Monday morning, we are all going there, you’ll see what it is like, you know will see. So you don’t have to wear costumes, you bring your change of clothes, and one towel. I said don’t bring, no costume, because they hadn’t even seen a costume what it looks like. SO I said just bring a change of clothes you know. So I said, are you coming? Yes… they were scared of me. They thought shall we say yes or no? They said yes. Yes, yes. There were fourteen who got right, got a sixteen seater bus, so fourteen is alright, I’ll be there, and one my driver will be so we said okay. I said Monday morning I’m coming with my driver to pick you up, so be ready at such and such time and bring your towel, and err change of clothes, you know? So fine. I’m going by house, I’m sick I can’t go, I got a bug or this, all these excuses, these lame kind of… So I, some of the house I had to really go inside, take them out of the back. You are coming. Well I said I’ve done all this work, if they’re giving me shame. And about eight ladies you know, very reluctantly. Some of them I had to really carry them you know, come on, come on, come on. Then my volunteers were there with me, and these two ladies err, the sports development officer and Deborah was standing there you know? And I told my volunteers, tell this ladies you know, not to be scared of them. Today we’re going to see and see how it works out. I’m not sure myself whether they will succeed, they haven’t seen me, I don’t know what’s going to happen. But I want them to give them an opportunity to try what happens, you know? So my volunteers who used to- knew some of the ideas, they said Ramesh don’t worry we’ll deal. So they told the lady, the instructor, put the you know the floor, the you know different things, you know the colourful things, it was teaching pool. So teaching pool is only up to here, people can’t get drowned there. So it was teaching pool, you know, I asked for teachers, and not the main pool, I don’t want to force the people getting drowned. So teaching pool, and err my volunteers went first, and they opened the floor, you know coloured floors, the lights on, the first in the water, you know, whatever colourful thing, looks so beautiful. So when my volunteers members came in, I was with the members in case some of them ran away. I was walking with them and the volunteers were already there sitting trying to splash water- the members went oh my god! So this is called swimming pool? That’s why our children like to come every time they want, they say we want to go swimming. Oh this is beautiful, and I say to my volunteers, listen what they’re saying, because we’re going to work on that you know? They like it, what should be done, you know? So the volunteers, members went inside all the ladies, and they were bit perplexed in the water and oh the beautiful… So I said to her I said you can sit there near the you know, near the water, you can sit down and you can splash the water with your hands. See what you like it? So they all sat down there you know, like there, and.. oh it’s nice and warm water, with their clothes, whatever clothes, saris or whatever they’re wearing, nobody said anything. I said now after a while I said, and there this ladies are just looking – I said now if you like the water it’s warm you can put your legs and splash them as well. So they put their legs inside and they liked it, and so I said- I said just watch please, don’t say anything. And they said okay, just standing- so afterwards I said to the ladies I said, you can go in the water, nobody’s going to stop you, go in the water as you are, with your clothes, you’ve got a change of clothes with us. Just go in the water, see how you feel. They went in the water, and they started walking in the water, and you know when they’re wearing saris, the saris come out like a tent, and then they’ve got these clothes like you know. So my volunteers, I was here, and the other one was saris, they were like blocking their walking. She saying oh, next time I’m not wearing sari I’m wearing something else, it’s very nice, you know. So they’re like, liked it. The other one said yeah its nice next to, I’m going to wear shorts and XXX (1:14:57) I’ve got a long one, this and that. So they liked it. And then we came out I said would you come? They said of course we’ll come next week. So slowly I said, look, now them numbers increased, and erm, er I said still we are not talking of swimming costumes, just give them chance you know. They said it’s legal this, I said I can be legal, all this time it was illegal you didn’t give them chance. I said let it be legal until they are sure, and i assure you that everything will happen as legal- but give them some chance. Nobody is going to drown, nobody is going to – they’re all here, you know we’ve got volunteers to look after, then we’ve got your pool attendant. And so then they kept, gave me- they gave me thirty sessions without clo- with costume. After thirty session, Ramesh, there will be a problem if something happens, people will come from upstairs, this and that. They were just trying to- I said, but before thirty sessions I said to them, I said, well you like it? Now this is the rule we have to wear this something because this is not right, you know. Yeah, yeah, but we don’t know. We don’t want to wear those big ones, you know, big costume and hair, err Muslim ladies said it’s not our religion. Even Asian, even Sikh ladies say it’s because they have never worn it. So I had to design a costume for them… I asked my dad, brought big clothes he brought from Aldgate, and I had to cut down just like that, trousers to short, one piece, all one piece, with shorts up to here, not here, up to here [laughs]. And there was a button at the back you know, so they can wear- it’s all one piece. And I just took measurement from each and sort of like stretchable clothes, so it fit everybody. So I made that for them, because they liked it. But then it went on , and then slowly what happened, I was surprised one day I went there, one ladies wearing a readymade costume, and the next time another one is wearing and it slowly things change, and then their time came when my costume was like old style and they was all modern. And they would not miss a session, you know? The group ran for nearly eighteen years, but because of you know the XXX centre had to close down, there was a XXX (1:17:10). Err, but every Monday morning snow or no snow they would be ready for the bus, bus would pick them up, take them there, they have a swim, and then they take them home. I’m surprised, I’ve got photos in my office and we were all shocked, you know? So we had our own instructor and some of them started learning swimming, they used to start, one, there was an old lady, ninety two years old, she started, she had learned swimming and she was swimming like a fish, at that age, you know? So they were not given chance – given chance people can do anything. And this story came up, you know, they themselves, council themselves put it in their magazine. And it was the first time ever, it came out that- it was all over the country, the story spread and they started putting up sessions for- erm, sessions for Asian women. I got so many phone calls, how did you do this, what did you do this, I said it’s not easy, but it has been quite difficult, but it happened, you know. And then, err even now, now they can go to any public place, I mean some of my volunteers go to mixed classes now, because they are closer they go to East Ham. They don’t feel so- so that was really very excited thing to happen, but err, it took some time, you know. Yeah.

