**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Anjum Mouj**

**Project: Growing Old Gracefully - SubCo**

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*Interviewer*

Interviewee

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**[00:00:00]**

So I was born in Bradford, erm, and I moved down to London to ocme to study; I went to Middlesex University. And, erm, what I did was the, the, the summer that I left university, I went to, erm, Pakistan, and I spend, er, er, three months with my grandma. And it was really pivotal moment for me, because having, sort of, trained in, er, sort of, er, social policy and social work I had actually no idea what I wanted to do, and, erm, when I went, er, to Pakistan I sort of remember just coming back really aware that I wanted to work with Asian elders. And, actually, you know, I lived in Hackney, erm, and I had absolutely no idea of any projects that existed working with Asian… In fact, actually, more specifically, I wanted to work with Asian women elders, and I was just like, ‘Okay, that’s just what I wanna do.’ So I came back, erm, and I think I shared what I wanted to do with my then-partner who was just like, ‘Wow, well, you know, you might have to set something up!’ You know? And then, actually, about a week later, I saw a job in the paper which was for Eastwoods Trust, a project called XXXX [00:01:19], which is the Sisters House, and it was the setting up of a new project for self-cotnained flats in Manor Park. And I lived in Hackney, and I actually didn’t know the borough of Newham, and I didn’t know Manor Park. But I went for this job, and I, er, cycled up for my interview and I got the job, and I was just like, ‘Brilliant!’ So it was my first ever job, working in Newham working with elders. And that’s what I did, you know? And I did that for a couple of years, and the house got set up… Well, more than a couple of years, and I was the project manager. There was only one person who worked on the project: that was me. Erm, and it was with eleven beds, you know, flats. And it was fantastic. And I was working with women, and it was just like one of those fantastic jobs whereby, actually, you know, you know, you’re an advocate and you support and we’re, we’re… First of all, obviously you’re supporting the development of the project, making sure that the house was coming, you know, before the house was built. Sort of, you know, getting the, the, the, you know, getting it all together, erm, and then sort of finishing it off, and then basically making the assessment of the women who would live in the house. So all of that was going on. It was just like an incredible piece of work. And then of course I met the women, and I was, you know, kinda, er, er, with the women for a couple of years after that, and then I, erm… Basically, the sort of within, within Newham there was so much going on at that time: the Community Care Act, erm, thinking about, you know, you know, community care; there was also other elders’ housing schemes, ASRA housing was there, also Eastwoods Trust had another brother project, which was XXXX [00:02:59] House, which was Asian men elders. So there was just lots and lots of communication in terms of, ‘What next?’ And at that time there was some, you know, er, you know, really good community conversations about how to support elders within the context of the Asian community. And, you know, er, er, really looking at sort of anti-discriminatory practice, looking at oppression, looking at sort of structures also around patriarchy—which is why you had the development of a specific scheme for Asian women—thinking about also the, er, you know, the domestic abuse, thinking, you know, there was also Newham, what was then Newham Asian Women’s Project, Newham Monitoring Project, that operated. So there was a level of activism that was happening in Newham at that time, and it was pretty, you know, pretty stellar. It was pretty incredible to be involved with, straight out of university to be honest. Erm, and this really got me excited about project development. Anyway, some years into that conversation, there was the conversation about, actually, with, you know, ‘Housing elders is one thing, but’, you know, ‘what do we do with elders that are isolated? The assumption has been made that families just look after their own.’ On many, many levels there were levels of unconscious bias that were operating. There was levels of direct discrimination that were operating. And there was just levels of isol-, isolation, that were then contrived because of those things, and also because of this, er, er, sort of, you know, some of the myths that are within the community, and the concept of community care, it’s sort of, you know, central government, er, if you like protocols or their instruction about how to operate. So the development of something like, er, you know, er, er, er, a lunch club or a day-centre that was specifically targeted at Asian elders became something er, er, you know, that we began organising as from those forums, and from those groups, and from me from XXXX [00:05:09]. Erm, and getting involved with the projects, developing, sort of, er, er, you know, a group of people that were prepared to try and lobby, and try and get funding for a project like that. So it became part of something that we did, as part of other organisations that we were working in, because we were recognising that there was some level of support and care that we were providing the people that we were housing, but there was an isolated group of people that had, that we weren’t providing support for, and how do you really develop care in that community in that way. So those conversations took place. I mean, I can’t remember for how long, but for some time before the project got off the ground. And then, er, you know, kind of, I would say that, As a group of people that were operating in the borough at that time, we were also really mindful of the fact that we had a responsibility to work around not just the, er, er, South Asian community, but also the South-East Asian community and other Black communities that we felt were really marginalised. So, SubCo became something that, about, ‘If there’s a possible way of working with Chinese elders, South-East Asian elders, and Asian elders, how do we make that work?’ And, given the fact that, you know, funding was so, er, how can… You know, it wasn’t, you know, there wasn’t ever an enormous pot of funding to be able to develop a number of services. It was like, ‘How do you develop a service and maximise it so it works for everybody?’ Erm, so then we started engaging in terms of the, the management committee if you like, or what would become, you know, the focus group that became the management committee about, ‘How do we develop a project that does that?’ So that’s kind of where we went, and very much in the framework of, like, you know, it’s very easy to be separated and fragmented in terms of BME communities, in terms of Black communities, in terms of Ethnic communities, and ‘How do we’… ‘What’s our responsibility to try and bridge some of those’, er, er, er, ‘barriers’, if you like, ‘amongst community, and what’, you know ‘…? And is it important to do that?’ And that’s really how, er, you know, you could imagine Subcontinent and SubCo became born as an idea. We ran a focus group I think for the name. We worked with elders about trying to get the name. And that’s how it came about. And SubCo, you know, became something. It became a, you know, it became a project. And I, I think I left the borough: I went to work as an assistant director for Age Concern outside of the borough. And I was there. I don’t think I survived more than a year. It was… Yeah, it didn’t, I mean, er, you know, the, if, if, if, if you like, from ,you know, at that point in my life, becoming an assistant director, er, sounded great as a label, but it just really wasn’t for me. And then, erm, er, there was a job that was advertised at SubCo, and I came back to Newham, and I came back to work as a project work for SubCo. And at that time, a bit like XXXX [00:08:21] the project in itself was, was slightly in its infancy. We were just developing it. Erm, and I had a colleague who was an outreach worker called XXXX [00:08:31], erm, who went and did just a lot of that sort of setting up, speaking to elders, getting the community involved, getting the community in and setting up the project, and setting up the, the work. And we set up a lunch club in that, er, you know, with Asian elders, with Chinese elders, separate sort of utensils for the kitchen, separated people coming in to do the cooking, you know, er, er, er, sort of a joining of, you know those groups of people and also some separation so that, you know, so that people had community and identity, and, you know, agency, if you like, and advocacy, you know, within their communities. And, you know, I can’t, you know, it was such a long time ago, but it was really exciting, you know. We’d get, you know, we’d get local GPs in, we’d get opticians in, we’d get, you know, people, sort of you know, having, you know, talks around mental health, talks around depression, talks around domestic abuse, talks around dementia, talks around Parkinson’s. It was, it was a pretty stellar project actually.

