

**Interview with Omar Ali. Carried out by Marilyn Priday. 27/06/17**  
**Recording to discuss his involvement with Community House.**

**Run time: 17 mins**

**0-6 minutes: Youth Work**

Omar became involved in the Community House in 1995 through a Link Worker project aimed at bringing diverse groups together, especially ethnic groups. He worked 5 hours a week and he took over from a friend. He talks about his relationship with Brian Selby, who was the warden at the Community House and how they knew each other. Omar said Brian was aware of his family as he had grown up in the area and they lived close to the Community House. Also, Omar took his disabled brother to the park nearby. He formally became involved with the Centre in 1995 through his volunteering with the Asian Boys youth club at the House.

*"Brian was instrumental in trying to get people to engage with each other across age groups and different faiths".*

Together we encouraged people to listen to others and express their views. *"Eton Road played a fundamental role for a lot of young people at the time".* Many of the youths who met each other at the club went on to get married. Marilyn asked if the Asian boys saw it as a problem coming into the House which was a Christian place. Omar said it was lucky that people like himself and others "were seen as having a legitimacy within their communities" to do this type of work. They were respected and had good connections with local mosques like Harrow Road. They also had boys in the club *"who local youths could relate to."*

*"We acted like a bridge between community house, the Church and the wider Muslim community in the area".*

They realised the building had a Christian church element, but they saw the community elements and the people who ran it as being more important than the actual building.

**6-10 minutes: Church**

Omar is asked if,

*"...someone tried to persuade you that Christianity was 'in' and Islam secondary?"*

He responded that they were comfortable in their own faith and skin, so it didn't really matter that the building was a Church. He said that they used the hall at the House to pray as their Muslim faith dictated.

He was pleased more and more youths joined in this activity. Marilyn agreed and said the women still pray now at the House. There are even prayer mats at the House.

One of the good features is that it accommodates different faiths. Omar said they had to be careful not to offend ethnic groups who wished to book certain events like weddings that could go on too late for the House opening hours, but

they managed these delicate negotiations with the residents and local people. He was keen to see these events continue in the house and recognised how there would be occasional issues as there are limited resources and cuts in local authorities which impacts the operation of Community House.

### **11-17 minutes: Young Citizen Scheme**

Omar spoke about his involvement in the scheme which started around 1998. It was initially an idea by Brian and Youth Services who took it on. Omar was employed by the Youth Service working at the Community House and surrounding area.

Its aim was to engage with primary schools in Maindee which due to demographic change had more Asian and Muslim children. They felt at 9, 10 and 11 years of age it was important to help them think about the world and other cultures.

Sue Callaghan started the programme which included input from the Police and Fire Service. The police would go into school and talk about community safety, misuse of drugs and how to be personally safe. The Fire Service spoke about smoke alarms and careers in the service, *"not just about the harms but the benefits of public service"*.

We also took groups to newspapers like the Western Mail and Argus,

*"To give the children the opportunity to explore something new"*

It was about informing the children, showing them about work and making them better citizens. He said the scheme had now disbanded.

Omar concluded the House always draws him back to it. He had such great memories as a place where all sections of the community met and engaged. For example, young Asian volunteers serving meals to older people groups at the Lunch clubs, charity events and disco's. A group of young girls were taken to London. *"We had some real good fun, some real good times here"*.