**That’s really nice.**

Yeah [laughs].

**How many people did you have coming to the sessions?**

Oh, the session first it was sixteen on the bus you know, because we had one bus. But the other people could make their own way. I, then year ago we were asked the question, then we had to change from teaching pool to bigger pool because it was small. So we had bigger pool and we used to put rope between the good swimmers and those who are learenrs. And the- you used to get completely full, you know. And then those who learned we had to transfer them to the main pool, and they started going to the main pool. And then slowly they started going to the main pool with the men, I couldn’t believe it. And slowly the things change, so then they went and then they went to sixty even. Yeah it went to sixty, so they had to make their own way. Only we used to have only one bus, so people used to make their own way on the Romford Road you know. But it became so popular because women would not stop going because they said it helps their pains, you know. All this women had pains in the muscle pain, so it for their own ben- they used to go have steam there, sauna, then come feel quite fresh, you know. So this was like a very moving story. Though it was very difficult you know, but in the end it was something we really achieve. It was a great achievement that people thought an Asian older women can’t swim, or they can’t go swimming, was not for them you know, here they found the project was so successful they even had to employ a worker who was speaking Engl- Asian language on the reception to talk to them and the women used to, then they talking to whole public you know? Oh they said oh why you only group you know? Open to whole public anybody can come in, and women said we didn’t even know there was a swimming pool here. We thought yeah its pool here, there is a leisure centre, but it’s not for us, it’s only for white people.

**Really?**

Because nobody told them, you know.

**Yeah.**

Yeah… that was really, really, you know I just can’t believe it you know? There are many other things but this two, the meals on wheels and this, it gave me stress but… but to me we got it done in the end you know.

**All sounds like it paid off.**

Yeah. And then I don’t know if you know, the housing director, must have erm, Taskin must have told you about this, Amargarh? The nine storey building?

**No.**

In Green Street?

