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Name of interviewee: Barry Mussenden

Project: Growing Old Gracefully - SubCo

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**Okay so it’s the eleventh of May and I’m interviewing Barry Mussenden at the Department of Health and Social Care, umm for the SubCo project. Barry, would you mind giving me your date of birth please?**

So, eighth of February nineteen sixty six.

**Excellent, and where were you born?**

In London.

**What, what sort of- what part of London?**

So I was born in Acton, West London – although I grew up in South London in the early years, yeah.

**So, umm, were you presumably your family were based in the South of London?**

Yeah, that’s right. So erm, my Dad erm, came from Jamaica in the nineteen fifties, and married an English woman and we ended up living in South London. But um, I studied in East London and ended up settling in East London so… lot of my early career was based in Newham and I was living in Tower hamlets at the time, so I’ve kind of got East End connection as well.

**Mhm. Where were you studying?**

Um, I don’t even know what it’s called now, but at the time it was called City of London Polytechnic. And so, based around Aldgate at the time I lived in Whitechapel. Yeah…

**Umm, did you like er, the East End, sort of east side of London.**

I… I found a real connection with it and ended up sort of living and working there for many years so err, erm… It’s got a, quite a unique character about it. Erm, and although I was sort of living in the borough of Tower Hamlets and working in Newham it just felt that the east end didn’t really drew- draw many dividing lines other than when it was sort of, which local authority you were dealing with yeah.

**Yeah. So um, what did you study at university, and then what did you go on to do after?**

So sociology and social psychology. Umm, and er, I wanted to get involved in some kind of community work or community development work coming out of uni’. So having studied in east London I began volunteering in Newham for an organisation called Newham Monitoring Project that worked round racial harassment and policing at the time. Erm, and I ended up becoming a worker at NMP as it was known. Erm, so my initial work sort of post uni’ was kind of around social justice campaigning and dealing with those sort of issues, but I- I began to get more involved in the sort of social care side of things as well, and there was a erm, a black community project called One Love project that erm, I joined the management committee of and was involved in that was erm, less- it… partially looking at elders but more looking at provisionally young people so erm, erm training opportunities for people who were not in work and education, some kind of youth projects, summer projects, things like that… Erm, so yeah I got involved in kind of like just local east end community activity.

**Excellent. Um, do you mind if we sort of back track a bit and talk about your time in NMP?**

Mm.

**Umm, would- did you have any sort of personal experiences growing up of discrimination that drew you towards that sort of social justice…?**

So, a bit personally but I wouldn’t say that it was my personal experience necessarily that drew me towards it. I think I got off pretty lightly on that front ‘cos were quite tough times growing up in the seventies and eighties. Erm… erm, but I think it was partly erm, studying in East London I kind of like, seeing you know… I didn’t feel very privileged at the time but you know [laughs] looking back I probably was quite- we used to get a full grant, no uni fees and so on. But just seeing the sort of depth of poverty in east London, and it being butted up side by side with the city. So, you know what, I was studying in Aldgate, literally you walk five minutes one direction you’re in really deprived east London, five minutes the other you’re in big tall glass towers you know, and this again was the eighties when there was you know, it was a big making money culture in the city erm, so the contrast grated with me quite a bit so I sort of had a lot of interest in heading east and working with the people that weren’t doing so well, yeah.

**Yeah. Umm, what projects were you involved with at Newham Monitoring?**

Er, so err… Quite a, quite a few erm, campaigns that were around erm, racial harassment from the police, racist murders, umm which were not uncommon at the time. Erm, er policing cases where you had deaths in custody or erm, what we felt were erm, unfair prosecutions of erm, people who hadn’t committed a crime. So, it was kind of a combination of case work where we give them advice, support, counselling… and erm, campaigning as well, sort of we sort of draw our issues that arise from different cases to try and pick up on themes and kind of campaign around those themes. So, er in the end although it happened south of the river, the most prominent campaign we became involved in was Stephen Lawrence family campaign when he was murdered in 1993. So erm… I remained involved in that family sort of campaign throughout the years up to now. Erm, as I say that, although that wasn’t in Newham, that was actually in Greenwich south- south of the river, but I was involved in many other sort of similar but less, less high profile but similar cases at the time. So I had a mixture of a sort of work around err, umm that kind of social justice in terms of erm, black and minority ethnic community experience with the criminal justice system, and experience of erm, racial harassment. And then, in parallel looking at er, issues to do with what provision we had by way of care and support services in the community, particularly for older people – that’s where my connection with SubCo began to arise, yeah.

**Excellent. Umm, you mentioned also working on the One Love project-**

Yeah.

**-Subsequently to that. Umm, what sort of training and opportunities were you providing to the young people?**

A lot of it was actually just basic skills around so, I mean these were in the early days of IT, not nowadays when everyone’s got a smart phone. Actually there was a lack of familiarity with IT and getting access to computer was pretty tough . People didn’t have home PCs in those days. Um, and so we were able to secure funding to set up a computer suite and to run free of charge training on basic um, Microsoft packages. We weren’t getting into coding and that side of things, it was much more kind of just how you use… Essentially, using IT in the workplace to skill people up better to get into roles in kind of office based environment. So that wasn’t the sole focus but that was you know, quite a key one because we were finding that young people leaving erm, local schools not with great results, not necessarily going on to Higher of Further Education, and this was a kind of a bit of a supplement to… So although we didn’t use the phrase NEETs at the time, which we now call Not in Employment Education or Training, was a kind of like the target group really. Er, a disproportionate number of whom were black. Erm, and then there was also erm, sort of child care facilities that were alongside that, so single mums wanting to get back into the workplace and so on could have their kids cared for while they were you know, training so there was that sort of project really. As it happens it was, I think it was just across the road from Sub Co but erm [Laughs] So erm, yeah it was a good project.

