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START AUDIO

[0:03:00]

Ian: I just need to find my questions. So thank you very much for agreeing to speak to me. I see that you replied to my email and you've read the information.

Respondent: I have.

Ian: Yes, there's nothing really complicated. Really, it's quite a simple part of the process we're at at the moment. What we're doing is part of [ANON]'s [REDACTED ORG NAME] project. It is just finding out people's experiences, thinking about how anything might need to be adapted or changed with how people are using technology or how anyone could be helped. Not personally, but as a kind of community.

Respondent: Well, it has been an uphill struggle, in so far that I have prided myself as an average sort of server or using internet, digital communication since 2000, so through work, and I retired in 2008. Well, it has been a long time, but for the last two years, the pandemic made it... There's no other alternative but to use digital communication most of the time. I think it will be foolish to think that 20 years' progress or even longer, of course, that we have no problem in using digital communication.

Ian: Yes, exactly. Great. Do you have any questions for me? I'm going to step away from the screen, but I can still hear you because I'm connected with my headphones, just while I get a cup of coffee. Do you have any questions for me?

Respondent: No. I think that I'll let it free flow for the simple reason, obviously, you have structured questions here for all the participants, and so it will cover the area that the project is designed to catch, and from Stage 1, this particular [routing of 0:05:28] the participant experience, etc. Then, the second stage is again, I would say, based on mutual agreement, whether we could, we should take it to the second stage of the design of the project. So I'll let it free flow. You are the boss.

Ian: (Laughter) Very rarely that happens, but it's nice of you to say. Okay, so how long have you lived or worked in the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area?

Respondent: Oh, since 2009, so 12 full years and a little bit more. 12 years. And prior to that, my wife and I lived in the North West of England, and Salford in particular, for 10 years, 11 years.

Ian: Oh, nice, nice. It's nice Salford, isn't it?

Respondent: Well, people who don't know Salford ask where it is. I say, "The poor relation, neighbour to Manchester." I like Salford. Actually, I think that Salford gave me for 10 years, first-hand, what 'social deprivation' really means and how the community reacts to it can overcome some of the most severe adversity.

Ian: Absolutely, absolutely. Yes, and I mean, we'll be talking about stuff like that soon a bit, actually, in terms of where you find where you live now and stuff, but we'll come on to that. So which of the villages – I didn't ask – is it you live in?

Respondent: I live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] since I moved back to [ANON] in 2009, and prior to that, before Salford, my wife and I lived in Burnopfield, County [REDACTED] for a year, 13 months, but prior to that, almost 20 years in Morpeth. So I do know [ANON] quite, quite well.

Ian: Okay, yes.

Respondent: The last 12 years have been in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], so part of this particular project is under the auspices of the [REDACTED ORG NAME] project that, for villages, have been endowed with £1m to do with strengthening our community. So I, personally, probably, like many, have benefited from this endowment.

Ian: How would you say you have, personally, benefited?

Respondent: How much?

Ian: How would you say you have benefited?

Respondent: Things like without the [REDACTED ORG NAME] money, we wouldn't have had for three or four years community transport, like which bus, commuting between the villages.

And we discontinued it, I think, over a year now because (a) the money did run out, (b) well, the design of the project, and we were not able to self-fund it because the utilisation does mean that the fare for individuals who use it, the projected cost, would be more expensive than using the bus. So we discontinued, but nonetheless, while it was in operation, it was a benefit to all the villages. And I, personally, have used it once.

In addition to it, of course, the full-time officer appointed under the [REDACTED ORG NAME] project, [ANON], has been helpful to every villager who wants to know about the [REDACTED ORG NAME] project, etc., and other benefits like the community kitty. We have been endowed with, I think, £20,000 or something like that, quite a good few thousand, and the purpose of it is to provide small grants to local organisations to promote social adhesion. I'm party to the small committee to consider those applications.

So I think that is very visible, can be seen by people who use the community facility – that [REDACTED ORG NAME] money does mean that we can help others. I had suggested to [ANON] that beyond the [REDACTED ORG NAME], local communities needed to come up with something solid that can benefit from the legacy of this [REDACTED ORG NAME] endowment. Because it's no good, "We've spent £1m, and thank you very much," and there's nothing that happened thereafter.

Ian: Yes, and I think that's really important. Anyone that has any kind of endowment, yes, you can spend the money on things, but you've got to have some kind of legacy or sustainable thing to come from it – that is the real success.