**No.**

Okay, alright. I don’t know how she missed that… In that list of thirty two, the other missing gap was housing. Sheltered housing, sheltered accommodation. Again in my research it came up that there were some people who wanted to have their own place. They were living in their families, you know? But it was difficult. Elder abuse was taking place, maybe if it was big house- small house, big family, you know? And then the generation gap, that’s the main thing I found in my research . There’s a generation gap, so in our time it was erm, children can share the room with the grandparents, but the generation gap, nobody understand, the language barrier you know, between grandchildren. Grandchildren didn’t want to share their room so there was this kind of thing, and the grandparents wanted to be on their own you know? So they just, the first thing was to have their own place for whatever reason, and there was nothing. So we started campaigning, sheltered accommodation. And then this was where err Ramesh Devra worked-

**Mm, I think he- he-**

Yeah, Anchor House- yeah it was a, erm you know, so he became, at that time, during that thing you know, we were up running about making noises, he came, up on that home there. And he couldn’t to put in there, to find residents, so he came to me, that’s how we met. He came, he heard about this Ekta, he came to my office, my office, what happened was my office because the work was getting so much, I was placed in Custom House, you know and Custom House was far away, very racist area. So the housing people said to me we can offer you your office in our housing office in, on Ilford Road, so you can work actually, what was in line it was them who needed somebody speaks English, because they used to get so many client housing office who didn’t speak English, they had housing problem, and they had- didn’t have anybody to translate for them. So they wanted to give me an office so that I can help them. So it was, so I said fine I will be in the middle of the borough, I’ll go oh far away if I have to travel far away to go and visit somebody. So I said, I was given an office, in the grant officers room, you know, because big room grant office, and I had my desk there. But I was very proud saying oh yes, I’m sitting among those, but I didn’t realise until after that it was for their benefit. Whenever somebody came downstairs who didn’t speak English and had a problem with housing, they said Ramesh can you help us? There’s somebody downstairs, you speak five languages. Can you come and help us? Fine, I don’t mind helping. So I would go down to that person, you know try to help them. And then I said to them okay, I’m helping you, you help me as well. If I have somebody from my group who has housing problem you have to sort them out, I said fine. So that’s how we worked, you know. I was based there for nearly six, seven years, then we had err our own centre, our own office here in the borough. So that’s how I- so when, and that time Ramesh came to build that housing scheme here, he built a scheme and it was called Anchor housing, and he couldn’t find the people to put in because he came from another area, and he didn’t know the local who needed the housing, so he came to me and by that time because I was interviewing each and every person, what are your problem, and housing problem, people erm, kept on saying social services this is mine, so I had this people interested. So I said look there’s a house, so first time it was my- my members who were put in that err XXX (1:24:31). And so we worked very closely, he was, he’s very nice, very helpful man. So we worked closely and we got people there, you know. And then problems increased. So the house was full, the waiting list, and that was only for women and husband and wife, but then there were people who wanted to live with their carers, or their women on their- or the men on their own. And so we went to housing, err as I said I asked them, we need some place, they said there’s no place to build it. We want a purpose built housing prob- building. They said there’s none. But we didn’t give up, we said no, you have to do because there’s people been suffering. Now they need housing, they need flats for their own, they don’t want to live with their family. They want their own independent like housing. And then they, we were showing this place, you know, you must go and visit it, you know, erm, Upton Park station, there’s a market you’ll see a big nine-storey building, green. That’s called Hamaragh –it means my house. So that’s, that’s what it was- a derelict building, housing building you know. Broken, there were drunks there, was a murderer there as well, that building was lying derelict for years. Then when we put the pressure on housing they said oh, oh that’s the one building there, that’s the building – we said why, ‘cos we went to visit them you know, six or seven of us – no way we can build a housing here for the older people. It was, was a bar there, pub near down, there was a murder there, and there was all these people drunk, drugs sitting there. Such a dirty place you know. I said how can you tell us to turn this place for older people. No, of all the people how can we do that. So we started, we didn’t, then we thought no, this is the only thing we should do something, we should take it, not just.. say, reject it. So we started working with the housing office, they’ve worked with us, they’re very good. So we just said okay, we will give you the money, you manage it, and err you choose the people who want to go in there and we do all this administration thing, and we, the, the right advice. So we will do all this kind of-. So we worked in partnership and this place whole, they changed, they refurbished the whole building, and the nine stories. And I remember I put my ideas in there because most of my members were waiting to go in housing, you know? So I had so many members who wanted to go there, so they had ideas, and erm, different ideas came like erm, erm members don’t speak English, they can’t read and write, the nine story, hundred and- hundred and twenty, hundred and twenty nine flats. They’re flats for err single people, for couples, for people who wanted to live with their carers. And err, older people are- get confused, how will they find the places around there, they can’t even use the lift, you know. So we have to educate. So we had ideas and I, I came out with the idea, I still remember, I still remember that idea was, how would they know if it was fifth floor or forth floor you know? Because they can’t speak in the lift, they’re going up… So we said, my scheme, my idea was having like every, every floor has different colour. Every floor colour, and in the lift you put in like, err you have the colours you know? Yeah, so its blue, press the blue lift- touch the blue colour, and we told the ladies you know, in your own language in front of your door, you know the XXX (01:27.59) your name. You can, you know, so they could, only if you can’t read Punjabi, then you make a figure, you know? So that you know. And when you know, call this blue, this figure is mine so you put the key in the house and everybody liked that idea. It’s still same, some woman will say Ramesh, can you come for a cup of tea to my blue house, so they won’t know the floor, they won’t know the number, but they know it’s on the blue floor. So there’s so many living, for sixteen years I was the trustee of that building there, of that committee, then I gave up because I was busied myself. So that is an- our pride and for the first time ever we had then kind of houses in the whole of Europe. People came from Europe to visit the place to see how it works and how it happened, so we work in partnership with the, with the housing, so it was managed by XXX (01.28.49) trust, but it was erm, run er- belonged to the housing, they were collecting the rent and all this other things, you know, things like that you know. So that was very successful, that’s another pride for us, people from the first time ever, a project like that had happened you know? So we did a great things you know, achievement, but then it’s hard you know, killed most of the things.