**Yeah, um did you sort of receive support from the council and local government when you were running these sort of things?**

Yeah, yeah so… In fact, umm there was council funding that wasn’t that hard to secure in the end, so erm, I’m gonna come on to what I think was going on there at the time, but we were able to secure a funding, even the premises was based in an old school building which the council basically secured and then let to the organisation. And similarly I mentioned Newham Monitoring Project earlier, an MP, we had erm, err, a council-owned building then that we were based in, alongside a couple of other community projects, one that was giving immigration welfare advice. And I think one actually originally was a small room for Sub Co before they got their proper building set up. So, although actually we used to press the council quite hard for, you know, better investment within the local community, erm, you know we still got a kind of degree of support that I think you’d struggle to get these days, yeah.

**Yeah. And what was the community uptake like and the sort of erm, reaction to the schemes that you were running?**

Very good to the point of amazing, so erm, in erm, I mean the One Love Centre was heavily used as I said, particularly associated with the Caribbean community. Er, our centre, Newham Monitoring Project was based at a centre called the 382 Centre, cos it was 382 Catherine Road, and it was basically just a community centre that er, had a, it was previously a shop so it had kind of like a shop front that served as a reception, and the reception was often completely packed so I think, particularly for local councillors popping in and seeing all those local people sitting using the services gave us a bit of weight and clout to think right, we better take these people seriously. But it’s because they were able to access services in community languages erm, from people that were foreign from within their own community too. So, this probably predates Sub Co to an extent, but it was- it- I think it was a reflection of what was going on in the community at the time. So I’m talking about initiatives that were all erm, community self-organised, so they came from the grassroots. It’ not that the council wanted to introduce a scheme and here, communities got together and organised this stuff then went to the council for support. And erm, in those days, I think funding was available, some of it came from what was then the old GLC, Greater London Council, and then into the local council, so you know we were still cash strapped, but we were getting core funding from the local authority, yeah.

**So not sort of chasing funding.**

Yeah. So you’d go to, whereas now you’d probably have to go to a whole, you know, you’d be contracting and going to a whole plethora of different funders to try and get your sums that are done there, we were able to get core funding from the council, and you top it up with other particular project funding, but you’re kind of, your core building costs, staff costs were covered in that way.

**Yeah. Erm, do you have any sort of, particularly proud memories or moments from er your work with those two centres?**

I mean, so we erm, in a way the greatest pride comes from more the day to day support we were able to provide local people. Just receiving that thanks, we were always getting flooded with letters of thanks and appreciation. So although there were some more standout moments that were more high profile, so when for instance we were campaigning around a death in custody and you know, managed to support a family to take it to an inquest to get verdict of unlawful killing, which was kind of quite a major thing in those days, wasn’t very often that a, regardless of the circumstances of a death like that you know, you’d struggle to get that sort of verdict, so I think you know, we had some kind of symbolic victories like that, didn’t bring anyone back to life, but just in terms of sort of challenging the status quo. But like I said I’m probably more proud of the sort of day to day provision that communities themselves were able to pull together. Most of this was voluntary effort you know, through some of the funding we secured you know we managed to obtain some salaried workers, but a lot of it came from voluntary effort from local people.

**Yeah. Umm, how well established were the organisations when you joined, I mean had they been going round for a while or…?**

Yeah. Um, so Newham Monitoring Project was set up in 1980, following the murder of a young man called Akhtar Ali Baig. Err, so that I think initially erm, secured sort of GLC funding and then eventually council funding. Erm, One Love a few years after that sort of mid-eighties, so by the time I was getting involved in the late eighties they were already well established organisations. And so I began just by sort of volunteering my time and then gradually in One Love’s case joining the management committee. In Newham Monitoring Project I became a worker myself, a paid worker for a period of time and then eventually a management committee member, so yeah. These were organisations that erm, had, you know, were already well established. I think the, the difference I’d draw and we’ll come on to this when we talk about Sub Co, is they had a greater focus on young people. The community itself was younger, so NMP, although it was there to support the whole community, often times the racist attacks were on young people in the street, the police harassment, you know, a lot of that was of young people. One Love was particularly, not solely, but particularly focusing on providing opportunities for young people. Erm, and I think it was more the kind of awareness that you also had an Asian community, those were the younger ones but you had longer standing members of the community, their parents effectively, who were now coming to you know, well beyond retirement age and the provision for them was much more lacking. So you’d have sort of activism that’d created, you know, quite a strong community infrastructure particularly facing towards young people. And then you had a whole generation coming through where there wasn’t really a great deal of provision for them. Erm, and that’s where I think I began to sort of turn my attention to that side of things as well. And, and we- a number of organisations came together to form something that was called the Newham Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum, quite a mouthful but essentially it wasn’t a- it was a collective of organisations all involved in care in one form or another. And erm, it, so each was you know, kind of got on with providing its own, erm, discrete services, but just to come together to lobby or raise the profile, raise awareness of the kind of collective issues that the community were facing. The aging , our elders as we used to refer to them, the kind of, the- the post retirement section of the community, the kind of challenges they were facing that individual organisations were picking up but we sort of used erm, Newham Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum as a way of bringing a stronger collective voice, so One Love was a member of that forum, NMP was a member of that forum and that’s how I first got involved, and I eventually became the chair of that forum.

**Wow.**

I think you, you’ve interviewed Babu Bhattacherjee?

**That’s right, yeah.**

Who, he was subsequently a chair of that forum as well beyond my days, but erm, I became a chair of that forum. So that, erm was very much more involved in sort of articulating the needs of older people in the community, which we didn’t feel we had so well served.