*Excellent, yeah.*

I learned how to play Mah-jong.

*Oh wow!*

Yeah! I spent my lunchtimes playing Carom board, you know? I learnt how to cook.

*Erm…*

It was pretty amazing.

*What, what were the*… *What were the sort of different needs like between, erm, sort of Subcontinental Asian, and sort of South-East Asian communities?*

Well, I think that you, you have so many similarities in terms of, you know, you know, er, er, economic, er, er, er, er, migration if you like, and people that, sort of, you know, came to the United Kingdom in terms of, you know, as economic migrants. You had some connectedness there, you know, communities that were, you know, always felt not part of the, you know, er, er, er host culture, but felt like they were contributing to host culture, so you had some real similarities. But then you did have some differences of needs: obviously you had different languages, you had, er, you know, you had different faith, different faith systems, you had different approaches in terms of what might, you know, people might record as, sort of, cultural etiquettes. So there were definitely some, some, er, er, er difference. But there were many similarities. And I guess at SubCo we were working very much on ‘What are the similarities, and what’s the connectedness’, erm, you know, ‘and how do we work together?’

*Yeah. Erm, how, how did you outreach to, sort of, elders in the community? And I mean what… were there any particular characters you can remember from…?*

Oh yeah, I mean, god, er, I remember Mr Macy who was well connected, so just, you know, people who were out in different projects, who would… People that was on-board, there was XXXX [00:11:26] who was, erm, the organiser, er, you know, sort of I think the chair of XXXX [00:11:30] and the vice chair of Newham Asian Women’s Project at that time, and she was an elder in the community, so we used them. We also talked to different Chinese elders groups and to different Chinese elders, and to different people, er, er, er who were working within, you know, the Subcontinent communities in that way. And so we got people to talk to people. We also just did some real grassroots stuff, like, actually, I remember just going to, er, er, West Ham park, and seeing a group of, er, er, er, you know—who knows, you know?—what I thought were Chinese men sat on a bench and just going over and chatting to them. They understand not a word of what I said, but actually what I did the following week was take one of my coll-, you know, somebody who wasn’t even a colleague, actually, somebody who was volunteering for us, erm, er, er, you know, who spoke, erm, Mandarin, and, er, to go over and, and, and chat. And there they were: same time, same, you know… next week same time, same day the following week, sat on the park bench. And we went over and chatted to them and told them, and they got excited about it, you know, and it was kind of, you now, a bit of that, you know? We’d see people, we’d put up stalls in, er, er, you know, Stratford, erm, you know the shopping centre, and we’d just try and talk to people, and we’d go to GP surgeries and put up posters, and have surgeries within the surgeries about what we were trying to do. And that way… And we, you know, we talked, you know, just to a lot of people who would let us into their spaces so that we could talk to people. We put up posters in pharmacies, we… We kinda just, if you like, just laboured the point to get people into the centre. And once we did, then those people began to talk to their people.

*So a real, sort of, word of mouth…*

Yeah.

*… kind of thing?Erm…*

Yeah, it was… I mean it was a pretty busy centre, sort of, er, er, er… Yeah, it was pretty busy. We, we really… Our assessments, we basically, you know, there were needs based assessments, we really got to a point where there were many more people that wanted to use the service than we could, you know, that we could cater for. You know, it just wasn’t a big enough space.

*So is this… Was this still based in, er, the day centre where SubCo is still?*

Yeah, Plashet Grove. I don’t know where it is now.

*Yeah.*

But it was on Plashet Grove, was it?

*Yeah, yeah, that’s…*

Eighteen? Yeah, yeah, yeah, Plashet Grove, that yellow building. I think I might’ve had something to do with that yellow!

*Oh really? [Laughs]*

[Laughs] Yeah! It was a colour as I always said, of the, of the sun, of the tropics.

*[Laughs] That’s nice! Very appropriate! Erm, what was it, what was it like, er, sort of, the process of getting the building?*

Oh my gosh, you know, I’ve sort of… What I can say? Yeah that… There was a group of trustees, so Ramesh Verma, he, Ramesh Verma, she was working with elders at, erm… Gosh, I forget the name, it might’ve been Age Concern actually, Newham Age Concern… And then there was, er, Ramesh, erm, Dadwal, who was working with, at ASRA housing. He was a project worker there, and they were on the board. And it was, and we had, er, people that we knew in the housing department and the council. Not that we knew, but that we, you know, that they were basically implementing the Community Care strategy. So it was a question of, you know, of really just constantly liaising to try and get a decent building. And when that building came, you know, came into the, you know, came in to the mix, it was then about, actually, getting the, you know, getting the building to, you know, work for us. I think, did the building come from community development.

*Yeah.*

To be honest.

*Yeah. Erm, what’s…?*

It’s probably the board members that remember that more, er, er, er, significantly than I do. I sort of just remember getting the building, and the, then organising so that we got funding. And as project worker’s it’s very much about getting the funding to secure the project staff, to getting, you know, er, er, er, sort of, you know, to, to, organising how we did our outreach, to , you know, really setting it up once we had it, and that kind of thing. And my job was really around bringing in the funding to make it work, to actually, to, to, to, you know, er, you know, you know, to put all the, you know, redesign the building so that it works, and the kitchen stuff and that kind of stuff. It wasn’t, yeah… I remember, it was a pretty shabby building when we first saw it.

*Erm, how, how did you go about getting, getting in funding to do, to do these things?*

Oh, sort of, we went to… I mean, at the time when, you know, SubCo was starting… When was that? The early-‘90s? The early-‘90s?

*Yeah, yeah.*

Er, it was a pretty radical project, you know? It’s like saying to people, ‘We wanna set up an Asian luncheon club.’ They were like, ‘Oh wow! Yeah, that’s caught me left field. I’d forgot Asian community need a luncheon club as well.’ And they were like, ‘And we want it for Chinese elders as well.’ So funders thought it was quite exciting actually. They never gave us anywhere near as much as we asked for, but they thought it was pretty exciting. The local, you know… Newham itself, the London Borough of Newham, was, at that time, er, you know, it had marginalised, it had isolated, it hadn’t thought about, you know, its minority ethnic elders. It really hadn’t. And, therefore, you know, felt a responsibility and a duty of care. And, as I was saying, they never gave us as much as we asked for, but they certainly were aware of the fact that they’d neglected, negated a community, and that community really needed support, and they were now presenting in the mental health system, they were presenting now about domestic abuse, they were depend-, you know, there were homicides in families, and it, that had been, that had been, ‘Doesn’t this community look after themselves? How is this happening?’ And then when you began, sort of, actually be able to put into the frame that there’d been a level of racism and unconscious bias that’d isolated, you know, a group of, er, er, you know, a group of people, that had actually contributed so much to that community, I think it resonated.