**Yeah. You said you were um, involved at SubCo for nine years was it?**

Yeah, I was erm, yeah on the committee when it opened. For that we started, you know when we starting working around, you know, set it up, and then continued for nine years but then I, I had this, with my Ekta thing. Because I also worked with in Europe. Another thing they won’t get me to do something else and I never said no, that’s my weakness. So what happened they knew that I had set up this different kind of project, you know, how it worked. So I was approached, they said err, they still is there, it’s called erm, err European Network on Aging and Ethnicity, and I’m part of that. So they approached me, they said well, we would like you erm, to tell us, Europe, how to work with older people from ethnic minority, how to set up the project, how did you set up this in here? In Newham, you know? So the, the network is very good, all Europe means for all countries of Europe, they have reps on that board you know. So I was one of them, and we used to travel from here to Den Haag. Den Haag, you know? So that was the Hague. They had the centre there. We used to go once a year in December, cold. Once I went to Germany, saw XXX (01:30:30) and hardly in the snow you couldn’t see anything, because it was so cold, and I can’t forget, it was so cold and no food there. Lived for two weeks you know, doing all this work, writing projects. I said never again am I coming and dying of hunger here, you know. But then they shifted to Den Haag which was good. So we would go and I would be the main speaker, like this is how I set up, this is what needs to be done. Then first time when I went and I, they asked me to give a speech, you know, be the speaker, and I told them, and erm, err they said err, the, the director of the course, something else, they said we don’t have Asians err, you know, here, so there’s no need for us to set up special err, project for Asians who speak Asian languages you know? I said fine, it’s up to you. I said today you saying there’re no Asians here. I see so many young people around here, they’re going to get old, or they might get some people from parents from other parts of- to come and stay them, one day you will, you are the one who will see there’s a flood of people will got nothing for them. So then you will realise that why did you say that? It really happened. You know what, how it happened? Erm, this people from Dutch, you know Holland, they you know some turmoil happened and they were all gone to Suriname, you know? America- South Africa- err, South America. Then something happened there they came back to their own country, you know? Dutch. So when they came back they were old, you know, they go yeah the cold, and they didn’t have no language, and they still needed the services and there was nothing there. So it happened really, I didn’t even know at that time this is going to happen, so again, year after that, I went- we went, they called me specially, they paid everything for me you know, because my, my Ekta I said, we have no money now, it was… they paid everything, so we- I went there and I stayed for a week, we had every day different kind of err, err speeches. So and they said, the man, the same man was still there at the top said you were right when you said the people need services and there’ll be nothing. So this is what happens, they put me on the air, you know, the radio [laughs], so this happened, and now we need, we need you to tell us now, we want to set up the services. So then I said okay, so I sat there, we went to visit some more villages, collect the samples of people, you know, what kind of problem they had, you know, wrote a report for that. I give it to them, this is how I did it, you know, what I did, so this is what you need to know first. Because you lump all Asian under one umbrella. I don’t believe in this even word Asian, there’s nothing like Asian. What is Asian? Nothing, it’s just a continent, people are different, they’ve got language different, their dialect is different, their food, culture, everything is different. How can you say Asian and then say okay, Asian everybody same. Religions different. So there’s nothing, you know, this Asian word is wrong. As a word it’s wrong, you know. This everybody’s individual, they’re all different, so you have to provide services according to the need in a different way. And especially when you come to Suriname it is completely