**Yeah, erm, before we come on to your work as a chair with the forum, would you mind explaining the difference between your role as a worker and also your role as a sort of management on the board at One Love and at NMP?**

So the, as a worker you know you- you’re contractually employed by the organisation, you’re receiving a salary, erm but obviously you’ve got that kind of fixed responsibility to deliver in your role. As a, on a board member, an unpaid role – it’s all voluntary, but actually you’re legally responsible and accountable for that organisation so erm, you know in terms of governance er, charitable status, erm, company status you’re, you’re still volunteering for the organisation but you’re actually carrying quite a bit of managerial responsibility, and many of the people that comprise the board are, are just those of the local committee that have been active in trying to get an organisation together. So, you know, what you can sometimes lack is the kind of professional expertise that would come with a er, you know, imagine the company board. So I think in time we had to be a bit more proactive in kind of recr-, creating a board, a management committee it’s often called, that, yes, was routed in the local community, but you had someone with an accounting background, you had some with a bit of legal background around the table so you can draw on some of that. So it, it’s sometimes sort of treat the management committee as yeah they’re kind of volunteering their time, they’re meet and so on, but actually there’s a really important governance role that that committee has, er that we used to kind of carry out yeah.

**Yeah. And presumably when you were chair of the forum you drew on your sort of experiences and skills?**

Yeah, yeah.

**Um, so what can you remember any of the other organisations that were part of the forum? I mean, was it big or…?**

No I mean, it was very big and some of them had quite discrete roles, so organisations such as the Newham Asian Women’s Project, now that wasn’t particularly focused on older people actually but a core part of their service was running a refuge for women escaping domestic violence, and they had other advice and support services for Asian women as part of that. So erm, not- there were, I forget the precise names now but there were sort of carer/support organisations for people caring for relatives at home. Erm, in- there were some kind of community specific day care centres. Some of them were based- faith-based organisations so, you know, a kind of arm of the mosque or the temple or the gurdwara or the church that was providing some voluntary care erm, may not necessarily be a kind of formal constitutive voluntary organisation in its own right but was providing care. So it was quite a broad network, a mixture of the quite you know, formal erm, legal entities, funded organisations and slightly more informal care that was going on in the community, so it was- I can’t rattle off a list of these [Laughs] – but it was quite a broad membership. Yeah, yeah.

**And what did the role of erm, chair of the forum involve?**

So it, it facilitated convening meetings where we’d come together to share information and concerns and erm, largely speaking then acting as an interface with the social services department, local councils to say- to draw on common themes that are coming up across organisations. So it wasn’t there to lobby on behalf of one particular organisation or another, or even one particular section of the community, but just to sort of draw together issues erm, across the piece about- essentially the difficulties that communities were facing you know, in the care environment particularly around elders. I mean, there were some young people with issues as well, but principally around the kind of issues being faced by older people, yeah.

**So, would you collect these themes together and present them to the council or did the council have people that came to the meetings?**

So we would invite, so I’m trying to remember now, yeah we did have a, the council had a umm, a lead on race equality. When I said the council had many lead on racial equality but sorry, the social services department… I forget the exact job title but an officer who erm, erm lead on race equality, he used to attend those meetings as a kind of interface so, you know, we might also invite in a particular officer or official erm, or even councillor that might be relevant to a topic we wanted to discuss, and sometimes the director of social services. I think you interviewed erm, Deborah Cameron?

**Yeah, yeah.**

Yeah so she was director of social services at the time, and I have to credit her, she would come along you know fronting out even when there was criticism, erm. So you know we, we had that kind of more routine erm, connection in to the council to the social services department through that particular official, but more generally we you know erm, I think we didn’t find it difficult to engage the council. Whether we then agreed on everything was a different matter but we weren’t stonewalled so you know, if you sought a conversation you would get one. You might agree to disagree at the end of it but, so we never, we always thought we had access into social services and a wider council, yeah.

**Yeah. You mentioned that err Deborah listened to criticism as well, I mean did you have any particular criticisms or things that you wanted to present to the council that could be done better?**

Yeah, I mean… I think we had an overarching criticism in particular, that we were quite sort of forceful in making, in that , you know and we, we, remember we ended up writing a report erm, it’s not online, it’s sort of paper copies but erm, I think we called it erm, Black Communities Care. And by black we meant it in inclusive sense of Asian, African, Caribbean. Erm, and it was, it was just trying to summarise the critique we had of what was lacking here and, and I suppose what I’d distil it down to is err, although social services still felt pressured at the time, looking, comparing it to now actually we were reasonably well resourced. You know, you could access home care, day care, erm residential care in a way that’s um, much more rationed now because the demand is so much more, and within that aging population now demand is a lot greater. In those days actually, it, it you know, there was a greater availability of care. And our critique was that although those services, many of which were council rum, erm were open to all, they were one size fits all. So they’re open to everybody but basically what you got is what you got, and erm, there tended to be you know, a lack of provision of speakers of other community languages, certainly in terms of kind of like what might be on offer on the menu and so on didn’t really respond to community needs and preferences at all. And I think there was still a kind of a, although I wouldn’t put Deborah Cameron in this category, but there was still a kind of overhang of a sense within social services more generally that these communities care for their own. So we know they’re there, but they kind of look after themselves through their religious organisations or within the family, within the extended family, there’s big extended family infrastructure, so emotionally therefore these are communities that tend to care for their own, if they want to access the mainstream division it’s there for them. And erm, rather than thinking about how do we, erm develop culturally appropriate tailored services to meet their needs, and how we are being proactive in engaging those communities to assess what those needs are, so I think that was our kind of overarching critique and within that there’s all different individual issues and recommendations we came up with. Erm, and er, I think that posed quite a challenge to a council that actually liked to think of itself as being you know, very progressive and responsive to be challenged back and saying ‘well actually what you’re offering doesn’t really meet the communities and what you’re really doing is relying on communities that look after themselves’. Erm, so that was erm, I mean I’m talking now of a period around 1990 that was a sort of challenge we were putting back into the, into social services and we were trying to sort of like raise the profile of that as broadly as we could. I think there’s something I would say in parallel to all of this, just in terms of my take on what was going on at the time, ‘cos I’m couching this in terms of what the council didn’t do, or needed to do or where we challenged them but I think within our communities itself, it was also quite a critical juncture. Just in the history of what, post-war Black and Asian settlement in the UK, in particularly in East London, ‘cos my take on it is that, when you had that post-war settlement from like fifties, sixties, seventies and the eighties, and particularly had a very diverse community build up in Newham. There was still a sense of, of erm, especially people coming from Commonwealth countries, that you were coming to the UK or coming to London to better yourself, to provide better opportunities for your family and ultimately to go home, whether their home was Pakistan, India or Bangladesh, the Caribbean… Here, you know, erm work hard, erm make a better life for you and your family and then re- you know, look forward to retiring back home. And I think the period we’re talking about, around that kind of early nineties, was when the realisation was really firmly setting in that erm Britain was home and very few people were retiring back home whether that was true people who originated from the Caribbean or South Asia. I mean very few are retiring home because their families are already settled you know, we’re talking about communities that now have probably lived in the East End for decades. Uh, and so I think although, you know I’m articulating a criticism of perhaps the slowness on the part of the state and the local council and social services to respond to need, I think even in communities it was, it took a while before actually the realisation set in you know what, we’re here to stay and that means we’re gonna out, you know live our lives and die here. And so erm, I think there’d been momentum built up in recognition of the fact that we need to develop more sort of provision for our local, for our own communities erm, who weren’t going anywhere. And so in a sense we were slightly playing catch up on that front as well, erm and then so, you know as much as I’m saying the council needed to develop a better understanding of what the local committee needs were, we to as communities were sort of realising it’s not just all about stopping our young people from being harassed on the street, it’s actually you know, we need to do a better job ourselves of coming together to ensure our, our- the needs of our elders are being met.