*Mmm. Erm, you mentioned…*

And it…

*Sorry.*

… resonated with other funders, you know?

*Yeah. Erm, sorry, you mentioned before, er, like this sort of intersection of race and gender. Could you talk maybe a little bit more about how that played out in the Asian community please?*

Well, ultimately we began having conversations from having projects that had been quite separated around gender, to actually having, er, er, er, er, lunch clubs that were not separated around gender, but were sometimes separated because to have a women’s group, to have a women’s mental health group, to have a women’s lunch club, actually were also really important because that’s how we got women to use services. Erm, so we were just having that conversation quite a lot, about actually how you had to deal, you know, intersectionality on all kinds of levels where, you know, ultimately we had to start thinking about disability in a way that we could no longer invisible it, that we wanted to talk to talk to our elders, er, we wanted to be in those conversations, and, actually, about, you know, er, er, er, you know, changing attitudes and other things that go on perhaps for a younger generation and some of those differences. And, you know, I would say on a personal level I was, you know, er, you know, I was fairly young, er, you know, at that time. You know, not… I was in my early twenties. And one of the things about that, was that, you know, I was working with people who were saying to me,’ You can call me Auntie’, or ‘You can call me Uncle’, and I was saying, ‘Well, I’m going to call you Mr. or Mrs. or Ms. So-And-So, or by your first name, you know? ‘Cos you’re not my aunt, and also you don’t want me to do that because, you know, I’m you, I’m your advocate. I work for you, you know? I’m working to get you things. So, you know, you don’t want it like that, you know? We wanna keep those boundaries.’ And, actually really got some people thinking about some of the power dynamics as well, where I think that comes in to, in to play where we start thinking about, sort of, the ‘Other’. So, yeah, er, I, you know, some pretty, er, you know, er, er good, you know, good discussions, you know, about sort of not letting those dynamics get in the way of some work, you know? The dynamics of, you know, gender, the dynamics of age, you know, sort of, you know, older people, maybe they are wiser and maybe they’re not, just people need to be respected and valued, and everybody does, young or old. And so we began having actually some of those, er, conversations, which I think, you know, kind of really enable and help a community to go on. I made some great friendships with people that were forty, fifty years older than me.

*That’s wonderful. Erm, how, how long were you at SubCo for, and how did your role in the organisation develop in that time?*

Well, I was, erm, at SubCo for, I think... It must’ve been two years. Maybe more, actually. To be honest I don’t know. Maybe three years. And the role was about getting people in, about getting the building ready, and, er, you know, and that, that really happened, and I loved the job, and I wanted to stay there, sort of, you know, just while, you know, while that project management of it had gone on, that, you know, so when the project was running I was still there. And then I left SubCo to go to, er, er, become the director of Newham Asian Women’s Project, so, you know, it was kind of like one job that I really, really loved, but there was a job that I just knew that I really, really would love, and, er, and it was down the road. I was still very much in touch with SubCo.

*Excellent. Erm, I was, I was hoping we’d sort of get onto to your work with the Newham Asian Women’s Project. We’re interested in the kind of organisational context of other sort of bodies that had, you know, linkages with SubCo in one way or another. So, would you just mind maybe explaining a bit about your, your, er, experiences with and the history of the Newham Asian Women’s Project, please?*