different from other Asian, people from other language- French, or another target whatever, they are, you call them Asian but they are not Asian you know. So they, they understood that bit you know. Then I, I wrote that this is what is needed you know, food-wise, religion-wise, and err, it’s up to you how you do it. Then a year, and they worked on that, they had very serious, they employed some workers who even came here, to visit my project, yeah there’s ladies from Amsterdam, she came to visit our project, she visited the Hamaragh – the one I’m talking about – Ramesh’ project and err, they saw hold things happening so they took back all that. And year after that, the third year when I went, invited again, and I went there in the evening we finished the conference, day time, about six o’clock there were two, three ladies who were part of that, they said Ramesh, after dinner can we take you for a ride, you know? We want to show you the lights you know, the chair, the canal, the water on the canal and all that, we were just having nice fun you know? I said no you’ve got so fed up of me coming here every year telling you awful, you know, you’re not doing this- so you so fed up you want to take me for ride and throw me in the water, is that what you’re going to do. They said oh no, no – they were so insistent; no we are coming after we finish dinner. You put your stuff in your room in the hotel room, and we, we meet downstairs and we would like to take you for a, just for a ride. The three ladies, and I said wow I don’t know what, you do whatever, you know what I mean, sure, said don’t worry, she’ll kill me, my son will get the money, we just joking. So they came, we sat at the car, we went, and we came here after a while she said we stop the car, near the water, you know, they’ve got these canals you know, water everywhere. So I said okay, I can come out now. I said what I’m doing here? Why you brought me? They said just close your eyes, so I close my eyes, now I said you’re going to push me, they said okay, open your eyes, look up – and I looked up, it was this building, and it had on it: Ekta Unit.

**Wow.**

Ekta Unit. I said what is this? This is the outcome of what you been telling for the last three years. Let’s go inside – so I went inside with them. We climbed, there were nine flats, and they said lets knock on the flats, so they knock on flats, this man came out, Suriname man, and they said, they must have organised, I don’t know, come inside, they said talk to him. I said well he’s Dutch- I don’t talk Dutch, they said no he can speak a little bit of Hindi, because he was you know from India, long time ago, but he could speak little bit of Hindi. So I spoke to him I said, you like this place? He said it’s very nice, very nice. He started showing me his cupboard, his kitchen, this is what I cook, all the food is- I’m so happy, he said err you know he came from America, south America, he said when they saw- when they told me, this nine flats [coughs] for these nine people who needed a place for their own, and they had no place, so we started example from what you have told us, this is nine unit- err if it works we can extend but as now it’s nine, and because of all that work you done, we name the unit Ekta Unit. I was so- I felt so proud, started crying actually, you know I was so happy, so then they put on the radio, you know people asking questions on the radio, you know, in English and in some Hindi, Punjabi. So that’s nice, and then I went once again for that, that was in Amsterdam, err in err Sonnenberg? Same thing, they are doing it there. We were writing- then we started writing the policies for the whole of Europe. Ten years but now they’re in their tenth year so I don’t know what's going, because they’re no funding either. Police of how to, for a while our services for people from Asian lang- Asian community, and the policies were ten years, you know- the elder abuse. Everything was in part of it. And there were so many centres in err, in Germany, again they were saying oh there’s no Asian people living here, the older people here in err, in Germany. We visited the villages, and we saw them, but because they don’t know. They have no sort of, when they started recording the numbers, you know, so they said now we’ll record and we’ll record what the needs are. So we work on the needs. So this is the tenth year, I don’t know what's going to happen again you know. Yeah… [Laughs]