**Mm.**

So that was sort of, the point in time where the forces were conjoining really, yeah.

**Umm, do you know, sort of your Dad’s own expectations as a migrant, I mean when he came to this country was he, sort of, planning to settle permanently or to move back?**

Erm, I think for him he wasn’t planning to go back. He came from Jamaica and he, he basically said it’s a beautiful island if you got money but he came from poverty and he didn’t really have any strong feelings about it, so I think from his perspective he wasn’t looking to go back to erm, Jamaica but erm, you know many of his peers were, they had the, this sort of idea of ‘right well, I’ll save money and I’ll buy a plot of land and I’ll build my house back in Jamaica and I’ll go back to that when I retire’. So although, erm- and perhaps my Dad because he married an English woman, whereas many of his peers married fellow Jamaican immigrants, maybe that’s why they had more of a sense than he did of ‘oh we might go back one day’. Erm, and they still refer to Jamaica as ‘back home’, or ‘back a’ yard’ as they say. And um, so I think within the Caribbean community there was a similar, I think, expectation that we would go home and then the realisation that I don’t think we’re going anywhere. Erm, in some ways although they face similar challenges err, and often it was through the black churches and so on that day care might be established and so on, it was a little bit easier for those communities to, I use the word integrate, sort of you know access the mainstream provision, because they’re all English language speakers, and although they have different dietary preferences it wasn’t that different, and so you could sort of find a middle ground and I think as a community erm, if you think at that point erm, it was still a majority white community in those areas, of the, the kind of Caribbean elders that might be joining those sorts of services were different but they weren’t that different. So I think it sort of… the services were probably slightly better able to flex to meet some of those needs than they were the Asian community where I think, particularly white elders, found those Asian elders very different, you know and [laughs] so you know, even in terms of how welcoming the atmosphere was. I’m not talking about open hostility, but you wouldn’t really you know, if you were erm, a Pakistani family and mum was now in her seventies, I don’t think you’d envisage ever sending her along to a day centre like that, so I think there was a real drive to say we’ve got to organise stuff for ourselves yeah.

**Yeah. Erm, you mentioned the sort of, inclusive notion of erm, blackness. Could you tell me a bit more about sort of how that understanding has evolved and changed?**

So I think particularly, although I think it’s probably true nationally, I think especially in East London you had a sense of, when we talk about the black community we didn’t just mean people of African origin, African-Caribbean origin, it- it absolutely was a term that also referred to people from the Indian subcontinent. Erm, south Asians whether Pakistani, Bangladeshi, erm Sri Lankan, Indian – in a way I think the term Black was used in a political sense in the way you might use green to describe environmental or red to describe leftie or whatever, it was sort of a sense of erm, migrant communities, particularly from the commonwealth who were facing similar challenges, you know may have different cultural backgrounds but actually all have a similar experience, particularly of racism in the East End erm, which was bad at the time. So I think that people would associate themselves, so it wasn’t any kind of erm, denial of your own particular ethnicity, and I think people were comfortable to interchange and you know, you could talk about yourself as a Muslim, or as a Pakistani, as an Asian or as Black and kind of use it interchangeably depending on the context. Umm, I think now erm, and partly because the minority ethnic community itself has become so much more diverse, you tend not to get that. So we often use a phrase now, BAME – Black Asian and Minority Ethnic – to try and cover all bases [laughs], but erm there you’re probably more likely to use ‘black’ as a shorthand, so if you’re setting up a day centre for Asian elders you’d call it an Asian elders day centre. But as our forum, it was the Black Community Care Forum, we knew what we meant by black, well we said black and ethnic minority, but basically it’s just meant, you know, that those same communities… So erm, I think yeah – that, that was probably a sign of the times, in terms of the way we used to- the language that was used at the time, yeah.

