

**Transcript of interview with Bernadetta Omondi**

**Track 1** – I started community groups as early as 2001 when the new link was still there.

**Track 2** - We started seeing many people coming in, black people coming in here and there was nobody to welcome anybody, you had to gate way for yourself, like me when I came, nobody helped me, I didn’t know where the hospital was, anything, any essential services that was needed. So, we have to kind of create and think, ‘what about these new people that are coming?’ As we started working together, working from people’s backyards and things like that. So when new link came, they started signposting, so they say ‘Oh we know, there’s a kind of co, lady there you talk to others’ so that’s how the communities really started, then PARCA was there for the refugees, it was African refugees there. So we could signpost people there, so Moez came to me, that time Moez wasn’t speaking a word of English and I was a teacher by profession so I started helping him out to see how he could, he had the know how of doing everything but the problem was just English so I tried to help him, doing posters here and there, trying to correct certain things when he was sending letters and we started growing from strength to strength just supporting each other. So when he came about the major problem he did have, where we could meet. We started meeting in people’s homes, so if the Nigerians had something, we would go to the Nigerians and sing and dance, you know just an African thing, we like food and music things in Zimbabwe and what not so. So the community started building each other so that’s how communities like Zimbabwe started coming together and as usual things like death do make the community pull together, so we started going to this when there was a wake or something, supporting each other, seeing how we could send the body back home and things like that. So that was the start of the communities, communities were there but not as organisations if you get what I mean.

**Track 3** – Bernadetta: The services were not helping us, some of us had nothing.

Ferzana: So it was just good will

Bernadetta: We don’t have big bins. I was given a green bin, grey bin, what not, why not name them? We did not have a clue of what to do with these bins, it’s simple things as just waste. We didn’t have a know how of doing it and then you find that your waste has not been collected, nobody was helping us. Hindsight now much later, I became the chair of Peterborough Community Group Forum, because I’d gone through all these things myself I’m trying to find my way through, my own way of getting the services, I thought there was a need to help people so I didn’t know the forum was there before, then when I started going to the community that Leonie told me about this forum, and then at that time there were no people, there were like 4 groups that came, I mean 4 people that came and they were talking of Peterborough Community Groups Forum, so then they wanted us to restart it because they thought there we would have help, people could get help whatever we’re talking about, even if somebody you know you’re in a foreign land you need at least, it impacts on your mental wellbeing, loneliness and relations, you don’t know where to get a job, you don’t know how, what you can do so we are signposting people already even when we were not an organisations, so then I became the chair, was that 2011, from 2006 I was something there, so we kind of got the forum going and when the forum came I started showing people if you come here we are able to help you in this and that, so I started calling people from even the waste, Peterborough City Council, come and talk to people about disposing their waste and things like that. So then we started having many people coming then Mind joined us, Mind wanted to talk about mental health, then the CPFT (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust) and things like that so we started building. I remember Ferzana you started attending our meetings

Ferzana: Yes

Bernadetta: and we had almost 50 community leaders in it and with other representatives from other organisations so that’s how we started and we were so lucky when the Beehive was given to us, I remember August 2011 the Kennedys were so so helpful and supportive and generous, we did not pay a penny, they said they wanted to see the communities especially around, mostly there, getting help.

Ferzana: I do remember the Kennedys actually, I do remember it now that you mention it.

Bernadetta: And so I went and spoke to Sarah, she had my vision and she told me ‘Bernadetta you are so brave’ and I then said ‘yes I want to do it because I’ve been doing it on the side, helping people here and there but I’ve figured out how I think I can support. So that just when I had already just had my accident, I’d just had a major operation, I wasn’t working but I wanted to continue with what I’d started in the community, so the Kennedys said ‘Ok we’ll give you a small place there, you can do meetings, so they gave me the hall and said I can do meetings when people are not using it, because to them they were going to use it for meetings for NHS meetings and nurses and what not, so I told them please when I’m here, we meet like once a week or something like that, when can I use this, start to try to bring communities to this in a subsided way, you can run the place but not that they are not really paying, so that is what we did.

**Track 4** – Yeah well wow, I like seeing, I call them my babies, people came into the country saying ‘I don’t speak English’ I say ‘you’re gonna speak English by the time you finish with me!’ The Lithuanian community people like Judita, Judita was a journalist in our country here but she couldn’t do anything here because she thought she could not speak English so it’s about building people’s confidence and making sure they can actually tap on their talent because they are talented, people like Iveta, and then we built Iveta and now Gladstone community is a force to reckon with, the things they do here, then they started their Saturday school, so they know how to go about it, we did help them and link them with some of the schools and through the council and things like that and they started their Saturday Schools. Look at them now, a hundred plus, would you not be happy seeing some people, people like Mohammed from Bangladesh, who has said I don’t speak English, look at the Bangladeshi community, they’re a big community now. East Timorese and Celso, Celso was so shy, in his country he has to write books, I told him ‘Celso you can do this’ and we’ve gone very far with Celso, Celso is with East Timorese now, they do lots of work in Peterborough, they help with refugee week, we do football, we use Millfield area there

**Track 5 –** When I was at the Beehive, there were the women, we had a women keep fit because the Asian groups didn’t want to mix with men, I give them that, so that also built also a big community, to just have the ladies and their needs being met so they are the things that we need to be thinking about when we’re talking and so I really really thank the Kennedys, they opened my eyes in Millfield, there was loads we did there, they saved community. They liked me because I could give them a hall to use, because there were many places they were going to use and they were not allowed to use it, so Millfield Beehive was a church, Beehive was a mosque, Beehive was everything where statutory bodies could meet, have meetings like NHS, Macmillan, name it and then we had church in the morning and evenings and very early in the morning we had the mosque, the Ahmadiyya community, a community that also has now expanded really big, I didn’t know about the Ahmadiyya so we had to ask communities that I worked with, so I really don’t know what to say.

**Track 6** – Bernadetta: I would like true stories of Millfield, because we want to get away from that negative notion of Millfield. Millfield is a good area if it is supported. So I would like us to bring more positive things there, not just things to, I don’t want us just to go ‘We’ve got this funding lets just do this and do that’, it has to be something conscious, some of them might want other things rather than, we want to use whatever we have there already, those shops that are there, those restaurants that are there and come up with something really good that we can be doing annually to just make that place known, just like Notting Hill, something like that started with just something small and look at it now. Millfield can be something like that in Peterborough.