**Wow. So exciting that you’ve managed to sort of help out across Europe as well.**

Yeah, yes… So yeah so I worked in Scotland as well. Because of that network you know, we are good friends all over you know, in Europe as well and here. So yeah we, we worked together so good friends in Scotland, part of this European network, so if they need something they ask me when it comes to Asian community, if there’s anything I can do you know. Err, and to go there and, those problems, because the people, err older people are aging. So their needs are complex now, you know. It’s not just that they need things more than just, more help. Information, and then they need to go to government, they have no funding so what can you do ? It’s a catch 22, you know?

**Erm, I don’t think I have any more questions so… do you have anything else you’d like to add before-?**

I don’t know, there’s so much you know, I don’t know where to… [laughs]. There’s so much you know, its err… yeah, no, I would like to see more services for older people, you know, that’s a thing because they’re, there’s so much. You go to hospital, you see so, so sad, cuts in health, cuts in this cut, that, everywhere this is cuts. And these are the people who really worked hard in their lives, you know? I know my, my father, my, my dad- how hard he worked in life, and when it comes to them asking for some little bit of help, they says no, no, nothing here, nothing there, you know? Err, that is the sad part… Er but err, that’s how it is, you know. What can you do? Mm… but Newham was very, very good for older people when, during that time you know? Everybody worked together, money you know? It was there for certain, different services, you had to work together, and then there’s a problem, we in that, that you know, that play of mine I was telling you, we used to get together, we had made this promise that err, we would all help. I told you before how we all helped toget- we all worked together, and we raised our concern with one voice, and get it done, rather than you know, from this providers. We speak together, we want this to be done, whether is for you, or for you, but it’s for the same community. And then we all work together and promise that we will not try to interfere other person’s work. Example, we send, and I’m still with that, that we will provide the befriending and support that members come to us for, for three hours, they come there, we do all this drama in my project we do everything you know? We like er, erm, my project is got so many different- I didn’t tell you about that. Ekta project does different things for funding and support. Not just come and have a cup of tea and go. When they come there, we try find out the problem, try to solve the problem, have the people social come, but at the same time, to reduce isolation. ‘Cos when I first got this people together, oh my god, it’s like a sea of people, older people, they can’t be just faces there. Yeah, they’re human beings. They’re older, but it doesn’t mean that they’re good for nothing. My dad was living, my dad was full of talents and skills, you know? So I starting to bring each and everybody, and I said they’re full of talent and skills. So I applied for funding and I got the funding, and then employed one man, one young man, and err we set up this, we set this problem, Hamaricani(?), which means ‘my story’, [coughs] and we end let Hamaricani, I tried to find with the help of that man, people’s talents. And with that people’s talents we found err, when we set up the project, Hamaricani, what we found that in that group from man, we had, we were, we had poets, we had singers, we had err musicians playing, who had done so much work, they were from all over the world, India, Pakistan, Africa – they were there. And from women there were dancers, storytellers, traditional dancers, folk dancers, you know all these things were there, but because they didn’t get opportunities they came here with their families, they leave their family and the family had no time to you know, they were just this: go to work, and this older people had no chance to bring up their talents and just… got depressed you know? So I said no this is not going to happen now, I’m going to bring out all your talents and skills you know, share with each other. And this project was Hamaricani, and its progress flourished so much, so then we created so many plays out of that, you know? We had plays to bring up all these you know, hidden talents. Share it with others, poets will write poems, and then we- they will say, and there was a man erm, there was a man who was so shy, you know from Africa, he would not even speak somebody, it was- not shy but he was depressed. He was going out in Africa, doing things you know, and there he was sitting at home just pray, at home, so do nothing. And he was looked after by his daughter who’d go and get some fruits, and this and that, and he would come and sit. And he say this is my life, I’m good for nothing, and he was feeling depressed. And I sat down to him, I said err what had you done, he told me I used to write. He brought so many poems from home and showed me. And he said I’ve not shown them to anybody, they’ve been lying in my trunk for years. You asked me, and my god I said, we’ve got such a publishers, and small book you know. And he said no, no, no I’m going to leave it alone. So he, I make him stand on the stage and read the poem, and ask him to write a poem. He wrote so many different poems on my project for the work and all that, and it was a very good poet. So then same thing with the women. Same with other people, you know, people, then we found there was a man who, who was in the Second World War. And he said he used to fill his guns, and shoot people [laughs] nobody knew that. And we got him a medal because nobody knew, it was important that this was a person who fought in the world war and this is what he did. He saved so many lives, so then he got a medal. So yeah this is how we found. And this project become so famous, and we wrote a book everybody, err and there was another one err, Winter Warmers we called it: stories, like how did you first, how did you finish, how did you experience a first winter in this country when you came here- they all came from tropical, hot countries- how did you feel you know? Because I was shocked myself, things so all of a sudden, you know. So there was some funny stories you know. I fought someone put cheese in my garden. One lady said I started walking, walking, walking I was running in my garden round, round and round like so much. When I came here my feet, you know, she was like, I opened the tap, hot water tap and burned all the thing, err feet. She told us she burned the feet with hot water because she was doing that and she was like I woke my husband and said come, see what is outside, all these kind of funny stories, you know. So we got the book published as well. So we done so many strange kinds of projects, you know? It was really nice. But this XXX (01:45:47) project on erm, Hamaricani was very so- we still do play, people in white might volunteer to go on weddings, because they revive all the traditions you know. In India you know, how people sing song during weddings, girls wedding, boys wedding, they dress like that you know, do songs, and the women are so good at dancing, we take them er with volunteers, old women, ‘cos they feel that they’ve got something you know? They feel they are something you know? Rather than useless.