Well, in, in, in, in an absolute similar way, er, vein, Newham Asian Women’s Project started because we began discussing, er, you know, and people began discussing in the late-‘80s about the fact that, actually, we were running projects that, in a sense, were, er, you know, projects that were mixed projects, but actually the usage of those projects was actually male dominated. And there were conversations that we weren’t having, which was, you know, predominantly about domestic violence in the context of community,. And that group of women, er, er, er, er, er a group of women, a group of Black women, ELBWP, er, East London Black Women’s Project, and, you know what, you know, and now has become the Newham Asian Women’s Project, and now is London Black Women’s Project, er, developed because of those types of conservations and running advice surgeries at Eastwood’s, er, in the building that Newham monitoring Project was in, and Eastwood’s Trust was in, and, actually, women were talking to us about domestic violence and we had no referral point, erm, and it was like, actually, this is also a conversation that we need to be having with, er, men within our community. And, you know, we were being silenced, you know? That, that group of women that started it off, and I got involved in the project in 1990 I think, when I came into the borough. Erm, er, er, er, you know, we were being really silenced, like, you know, ‘This is not what we talk about. There’s so much racism, we don’t want to be talking about the things which aren’t working in our community.’ And we were like, ‘We do! We definitely do! And we have to!’ Erm, and, and, and, and, and that’s how we came about really. And I guess in a way that sort of community development, that voice of where there is no voice, I feel is, you know, is something that, that group of people at that time in Newham, that’s what we, that’s what we were about, about giving agency, giving voice, recognising some stuff around intersectionality, sort of really trying to work with that, recognising that we’ve invisibilised people within our community. And I think we started, you know, talking much more, you know, talking much more, you know, in terms of an LGBT perspective as well. Erm, and, you know, and certainly recognising that there were, you know, er, er, I would say that as, you know, er, you know, as a lesbian going into that project, you know, there was just that thing about, ‘Okay, we, we, we…’, you know, ‘We are having conversations that perhaps we’ve ignored before.’

*Yeah. Were, were those conversations hard to have in, in the Asian community do you think, more so than other…?*

No, not necessarily more so than other communities. I think people have, er, invisibilised LGBT people, er, er, er, and communities, for, for, for many, many years. I think that people think that they’re more progressive if they’re a little bit more accepting. But if you talk about the church and LGBT communities, to this day, will struggle with that, you know? It’s like, so, no, anybody thinks those conversations are tricky. And within family and community they might be, and they might not be, you know? It’s just one of those things. What happens is that, er, you know, this is about identity not about identity politics, but about who we are, and therefore those conversations happen in that way, and the friendships that we form actually enable and facilitate them too, or we enable and facilitate those conversations so that they become a political voice. So I don’t necessarily think it’s harder in the Asian community, I think that, you know, I think there are, you know… When you have communities that, I guess, er, that, you know, there is a cultural environment where, er, er, parents or a generational difference between parents and children, and have then not been talking to each other about who they really are, then that’s just tricky. And I guess migration, er, patterns of the Asian community meant that, actually, you know, that sort of, you know, er, development of family life, or if you like of family relations, you know, is just, you know, er, er, you know, a decade or so, erm, you know, in a different—generationally—in a different place. But I don’t think, you know, I don’t think one community or another community it’s harder to have a conversation in. I think conversations about difference are just hard.

*Mmm. Mmm. Yeah. Umm, what, what were the sort of services you offered through the Asian women’s project?*

Erm, we err, refuge, offered them refuge, refuge erm, and then from that again just those pivotal moments err, I remember being in the project and just absolutely recognising that we ran a refuge with six bedrooms you know, and it was just like you know, what we you know, a drop in the- this is a drop in the ocean, we need to have- we need to start building a community. So we got a, we then had the resource centre people were, we just really got it, that we needed to actually start thinking about building a community about women that were leaving abusive situations because otherwise they were just going to go back because there’s nothing else out there to support them. So then we ran a young women’s group when I was err a member we funding for two hours of youth work and I was just, said take it back, I can’t be bothered, monitoring for two hours of youth work, you’ve got to be kidding me? But you know, I spend longer filling out the monitoring forms than I do running the, you know, getting people to run the session. Erm, and I gave it back and then I started negotiating with them for a full time youth service, essentially. The project then went out into schools, the project looked at self harm, and we got it sort of after about eighteen months of lobbying, we did get that. So I suppose we sort of, thinking at err, you know, about sort of developing err, structurally systems that will help prevent violence and get people to be thinking about their own agency and their independence.

*Erm, you previously mentioned that there was a sort of silence err from some community members and they didn’t want these issues being discussed. Err, was it, did you, did you face like other forms of resistance in trying to set up these projects?*

Yeah, yeah, yeah. When we went to you know, the London Black Women’s Project, I remember once going to a members meeting whereby the Asian councillors got up and left, they didn’t want to- they certainly didn’t want to fund a refuge. They certainly didn’t want to fund it, you know, and when I first started working in the borough my car was err, err you know, I was visible in terms of Newham Asian Women’s project, and somebody scratched up my car. Yeah, yeah, definitely. Kind of quite a lot of resistance.

*Wow. Erm-*

Yeah, you know, we called it out, you know. Members got up and left and we said to the people that were sat, is this how you run council meetings? That people are just allowed to leave. You know it’s like, we should just face this hostility ‘cos you can’t challenge it.

*So-*

You know, articles in the newspaper – yeah we were on it. We were on that thing, I wrote an article in- I was interviewed by the local press for SubCo as well, many years ago when we first set it up.