Respondent: I mean, case in point, of course, people can still see long after this project... We are scheduled to finish off all the money by, I think, the end of this year. [ANON LANDMARK] – you know, the legacy? – is reopened, and we have a team of volunteers to guide people, who come along and see that. Well, such a historical building. It's continued to provide a sort of focus to visitors.

And things like that – of course, it's helpful, but it would still be very much my intention... As long as I could still participate, I will continue to give, to put in my input. Thereafter, December this year, I would like to see that the community project would continue to strengthen the four villages, and beyond. I care to say that – beyond.

Because I do think that many, many organisations can indeed cross-fertilise, like the university with the local community, the Health Service, care groups – inputs to the local community and beyond. And local community self-help groups can, of course, have a great impact on the local authority, including education and health.

Ian: Could you talk a bit more about that because I think that's a really interesting set of ideas – the idea that, even without a pot of money, if community members get together, they can still make things happen? So what do you think that they need to come together? And what does 'coming together' mean? Does that mean sharing resources or sharing knowledge or...?

Respondent: Both, and probably beyond. Part of my community work since I retired has been one day, luncheon club in the local village, [REDACTED PLACE NAME]; one day in [ANON] Street in [ANON] , the [REDACTED] community, the [ANON] [REDACTED] Association; and then the third session, I spend it working with the Health Service, have been for the last, well, five years and beyond, probably about eight years – the Clinical Commissioning Group, which is the funding body to the NHS in [ANON].

I am a member of my local medical practice, [ANON], which has... Well, a 'five' practice. And a patient participation group – before the pandemic had at least a quarterly meeting, probably for a number of years. Bi-monthly. Every two months, we met. Through them, a lot of information is being used by the members to benefit themselves as the patients to the surgery, but for some other members, noticeably Co-op members, from HealthWatch... They brought in information, which, I think, is very, very useful, and would have great impact to the patients in all surgeries.

I particularly pick up groups like the walking group by one of the health centres in [ANON PLACE]. They organise a walk/talk for a group of people. Initially, it was from a group of cancer sufferers and their relatives and those who would recover. Now, I think the Health Service is promoting people... Notice. Do everything they can to encourage good health. Had more impact to the Health Service than mainly treating the ill. We have been talking about it a long time.

Now, that is a good example I would like to see, or the surgery or the practice put in something like, simply, use the poster, their patient participation group. Foster activities, that they can own them in their practice. I had eight in mind just before the pandemic. But the pandemic, with Zoom meetings in our patient participation group... It's still limited in each practice, and because of the lockdown, of course, even going out, there are limited-available activities.

But now, we are on our way back to normality, if we can call it. It is time that we can, we should take it up with Valens. First, I would propose that I would take it up to the patient participation group. And of course, that in itself, we can, if I may say, convince academics to input, to do a small project to quantify the benefits. This is a small thing.

And likewise, about the [REDACTED] community, I am ethnically [REDACTED], although I have been a British citizen for 40-odd years, and I am proud to maintain that very – well, I would say – good combination. I would want to continue to input to the [REDACTED] community to enable already for the...

Well, I perhaps checked the community work in the [REDACTED] community first from the mid-1990s until 2000, when I moved to Manchester, Salford. Didn't do any community work, but as soon as I came back here in 2009, within a week, I had enrolled myself back to the [REDACTED] Association, and continued to do the work there.

I care to say, with that liaison with the local authority, like the education authority, like the council at a general meeting and like the police, like charity, like, well, the local Alzheimer's Disease and Help the Aged...

So I sense cross-fertilisation is something that we ought to be putting our mind into because, single-handedly, we're trying to do something without encouragement and support, mutually. It can be a very hard, difficult struggle.

Ian: What do you think needs to be in place for this kind of – did you call it? – cross-pollination? What kinds of structures and things need to be in place to make this cross-pollination happen, in your opinion?

Respondent: My feeling is that motivation is a very, very potent element, and I would care to say it's a commodity that we undervalue a great deal. For anybody who cares about community, those who possess a skill to muster others, to encourage others – motivation – and harness those motivations in a, if you like, semi-official forum...

Forums: I have valued multi-agency forums. I come across these sorts of things in [ANON]. The council used to have so many quarterly meetings with the council leaders, with ethnic minorities. Now, that minority group, of course, consists of at least half a dozen, and probably more, racial organisations, but although racially based, they cover all aspects: education, housing, all this. And through them, we can input something and see...