**Yeah.**

We want to give them that you know, push.

**Sense of pride.**

Sense of pride, yeah, something we value, we want to learn from you. And err, one or two women we ask them to teach this err traditional dances to young girls you know, so they do that. Yeah. So yeah that goes on in my project, and we make them sing you know, every group you know. Erm, dance in the group, when we, the women who even they were in Zimmer frames they still want to dance [laughs]. Yeah you can come and see them, it’s very nice, yes.

**Does sound nice.**

Yeah.

**Excellent, erm, I think we’ll finish there.**

Yeah, okay, if you want to ask me anything you’re welcome to.

**Erm-**

Is there anything which err, I think I’ve done but I don’t expect to- because there’s so much different things.

**So many, yeah.**

Thirty two years, gone through thick and thin you know?

**I was just wondering if you have maybe, any memories specifically of erm, being on the board at SubCo and what sort of work you did there?**

Oh yeah, SubCo board it was very good, you know we had all erm, a well professional people there, because in those days all these people we had all good jobs you know? Very high profile jobs, different. And all those people there they brought their own skills. Like I was, I had the skill of working with people one to one, plus my own skills you know from life you know, what we say, caring skill. How hard it is to care twenty four hours, single handed, for parents, you know? And not asking for help, which is no good. I will advise people don’t do that now. I did it and after a bit was in hospital for nearly four or five months, you know, so much you know? You can’t do all that. I had to bring up to my two sons as well at the same time. But I didn’t take any help which was my sense of pride, it’s not good. So it was, I, everybody you know there were many other people you know, from housing, social services, different, we had even people from social services used to come and present social services on that board, so everybody bring their own skills and together we set up this, and SubCo just flourished, you know? And it’s so much, and now it’s become a bit different but those days it was like a, erm luncheon club, they had to… I was telling you that I went on the other side, when we, we were on that board we decided that we would not tread on other people’s toes. Like I’m doing day-care, you know, and somebody is doing lunching club. So they will not do what I’m doing, I will not do what they’re doing. Everybody’s doing that, we will support each other. And it happened so many years, but then the time came when social services, cut the funding, so the XXX (01:49:03) pot of money, anybody wants something from that pot of money they can apply. Whether it’s for day-care or whether it’s for lunching club, and that money is everything, so everybody sort of rushing to that pot. And it all got mixed up. So everybody can do whatever they want, that money. That all that is lost, you know? So, yeah, so funding money makes everything- but we still haven’t done that. We have stuck to our policy and principle, we do the same… you know? People come to us for four hours, we give them their- we started giving them food because most of them has- we used to give them only snacks, you know tea and biscuits you know. But now because the traffic is bad we are sometimes on the road for two or three hours you know, getting there, and they’ve got most of them got diabetes, so my volunteers cook some food there, snacks, and we give them food. But no we, we don’t do that, we said no, we stick to what, that everybody do what they feel like doing you know? The number of older people are increasing, getting frail, so many have problems.