**Umm, what were the particular needs that the err, elders in sort of the black community were facing in the early nineties and eighties?**

So partly language was still a major barrier, so although – even more so amongst women than men. So you had erm, you know that kind of immediate barrier of not being fluent in English or perhaps having very little English at all, not being confident in it, and particularly as you’re aging – a kind of tendency to kind of slip back into your ow- your first language so even though there was perhaps in the workplace had been more confident in speaking English as a second language, reaching more advanced years kind of slipping back more into comfort in their kind of first languages, and so that just be one kind of tangible barrier. Erm, and around err, in terms of the kind of caring environment you want to create, just what people’s needs and preferences were, some of it was about just erm, you know being able to socialise with people , you can reminisce and share similar memories – whether it be of India or whatever, erm around erm sort of you know, just the kind of, those cultural things around food and music and so on; what kind of entertainment you want to bring in, erm you know… You know that… just those, if you think about what makes up a nice care environment, particularly for an older person, er you know, I think culture, background plays a big part in that. So it’s not rejection of anyone else’s culture but just sort of recognition of that, that is not just a minor preferences its quite a fundamental need and if you’re not able to address it you’re not really gonna- your service isn’t really one that’s gonna work for people.

**Umm, so when did you first come into contact with SubCo or people who had gone to form SubCo?**

I think so initially, early days actually, because when they were first beginning to get SubCo off the ground, erm as I said they had a kind of small office in the same community centre we were in when we were trying to get things going then they established their own day centre, and I would erm, because they were quite an active member of the Black and Ethnic Minority Community Care Forum, even before I was chair just in terms of the way we used to network one another. SubCo would often be a place you’d sort of go to meet, sort of get their perspective on some of the issues we were, you know, putting into the council or what have you or campaigning around. So in terms of the kind of erm, people like Taskin, Celene, people that were working there or some of their committee members would have quite a bit of interface with them. And also, if I’m honest with you, just on a social level, because as soon as they got the day centre off the ground, although it was a service there for elders, you know people who sort of registered with that service, they used to sort of, would put on events and activities where the wider community were invited to. So I’d p-pa- I’m happy to pop along and share a bite to eat with them on that level too, so it was you know it was a centre that was catering for a particular need but actually was quite an open environment. It would encourage people in. Err, and so I felt like I had quite a bit of- I was often popping in and out of there for one reason or another. Yeah, but they were- you know, Sub Co was, is establishing its own centre while also being a player in the kind of wider community just around influencing, you know what was happening policy wise and so on.

**What, what was the err, atmosphere in the centre like when you go to these events?**

Very warm. Very welcoming, you know. I was quite visibly as I stepped through the door not from an Asian background but I couldn’t be welcomed more warmly. In fact sometimes they’d kind of almost go over the top of wanting to you know, ‘oh have you tried this before? Have you tried that?’: couldn’t be more welcoming. It didn’t feel in any way like a- you know sometimes now we talk about erm, erm community cohesion and community isolation and communities kind of separating themselves off from others, although it was a service that’d been developed in order to you know, address those particular erm, cultural needs it absolutely felt like erm, an inclusive environment wanting to connect with other people. So I think whoever you were, whatever background you were from and whatever organisation you were from, I think you’d be- you’d get a welcome reception there. So they, I think they kind of took pride in kind of perhaps exposing others to some of their own sort of culture, rather than necessarily trying to separate themselves off from anybody else. So yeah it was always a nice place to go and am sure it still is. [Laughs]

**Yeah, no it is. Erm, do you remember when they sort of got the building set up and, was it easy to get sort of erm, you know a base for a, for an organisation?**

Oh what, I wouldn’t go as far to say it was easy, they had to work hard to secure it. Erm, but… I think there was at this point a growing understanding of- by supporting an organisation like Sub Co, you weren’t somehow doing them a favour that they should be sort of, you know, beholden to you. I think there was a kind of recognition of, this is meeting a gap in our local provision. So I think from the council’s perspective, they sort of understood that erm, you know, within the kind of range of local provision, this was dealing with precisely what was lacking. And so it was in the interest to support it, because you could then point to it as something that now locally is, is on offer that wasn’t before. So as I say, I know it took a lot of long, hard work to secure the centre, erm but my sense was they were slightly pushing an open door in the sense of the recognition that this is needed.

**Um, you mentioned err, Taskin obviously, were there any other people from SubCo who you met and socialised with?**

I mean many, many. I- to be honest with you I can’t roll off all the names – Ranesh was one, erm Jaspin Singh was involved – certain people that erm, yeah I mean, many people and erm, it- it- I think it was a mixture of, some people who had solely got involved in Sub Co, and some people who’d been involved in kind of, community activity in the area more generally and recognised this was the kind of next thing we had to kind of tackle, so when I talked earlier about some of the provision that was there had sort of been developed for younger people, I think there were some of those same individuals recognised that’s only part of what the communities need is. So there were, you know, some kind of more experienced heads who’d had been involved in community activity around slightly different issues that were involved too. Erm, so you know, it felt like it very much felt like a sort of community lead initiative.

**Yeah, yeah. Erm, what were you doing professionally at the time?**

So at this point now erm, id err, I was still chair of the Black Ethnic & Minority Community Care Forum. I was no longer a worker at NMP, I was working on a project – a London-wide project – erm, called the Black Community Care Project. It was slightly, a slight extension of what I was doing in Newham but across London as a whole. Err, there was an organisation at the time called the London Voluntary Service Council, the LVCS, I think it’s folded now – but they used to support erm, support voluntary action across London and again they had sort of erm, historically been you know, quite homogenous in the activity they supported and were seeking to be more responsive to black community needs as well, so we, we- I was the first person to run this Black Community Care Project they secured funding for. So I still connected into east London with that hat on but my pay job was to work on similar issues across London as a whole. So I got involved in erm, setting up some projects along similar lines to Sub Co actually, erm in other areas of London. Erm, you know, so if you take Newham as a very solidly Labour borough, always has been, always will be I’m sure, erm took a kind of similar approach within Wandsworth which is a very different borough, was a flagship Conservative borough at the time – erm, but it similarly with a very diverse community – and they were quite keen in going, developing similar provision. The way they wanted to go about it was slightly different. Instead of grant-aided it as kind of they wanting contracts, but we were able to work up some projects that used the kind of Conservative preference for kind of contractual approach to still get the same outcome. Err, so that- I was working along these sort of issues erm London-wide really, yeah, yeah.