*Wow. So I mean, through, through sort of this publicity, was that an effective way to sort of overcome this opposition?*

Yeah, you just had to keep voicing it I think and just keeping really clear about what the point was, you know. And the you know, it did really help to err, get publicity, also what helped was lobbying also, what helped was being an activist and actually remaining in the, you know, remaining in the community, having the conversations, getting involved in the, you know, different aspects of the local, you know, the council structures in the meetings and you know, and can you- actually, you know, pretty, pretty much you know, I would say people in Newham Monitoring Project, Newham Asian Women’s Project, others.. Eastwoods Trust, to establish those projects people worked twenty four seven, you know, people were on it all the time in terms of their- we did err, you know, we like, we did exhibitions that were really, you know, positive images of elders, we did positive images of community, we did positive images around disability, we sort of really, you know, on all levels that we could, that actually just get people to start recognising err, you know, the work we did err, err when I was at Eastwoods Trust we ran a conference erm, that was about housing and Asian elders and we got a, a theatre company to come and do a play here, you know, the person who actually volunteered you know, as our volunteer organiser as that, err, err play was err, gosh I forgotten his name, Singha Verma, who now is the director of the err, I think it’s the Waterside XXX [32:31] rather. So we did some stuff, you know.

*Yeah, was it, was it sort of quite innovative to use drama to-?*

Yeah, it was music, drama, err yeah we ran, you know, we sort of err, we ran conferences, we you know, poetry read- we had poetry, poetry done by the elders at SubCo. We did music sessions, we did yeah, loads of stuff that was, you know, we went out into the com- you know, we did AGMs that were huge, we’d get hundreds of people coming to and the elders would be doing their stuff. Performances, we still do that at London Black Women’s project, yeah using it all.

*Excellent.*

You know arts, you’ll see that on Green Street, just by St Stephen’s there’s a mural erm, by St Stephen’s passage by the you know, at the top of Plashet Grove, there’s a mural on the pavement, there’s some mosaics and some benches. Well, that you know, were designed by err, err some of the err, err members, some of the lunch club members of Sub Co elder’s day centre.

*Excellent. Would you, would you mind telling me a bit more about that project because that sounds really nice to use public art like that.*

That was, that was the Green Street Regeneration Project.

*Mhm.* *What-*

Erm, and we met every month, a group of people that were regenerating Green Street. And you know, err, sort of council members. It was actually mostly a very white meeting I think probably except me, and slightly- you know, that for ages, it was like how do we regenerate Green Street, what we gonna do, err that kind of stuff, and you know, how do we use the funds and we were just involved with that you know, part of my role as working at SubCo was to be involved with that project, and I was quite an active memeber of that project. You know, as well the people, you know, that were at SubCo, you know, the people at SubCo and I know Tasmin’s still there, she was one of the founding members of SubCo.

*Mm, yeah. So what, was this a sort of mid-nineties I guess?*

Yeah.

*Yeah. Erm, err sorry err, the, was it the London Black Women’s project, is that the current-*

-Name of the Newham Asian Women’s Project? Yeah.

*So how did the organisation sort of transition into-*

Well it just transitioned about err, I think it had a name change gosh, I’m terrible and I’m the chair of this project, the name changed about err, two- two, well time just goes so quickly you know, two or three years ago. And a lot of that thinking was simply based that services for black women were being really cut, and we always meant to- with err, when erm, so when I was thir- err, err director of Newham Asian Women’s project, we started thinking about a project we were, in fact actually we were err, we were one of those projects that grew and developed, you know the Asian Women’s Refuges used to come to us for advice around funding and support and we thought okay, what we need to do is set up a project that works with black women’s projects. And we set up in that, in partnership with other projects, we set up a project called Imkaan, which has now become an independent project. And Imkaan was our project that we set up for south Asian women for a year and we said after, well, after about two or three years what we want to do, we know that we’ll get the funding for an Asian women’s project, because we ourselves are an Asian women’s project. But what we want this project to do is become a black women’s project, because we know that we’ve been separated and fragmented, we know that funding is set up so we can get funding for Asian women, and we learned that from SubCo really, you know, you can get funding for this, you can get funding for that but goodness me if you want unity, you know, that’s a whole different thing altogether, and we thought actually this is a state thing, this is divide and rule, this is separate and fragment. And ultimately, we do need a project that gets us working and understands our cohesion in, in a stronger way. So we developed In Calm so it was really a matter of time, if you like, that you know, Newham Asian Women’s Project that we would think the same, because we really recognised that services, resources err, err for black, for you know, for black and Asian and minority ethnic women are really scare. And also, there’s a whole agenda around separating these communities, so we wanted to really break that and get us to be thinking and you know, understanding you know, prejudice and discrimination within our own communities, but also externally about the separation and fragmentation that gets exists, and gets us operating in those ways.