**Do you think the needs of the community and the older people has changed from today to when you started?**

Oh definitely, there’s no doubt about that, yeah. Firs thing as I said, they’re getting older, aging. You know, they’re living longer, and with that come the health problems. And the services are decreasing, changing as well. Services are completely changing now, you know? Erm, we used to have people coming to our groups, filling out like attendance forms, this and, they help them there’s no one. There’s no one there. They can’t have- they can’t do that, they don’t have anybody at home. We have no funding to employ a- I had a staff member who used to do all that but funding gone he left the job, and we’ll had to organise Age Concern, you know, now they don’t do it anymore. So this lack of services there, ‘cos they… they don’t have workers there so what can they do? So all these things, there’s a lot of problems. Things have changed so much, you know? Err, they’re trying to pay attention- everyone is paying attention towards young people, the thing, young population is getting bigger there, yeah, which is fine, I had a big argument with my mayor, you know Robin Wales, he’s not my friend [laughs] not good… he tried to flatter me but he’s not good friend because he doesn’t do anything for older people, doesn’t like older people. You know he doesn’t- once I was, one day we were in the festival, some festival going on- when there was something decoration like dancing or something, he always watched my volunteers, they’re very good dancers, they perform you know, to dance on the stage. So he invited them, they said okay, I’ll send you some transport to bring your volunteers, so we went there and they were dancing, and he I don’t know from where he saw them, he came and joined them and started dancing with my volunteers. And I was watching I went to him and said, Robin, you like dancing, but when it comes to money you cut their money you know, and older people are sitting at home. These are the volunteers who could walk here. Those who really need the service they’re sitting at home because they couldn’t come, and you are taking the money away you know. I said older people are the ones who need help, you know? So he just shook out his hair like that, and said look Ramesh I’ve got my, my hair is going grey. I’m getting older myself. I said I’m sorry to hear that, but when you get older, real old you know, this isn’t- when you get old like those people, there’ll be, if this is what goes on like the way, it’ll be nothing for you in this borough. You don’t have deal- you’ll have to find another planet to go to. And you know what planet is that, you know? [Laughs] you’ll have to think of that, you know. Ohhh, he said ohh you’re going too far. I said yeah I’m going too far because I was saying remember, you don’t know how much they’re suffering. They’re sitting at home, some don’t even, some don’t- even driving is a problem these days, to get transport for them. We have to struggle my, my volunteer drivers- staff has to struggle to book a transport to come to our centre, which is only run twice a month because we can’t afford more than that, what can we do? So I said it’s so difficult. So that’s a lesson, but in the old days we had our own bus, you know we had our bus, and err even community transport was there, driver was there. We used to have groups running four days a week. Now only twice a month. So things have changed for the worse.

**Yeah.**

Yeah, and I don’t know what’s going to happen in the future, still don’tk now. And the prob- the health problem, as you know dementia, mental health problems… you know, people getting disabled and then there’s nothing, you know, strokes. It’s all age- aging… Mm…

**Yeah… I guess yeah if there’s not the money they can’t really do anything can you?**

Yeah. He’s changing now isn’t it? I saw that he’s leaving.

**Yeah…**

Mm…

**Well thank you for giving me so much of your time-**

-It’s okay, it’s okay.

**It’s been very interesting.**

-So what you going to do with that? Are you going to edit it?

**Erm-**

**THE END**