**Erm, would you mind talking a bit more about the difference in funding and how that affected the work you were able to do?**

The- so grant funding err, the- having a core grant I think really liberates an organisation in the sense of you know, there’s such an intense pressure on just paying your core costs so, you know, you can’t run a service on any kind of scale without paid workers. Voluntary, volunteers only take you so far. Ultimately you have to have some kind of core work force that, where doing this is their day job. And I, and alongside that you need some kind of base which involves a roof, lights [laughs] heating and so on. So there are core costs which erm, if you can secure a grant to meet, really give you that platform on which to kind of expand a service and maximise a service. And then if you can complement that with you know, other additional project income: great. So that’s the advantage of grants. Erm, the, the flipside that comes with that of course, particularly in those days when it was the council grant you were relying on erm, there’s always going to be strings attached and actually you could be quite beholden to the council then in terms of then how they shape and influence the service you’re providing. So, I think err, you know, it- I began to learn that although actually I think any organisation you know, providing community service like that, if you’re gonna’ have a core grant that’s, you know, unless you’re a really massive organisation, only a small community based one needs that security. But I found, interestingly, contractual opportunities can be made to work to your advantage. Err, if you- if you’re able to erm, manage that on top of a core grant I think if you rely on that alone to run all your services, then basically every contract you enter into you have to create some head room that can, you know, cover your core costs, and especially in more recent years organisations, because they’re trying to reduce your erm, kind of like, the kind of- effectively you know, pull it down to minimal hours and keep them as low as possible, it’s really difficult to build in a margin that helps you cover your core. So I think there’s a lot to be said for having that kind of core grant aided, and it was much more available in those days than it is now. But you can make other funding models work, erm, but I think you just end up having to be really business like about how you cost your service – and you need a critical mass, you need enough people to buy that service, enough councils or other purchases to buy that service to make it viable. Erm, so this is where you end up with organisations that fare well, tend to be ones that operate on big scale, whereas by definition, some of the organisations we’re talking, if you meet a local minority community need, the scales gonna’ be limited so, especially in the kind of modern XXX (39:02) criteria. So I think it’s actually you know, it was tough then and it’s even tougher now.

**Mm. Erm, did you notice different community needs across London? Or were they similar to Newham?**

It’s funny, it actually made me better appreciate what Newham had going for it. Even though Newham and East London more generally, Tower Hamlets together, you know an especially deprived part of London, an especially deprived part of the country – you really see that deprivation then and now. So even though the kind of social need is even greater than many areas, you also had a sort of erm, community capital, a community infrastructure to draw on, that when I started working in other areas I really noticed the contrast, where you didn’t have such good networks across communities, you had slightly more riv- rivalries maybe too strong a word, but communities were a bit more insular in the way they worked. Mm, I think I might be out of time in this room we might have to move, erm yeah… So erm-

**Shall we pause and-**

Let’s pause and relocate.

[Recording paused]

So I think I was just saying, I could really see the benefits, the infrastructure that erm, community infrastructure that you had in East London the contrast with other areas where there was much less collaboration between communities, between organisations. So I think we had quite a lot to work off in- in the East End, even though I took it for granted initially at the time, when I saw how it worked in other areas I realised the benefit of that.

**Yeah. Umm, I mean did you do any work with SubCo sort of directly involved in their project delivery or was it more sort of collaborative?**

Erm, probably more so collaborative, I think err, there might have been some occasions where just a bit of sort of advice on some aspects of the service that they were looking to develop – I’m trying, struggling to think of a hard and fast example now – erm, but err… it- I think it was more just erm, helping to kind of raise the profile of the organisation and erm, you know connecting them into err, others that were doing sort of similar work so yeah what I- certainly wasn’t involved kind of hands on in any of the day care, erm delivering and so on, erm but we did keep well networked in with their workers in particular.

**Erm, so obviously they had the day centre and you mentioned food being very important part of social care, erm what other aspects of their work did you think were particularly, sort of valuable?**

Really good at reaching into isolated families and communities and individuals, so err, the fact that you know, there was a minibus [laughs] that could pick people up. I think erm, that err, I think this is where you can draw a big distinction with what the sort of generic council offer was. I think with the council, if you went effectively and knocked on their door and said you were in need, umm, certainly then they would seek to respond in some way or another – whether it was completely adequate or not you know, you’d have to wait and see – err, but if you were, if you didn’t come up on their radar that was it you didn’t exist basically, and I think Sub Co was erm, really well placed at just sort of erm, you know they were identifying individuals without the family necessarily coming and knocking on their door reaching in to communities, having an awareness of individuals who were, you know becoming more isolated or becoming more vulnerable or perhaps had worked in the local, locality and retreated back into kind of like isolation in their own homes. So erm, ‘cos it’s not like we’re talking about erm, a context where people can automatically were reaching the older age and putting their hands up to say ‘I want to access the service’. Sometimes they would actually retreat into the corner of their own homes and had to be coaxed out and understood you don’t have to resign yourself to sitting in front of the television, there’s more to life still. So I think they had a real strong kind of outreach ethic and, and just erm, ability and contacts at sort of connecting communities and identifying vulnerable people and coaxing them out, rather than simply responding to the people who were proactive in coming to meet them and find out where they can get a service from, support from.