*Mm. How, how have these sort of cuts to resources and stuff affected the work that you do and also the needs of your service users?*

Oh massively, we are massively under resourced to do the work that we do. We err, you know, we try and get external, we try to get a lot of external funding to do with that. A lot of our funding doesn’t come from Newham. Erm, and I would say that the you know, basically, gender has been taken off the agenda, I would say services for women around domestic violence have been deprioritised, erm you know, I would say actually, what’s going on, there’s nothing you know, this is, you know. There’s no hidden agenda here, this what you know, what government call the big society model, which is community looks after itself, but actually it doesn’t really mean that, it just means that we really won’t provide services unless its for the most, most needy. And we’re not even really going to provide services there. Which is why you’ve got people that really should be having support around their mental health that are you know, that aren’t that, you know people should really be supported in going to err, err day centres but are not, but are isolated and at home all the time, you know, people that should be out of violent situations, but actually cannot because they’re locked into this sort of economic dependence and there’s nowhere else for them to go. I would say that this is you know, you know its not just the funding cuts, it’s the, it’s the attitude of the cuts. It’s the block of the mindset, it’s the not supporting people that are most vulnerable, its those cuts that, that are really painful to see in society. It’s you know, we are really deprioritising you know, children services, you’ll have seen the headline, sixty million pounds to cut from social care in Northampton, I mean how? How do you do that? You just stop providing services, that’s how you do it. So of course we’re going to see more child deaths, of course we’re going to see more homicides within the family, of course there’s more, you know, theres much more structural inequality that exists, and when structures err, err make inequality, things get tough, and they get tough for people that are different and by that I just mean black, by that I mean LGBT, by that I mean older, by that I mean younger, by that I mean disabled, by that, you know. By that I mean trans, you know it goes on this in this way, so things get meaner and rougher.

*Yeah. I, I hadn’t really considered the erm, what you say are the XXX [40:13] cuts. Erm, is that like a result of the sort of nec-*

Yes, structural inequality, when things get, you know, when things get tough, when envi- economic environments get cut when you don’t have social care, when you don’t have society looking after the most vulnerable, when things get tough, when people start saying that group of people are taking my jobs, that group of people are using the NHS, which, there’s absolutely no truth in, which the media propagates, things get tough.

*Yeah. Erm-*

Yeah, that attitude.

*Is it, is it harder to do this sort of community organising where-*

It’s a very different, it’s a very different landscape. It’s a very, very different landscape. Erm, you know it’s a very different- its much harder, erm and its you know, it’s really you know, it’s, it’s you know, it, it you know, the it’s really been dissipated towards yeah…

*Erm, sorry to be a bit scatterbrain and kind of bring it back to something you said right at the start about this trip you made to Pakistan which gave you kind of the impetus to work with Asian elders, would you mind erm, just going through that story in a bit more depth because that sounds really interesting?*

Well, I, I guess it, you know, err it, what can I say? It’s like how you know, that just that, I suppose for me, on a, this is just on a very, very personal level, was something that sort of, your personal sort of facilitates your political and for me on a very personal level I knew that I was going to, you know, i’d left Bradford, I knew I was going to stay away from Bradford, in terms of I studied in London and my family were very happy for me to stay in London. They were kind of really were aware that it was going to be probably a bit tricky for me to stay in Bradford as a muslim lesbian, so you know, err going to Pakistan I just really knew that I was just such a part of that community and I always wanted to be a part, you know, I wanted to remain, you know, in there community. So it was just really about that. That realisation that I could, that must exist somewhere else, and therefore to find a community where that you know, that what I had in terms of support and community and understanding erm, and you know, the loyalty towards, and ability to articulate err, you know for you know, community I just felt I wanted to do that outside of Bradford. So that’s kind of what it resonated in me, you know, just spending that much time with my grandmother who I thought perhaps I might not see again, but I did thankfully, just really made me think about what would be, what you know, what I could do, you know, what- I always knew I wanted to be a community worker but you know, where in the community I wanted to work, and how I did actually have an idea.

*Yeah. No it-*

It was just very much about that, about realising that you know, there was a, was a conversation that I wanted to have within that community as well, and so I’m as well with a Muslim LGBT group, and I’m sort of, you know, complex because I’m not, you know, don’t identify religiously at all, however I think for a group of people that have very little agency and voice its very important because it’s a community I grew up in and know a lot about.