Now, the organiser of the meeting, I clearly remember back in the 1990s, the chap was energetic, and his name was [ANON]. He's now 90 years old. He had been one of the instruments to all this good work in [ANON], and I learned that those forums can be most useful when individual organisations can actually see from an idea to the practice to something that they are proud of, like the [REDACTED] Association in [ANON]. They are proud of the very fact that it had established since the mid-1980s the [REDACTED] Association.

Even just before the pandemic, week on week, our luncheon club continued to attract up to 50 members – over 50s members coming for lunch. Of course, through that, older people feel the feeling of belonging. It's something very, very potent to maintain their wellbeing.

Of course, the Association is under an obligation to input into the city, so it makes the Association as a bridge between ethnically [REDACTED] British citizens and the local community. And we achieved.

Now this sort of thing, my feeling is that we can translate a wish to see a better society in reality by taking small steps, but forums, multi-agency forums as well as 'ethnic origin' would be helpful. I realise, of course, in [ANON] that ethnicity/race probably is less important than the local community base, from villages, different towns coming together.

In the past, in the [ANON] police force, they had quarterly, at least for the last 20 years... Before Blair took over the Police and Crime Prevention Commissioners, they had meetings with the ethnic-minority groups yearly, and through that forum, a lot of things, in addition to police work, happened again.

So when I talk about multi-agency forums, I think it is probably very important that statutory services take a lead. Of course, they all have their terms of reference for the forum, but I think each one has much proclaimed... One of the subsidiary terms would be to promote a better community. And that would mean that outside of that forum, people can use the forums – public-owned data and public-owned information – to promote their own other group.

I think it is all very, very practical that we can make it happen rather than talking shop for a year, another year and then we review it and say, "What happened? Oh, we talked about it."

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: I mean, if I may offer you some examples following the cross-pollination/fertilisation, some good work for the community happened, like when I was in [ANON], a party to Help the Aged and I came across this Save the Children Fund. At the time, they were promoting training for the protection of vulnerable children.

We offered the [REDACTED] Association as premises to hold those training sessions, and as a result, we were offered six placements. [REDACTED] mothers, parents were invited to partake. Next door to the [REDACTED] Association is the casino. That invitation was sent to the General Manager, and they decided to send one of the supervisors to it. Now, people might ask, "What has it got to do with the casino?"

Well, a gambler gambles their life away. A casino employee, under the Gaming Act, under the authority, should prevent any gambler from ruining their life, including the abuse of children. This sort of thing. And at the end of it, of course, the organiser sent the [REDACTED] Association a letter of appreciation, etc. It is a mutual benefit to everyone partaking, and I do think that this sort of thing can be of great help.

In my local village, [REDACTED PLACE NAME], we get invitations by all kinds of statutory bodies, including, on one occasion, the local fire service. They provided a coach to take us – 'us' meaning members of the luncheon club – and volunteers to MIMA museum, etc. So our members, of course, are very pleased.

Now, in return, we invited – the fire service, at the time, sponsored the Edinburgh Award Scheme – youngsters coming to the village hall. We cared to let them partake in our activities, and I care to say that we could offer the youngsters that experience of working with older people under supervision.

A limited opportunity, granted, but as a result, we partook in their certificate award ceremony. And some of them, I have no doubt, would continue to grow, and many of them, I dare to say, without any irony, they may be flipping a burger... 20 years on, you are Chief Executive of an FT 100 Index company. So we can influence the community to get better – so small steps.

Ian: Yes. You say, as a member of the village in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], you get invited to take part in statutory-body meetings and things. Is that to do with a club you're a member of, like you mentioned a lunch club or the [REDACTED] Association, or is that just because of the things you're involved with or is that just because of where you live? Do you know why that it is?

Respondent: Yes, without doubt. I think that's why motivation is very important. The participation, looking out for opportunities is very important, and if I may add that it is the first step in my book for the simple reason a village hall can function, day in, day out serving scones, serving tea and coffee, have a luncheon club... With the members, obviously, the organiser needs to look at, "Hey, how can we improve the range of services to our client group that makes it more interesting, that they say, 'Oh, I look forward to that occasion when I go to the village hall'?"

Now, some are more successful than the others, so those experiences I quote... In the [REDACTED] Association, I have served as an executive member for many years, and in fact, in the last, well, seven years, I have stopped serving on the executive committee, but if there is community work that I am interested in and I see the opportunity, I put up my hand and I tell the so-called president. I say, "You tell the executive committee I am going to partake in these particular activities as an individual."