**Yeah. Umm, so do you know roughly when this sort of, central grant funding ended and how that affected your own projects and also Sub Co’s provision?**

Yeah it erm, so I don’t know how Sub Co’s funding evolved, but just to give you another example, where I talked earlier about the Newham Monitoring Project, NMP, now that was heavily reliant on a core council grant, erm but part of what that project was about, more so than Sub Co was actually challenging the council and the local police on some of their practice so, you know, erm the project was highly critical of the council for not doing enough to tackle you know, racial harassment in known estates where you had families that were com- you know, experiencing that kind of harassment and the perpetrators were known. And often they made themselves be council tenants, and the council being quite sluggish in actually responding to that, similarly with the police erm, quite sort of slow to take action, to intervene in any effective way when ongoing harassment was taking place. So NMP was quite vocally critical of the council and the police and other authorities in their lack of response to these issues, and I think you know, there was a growing sense in the council that, ‘why are we funding these people to criticise us essentially? I mean yeah they’re delivering a service too and they support families and give advice and legal advice and stuff’, but there was sort of a view within the council that these people are biting the hand that feeds them, ‘because we give them a grant and we seem to get this grief back’. And the police in particular were saying, ‘why are you funding these guys?’, you know. So I think NMP was probably the first very prominent example of an organisation that had its council funding withdrawn essentially because it was being too much of a pain [laughs] a pain in the neck. And you know, a sort of notion of, you know, you know we shouldn’t be providing our funding for them to come and give us a hard time. Erm, NMP actually struggled quite a bit to kind of shift to a new funding model because its- you know, with social care it is, although it’s tough, there is a greater erm, opportunities for contracting your services. People don’t contract that kind of service that’s about issues to do with policing and so on. So I think we went to National Lottery and some other sources but the organisation’s impact was definitely reduced once the council funding was pulled away. Erm, and it didn’t go without a fight, and I think there were five hundred people outside the town hall including members of Sub Co actually, Sub Co elders you know waving their walking sticks saying why are you cutting funding in this organisation? So you know, it was a high profile issue but I think that signalled for me aware the council was more willing to take decisions that were going to be unpopular but just that kind of decoupled it from any kind of funding arrangements for organisations that were giving it a hard time. So that didn’t initially impact on Sub Co, but over time it just pointed to, within local authorities nationally really, and it also accounts budgets being squeezed anyway a sort of, backtracking away from grant funding that I think really did have a big impact across the whole black voluntary sector.

**Umm, what year was the grant withdrawn from NMP?**

Now let me get this right… Erm, I’m not sure exactly- so it would have been mid-nineties, around ninety-five, I can’t remember off the top of my head erm… let me think: nineteen-ninety-six, ninety-five, mid-nineties, yeah. So erm SubCo had been going for you know, a few years by that point erm, and in the early days I think NMP was the better funded established organisation, they used to lend quite a bit of support to SubCo. I think by this point SubCo used to help out NMP a little bit because you know, even basics like office stationery, if you haven’t got any funding you struggle to do it. So err, umm yeah that was what I, with hindsight, I can now see was a starter but got a gradual tapering off of funding for black voluntary sector, or black and you know, black and Asian voluntary sector at that sort of low, community, grass-roots community level, yeah.

**Umm, do you know when NMP sort of, closed shop?**

I mean it carried on for a very long time, it only really closed shop, where are we now two thousand and eighteen, maybe a couple of years ago: two-thousand and sixteen, something like that? It carried on for a long time through erm, a combination of some National Lottery money, some- running projects as well, so although you could- you’d struggle to get core funding to sort of run a erm, you know, kind of generic service it provided before, you could get sort of project funding for particular anti-racist projects and so on, so it- it you know, and increasingly relied on volunteers rather than paid workers. So it actually, in one form or another, kept going for quite a long time but eventually yeah, it had to close.

**Mm. What was the, I mean presumably some people in the council must have been sort of, more or very sympathetic to its aims – what, were there sort of, divisions in the council, also you said with the police, were they able to put pressure on as well?**

Yeah, well there were, there were divisions in the council but err, I think- erm, it- it- this is- what I’m about to say is more peculiar to Newham, ‘cos Newham I think, virtually all the councillors are Labour so it’s sort of, you don’t have that sort of, don’t have what you do in many councils of will it swing one way or another party-wise, there’s what, essentially one party in charge. But the different wings in the party, and you had erm, there were erm, Newham was the first borough and also Lewisham I think to have a directly elected Mayor, borough Mayor, erm who was Robin Wales, who was previously the sort of err, council leader. Erm, and he, he particularly took against NMP, and so I think he was quite influential in how the erm, other you know, kind of momentum built up across the council not to fund NMP. So erm, you know there were quite a few sympathetic voices erm, within the council at the same time. Erm, and they had in those days the council used to have its own race equality officers who were actually very actively supportive of NMP. So it wasn’t you know- I talk about the council as one homogenous mass, but actually there were differing views. But also it was a sign of the times erm, I think the kind of project that NMP was, you’d… I think it was seen as a, erm bit too much for an agitator [laughs]. So erm, you know it was only a matter of time before a council would stop funding it. So what I’m describing isn’t necessarily exclusive to Newham. There were similar projects at the time that gradually lost their funding too. Erm, so yeah the- that’s, that’s the kind of history we live through yeah.

**Yeah, erm do you know why Robin took against err, the work of the organisation?**

Erm… he was very focused, and he remained Mayor for- he only just lost his, very recently this year has he stopped being Mayor – he as Mayor for decades. But he was very focused on- his vision of the kind of erm, erm regeneration of Newham was erm, kind of built around putting a new image on the borough, and he was quite a driving force in terms of how the twenty-twelve Olympics ended up settling in Stratford, and so on. And I think what he didn’t want is an organisation that were sort of tarnishing the image by sort of highlighting issues of racism, harassment erm… If you could quietly get on with doing a little bit of support on the ground he’d be fine with that. Anything that’s about raising the profile of it and actually tarnishing the image of the borough as a whole, or exposing those sort of, the reality of what was going on the ground wasn’t welcome. So I think over time it just felt like this wasn’t an organisation that he wanted to have in the borough. He’d far rather a low profile service that would quietly meet with families and give them some advice and wouldn’t be sort of campaigning and bringing national attention to these sort of issues and getting them on the news and that sort of thing. So he just didn’t like that approach, and I think he, there were many others that shared that view, that they felt just put the council in a bad light, yeah.