*Yeah, it’s certainly-*

And I can also be out, yeah… Sorry?

*I was going to say it’s certainly a useful kind of organisational body to bring people together around I guess.*

Mm.

*Umm, what were- what were your sort of differences in experience between Bradford and London then?*

Oh gosh, I think massive. You know, part of it was you know, I you know, I had less autonomy and independence in Bradford, but also, although I grew up there, where I really grew up was London, because this is where I came as, you know, you know technically i’d grown up at eighteen, but of course I did all my own growing up here. But it was quite political in Bradford, I was involved in different things in Bradford that were quite different- organising, like I set up when I was err, I don’t know about twelve, a homework club for young Asian women, just because we you know, after school, going straight home, and it was just like hang on a minute, there were no sort of social activities that were organised for them. So I suppose it was that you know, I felt much more, what I needed to be was err, you know, almost in Bradford I was involved in a community whereby lots of people probably knew my family erm, and in London I didn’t have that. And in London I didn’t have to call every adult I came across aunty or uncle, as I said I just called them by their first name, and it was just that sort of recognising a different- changing community, that responsibility that you have and it was easier to do that in a community where I didn’t grow up that for me.

*Yeah, no I can see, I can see why that would be different. Erm, what, I’ve sort of kind of reached the end of the sort of questions I had in the back of my mind to ask you-*

-Right.

*-But I was just wondering if you have any sort of standout memories, or like, particular moments of your work at SubCo?*

Erm, yeah. So many of them, so many of them. I think just sort of err, you know, those elders’ clubs, those- cooking that food, the richness of it, people really you know, the noise, the err I can’t- you know, the- the energy of those lunch clubs, you know. You’d go down, they’re smelling of Chinese cooking, the smell, the scent of Guajarati food, you know, vegetarian cooking, the basically, just the richness of those you know, that chatter. Honestly, was such a lively place SubCo. You know, it was just, you know it was magnificent the sort of you know, I would be, you know, about ten o’clock when we started getting busy, when people started getting dropped off about ten thirty, eleven AM, there to the day centre, it was just lovely, it really stands out to me. It was like if you could, you know, if you could put in colour the sound it would just be, you know, bright, vivid colours err, that just you know, came, you know, came at you, you know what I mean? It was you know, it was just really absolutely lovely, there were some you know, stuff that I learned, you know, we had a person there who had Parkinson’s, and just sort of working with him, and supporting him and he’d had you know, he’d been like a physicist and he just you know, and his mind was just so brilliant, but his body had gone, you know? Erm, and just conversing with him and just sitting there and you know, playing chess with him err, you know in the, in the time you know, kind of those things, just being with people. Amazing stuff, and you know, erm yeah, you know stuff as well that I would say that would be quite emotional like, you know, obviously you know its an elders day centre, so people died, and I’ve you know, that sort of recognising about sort of you know, the importance of that emotion, and the importance of letting that go so that we can have a learning in terms of how we are as community and how respectful we are, and just you know, some incredible things for me that stand out as I say. You know, the spirit of it, the spirit of SubCo is just something else.

*No I mean, through my own experiences it seems like a really warm you know, friendly place. So I can imagine how wonderful it must be to have been, sort of working there and making these relationships.*

Yeah. It was just a, it’s just a like- I just think brilliant, I just think long may it continue.

Yeah, absolutely. Erm, well yeah like I said err, it sort of, I’ve reached the end of what I had in mind to ask, so all I can say is-

Great.

*All I can say is thank you for giving your time, its been really interesting talking to you, and I think there’s lots in there which will be really helpful for, for the project outcomes, so yeah, really thank you so much.*

Fabulous, thank you very much. Err, you know thanks for taking the time to call me and cope with my business, and yeah it was actually really lovely to talk about that part in my history and talk, and to remember SubCo, that was really, really lovely for me on this bright summer day, so thank you very much. Yeah, and good luck with the project, and do drop me a line. And yeah.

*Yeah, absolutely, I’ll be in touch with this sort of this paperwork and the transcript as well.*

Perfect.

*I’ll let you know how it’s all coming along.*

Yeah, and do give my regards if there’s people there.

*Oh, absolutely, yeah.*

Yeah, alright, do take care, good luck with it.

*Yeah, no thank you. Have a nice afternoon.*

Alright, you too. Cheerio, buh-bye.

*Bye.*

Bye, bye.

**The End**

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**Interview Details**

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**Project: Growing Old Gracefully - SubCo**

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