**Yeah. Did that sort of erm, agenda for redevelopment affect provision of other community organisations like SubCo as well?**

Yeah, ‘cos it erm, err- what you got- actually as much as I really enjoyed the Olympics and I went to a number of events, that erm, that regeneration drive that was kind of culminated in the Olympics erm, came at a price of effectively having to clear out the kind of poorest, most disadvantaged communities because you know, that whole space didn’t spring out of nowhere, and there were people living there before. Some of it was wasteland, but a lot of it was like very poor communities living there. Erm, so I think you had a kind of erm, you know, I mean you see this sometimes when you, I mean I wouldn’t describe Newham as being gentrified, but you see it when you see areas that are gentrified like Brixton and so on, the kind of knock-on effect it has on the communities. So I think it had that kind of dynamic going on where although, you know in principle the idea of regenerating the East End, no one’s going to argue against that, of course you want to see that, but it seemed to come at the expense of the poorest and most disadvantaged communities. So I think you know, just in terms of the availability of buildings to host community centres- you know, I’m talking to you about the late eighties, early nineties where I said, oh NMP was in this community centre, and SubCo secured this centre and One Love had this centre, all of that went. There was no- because any building that had some potential or value to it you know, it was about turning it into you know, erm monetising it, not making it available for local community provision. So I think that’s you know, although the principle of regeneration was one everyone would support, those are the kinds of knock-on effects it was having. So I mean SubCo have managed to keep going and brilliant, good on them, but I think a lot of organisations fell by the wayside over time because you know, it drives up the costs of rent and you know, err you know sometimes you always think that increasing property values is a good thing but actually it has a big knock on effect in terms of you know charities being secure provisions. So you end up, instead of having a plethora of small groups, you see a number fall by the wayside. And those that can really consolidate and build, and perhaps merge and grow, you know they’re the ones that last, so you look around and you see bigger, well-established charities that some, some of whom don’t operate that much differently from the council I’m describing from days gone past. So it does change the complexion of the community and what’s on offer. So you know, there are upsides to it as well, but that I think was something that is gradual but over time I can look back and see the impact it had yeah.

**Yeah, erm in your sort of own current understanding of the needs of the black community, particularly elders, have they changed since SubCo’s founding?**

Well for a start err; the communities themselves are much more diverse. Although East Enders always associate themselves with a whole range of different communities, you can broadly speak- you can talk about the sort of black Caribbean community and the Asian community, and by Asian that would include different faiths and people of different countries, but that was the kind of core of the communities who needs were needing to be met. Then you began to see kind of East African settlements, Somalis and other communities speaking different languages, having different interests. So I think just the kind of range, the diversity in the community has changed quite a bit. And also, erm, maybe some of the expectations as well, so err, you know, in SubCo’s early days people were essentially for any kind of service they were getting because there was that or nothing and they were very glad for it. I think now people have a bit more of a sense of you know, I’ve worked in this country all these years, I’ve paid into the system I should be getting something back out of it, and yet conversely the sort of- some of the eligibility criteria is tougher than ever to get a service. And of course just the whole changing demographic, just the number of older people is so much more, the demands on the service become that much greater. So where SubCo were there back in the day they could meet, pretty much meet the local need, SubCo alone couldn’t meet the local need, the local needs massive. The number of people that fall in that category of Asian elders is huge in east London. So I think a consequence of that is, you can’t have what I was describing earlier as mainstream provision on the one side, and then you know, community based provision such as SubCo alongside it and that cover everything actually. In some areas the Asian community is the mainstream, is the majority now. And so I think you have to have services that are more, it’s great to have SubCo, but all services need to be more responsible to the diversity there. You can’t just leave it for someone else to cover. But as I said the funding pressures are tougher than they’ve ever been.

**Yeah. Umm, well I think I’ve sort of reached the end of all the questions I had to ask, I mean is there anything else you think is relevant or interesting that you can add or?**

Only to say that I think it’s a testament to SubCo that they’ve managed to stay the course of twenty-five years and from what I can see they’ve gone from strength to strength in that time, whereas others have fallen by the wayside. I think the next twenty-five years are going to be even tougher [laughs]. You know I think the pressure on social care is a massive issue for the nation as a whole, and that I now, you know, work in the Department of Health and Social Care, I see it a bit from this side just around erm, just with an Asian, aging community with greater need and you know, hugely reduced local authority budgets you just look at it and think the next twenty-five years are going to be really tough again. Erm, so I think I’d love to see you know, another twenty-five years, an oral history of SubCo after fifty years, but the next twenty-five years are not going to be easy, I know that, yeah.

**Well I guess just finally, just for a bit of context, could you explain some of your current role at the moment?**

Err, yeah. So working in the Department of Health and Social Care, I don’t actually work on the issues we’ve been talking about in this conversation. I’m much more involved in staff engagement, both internally with the department, so how we communicate with our own staff, how we kind of involve staff in activities and influencing the, you know the organisation they work in, and also within, not so much social care, but within the wider NHS, and we have a forum called the social partnership forum where we get representatives of many of the staff bodies in the NHS, which is the unions, some of the professional bodies, the Royal Colleges and so on together to talk about issues that relate to the kind of wider NHS work force. So I’m kind of, my day job is much more into that sort of erm, staff engagement, kind of internally and externally, but I’m not in terms of Health and Social Care policy, so I’m not sort of, involved in you know, the kind of erm, you know what should social care look like in the next ten years and stuff like that? But I’m, so but I’m definitely a kind of, now well established civil servant, but coming from a community background, coming from a voluntary service background.

**Excellent, I think we can wrap up there.**

-Alright, alright, alright.

**Thank you so much for your time it’s been really interesting.**

No worries.

THE END