But of course, it is for them to know that I have a background of being a volunteer in the [REDACTED] community. I would not dare to represent the [REDACTED] Association, but I can influence things to happen.

In [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Village Hall, I have never been... Although there have been occasions, there have been opportunities for me to join the management committee, I say, "No, I just want to do the work as I please myself." Whenever there are opportunities, I grab hold of it and I let others know that my suggestion is that this participation will be useful. Most of the occasions, it is agreed.

So I think I am no different to any other individual, although, of course, individuals have to decide for themselves how much time and energy they want to spend in that organisation to promote work for a better community.

Ian: Yes, exactly. Yes, that's really interesting. I mean, I haven't asked hardly any of my questions, but that has been really insightful and interesting. I was just thinking about a couple of things you said – so the fact that the [REDACTED] Association is based in [ANON], not that close to [REDACTED PLACE NAME], and I noticed you said something else about ethnicity not being as important in [ANON]. What did you say was more important? Did you say it was more...?

Respondent: No, a geographic-based group, like a village, like a township. If one town has a particular group, like a socially deprived group, then, yes, we should pay attention to them. Like in Ashington, I understand, the food bank has been very active. Now, I must say that, to me, it's an indictment to our 'better community' work, meaning that it reminds us we are a long way off to a better community.

But I would not dismiss. Ethnic groups in communities would continue to be helpful to promote greater adhesiveness to the local village and town. My feeling is that, in [ANON], small townships, communities and villages, the ethnic minorities that choose to live there really do realise, yes, they are far away from their contemporary ex-pat... Call it 'ex-pat'.

So if they have to go to [REDACTED]town... In fact, in [ANON] Street, we cover a 20-mile radius. There are residents in [REDACTED] who would come up to [ANON] Street once a week. By the way, the casino plays a very important part for the simple reason that most [REDACTED] like a flutter, they like to gamble. So they have lunch and then they go to the casino. (Laughter)

And the casino, by the way, there were four, but now I think it's three casinos in [ANON]. They all give support to the [REDACTED] Association, like, annually, we have an annual party, and then the casino would fund a table and would donate a prize for the raffle, etc. So we are grateful for their help. In return, of course, they know that the [REDACTED] Association when the casino has any promotion, etc., well, a small poster could be displayed. But usually, they don't have any poster because of the Gaming Act, etc.

For that, I think that one of the examples from the [REDACTED] Association's work of mine and extended to the local community... On one occasion... One of the centres in Newbiggin, through the [REDACTED] Association, has a small website, and they maintain it yearly. Not very actively, but nonetheless, it has. They advertise the service, and one of the art groups in Newbiggin contacted me, saying, "Look, they are going to have an exhibition. Can they have a [REDACTED] Dragon Dance?"

I asked, and unfortunately, the [REDACTED] Association said a line dance group, one group in Sunderland could do it for free, but were not available at that specific time. The other group of a line dance troupe, based in [ANON], was, I'm afraid, a commercial one. They wanted money and I said, "No, it's a small art group. Kindly, if you can do it for free..." I tried to influence, but in that event, I was afraid that we were not able to provide any support.

But for that, I think I continue to think that it is still very much worthwhile if we can do it. I must confess that what I'm muttering, going to mutter is a bit political. The last five years or more, the [REDACTED] government has been putting a lot of effort, making a lot of effort to engender likeness to them. Unfortunately, because of their practice of – I call it – totalitarian practice, that does not engender fondness from others.

For that matter, I think that is vital I will continue to separate politics to a single-party government and the nationhood, meaning that when people say, "Oh, I don't like [REDACTED]," I say, "Well, you mean that you don't like that Communist [REDACTED] government?"

For that, I think it will have an impact on promoting 'better community' because, sometimes, politics does come into it. But for the volunteer, I always remind myself, trying to separate the two of religion and policy. It doesn't, mustn't always mix up with community work, and try to separate the two if one can.

Ian: I think that's sage advice, no matter what government and what politics or what religion we're talking about, perhaps.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Well, yes, that's interesting. So the community work becomes the important thing. It doesn't matter what, why or how associations get involved. At that point, everybody has got the same agenda. Backgrounds don't need to be discussed. Yes. So that's really, really interesting.

I mean, I'm finding it really interesting to hear about how much of an area the [REDACTED] Association covers in terms of their members, and I'm thinking, perhaps, [ANON] is, obviously, a very urban centre. So would I be right in saying most of the members of the [REDACTED] Association are from these most central urban areas?

Respondent: Yes. Yes, but...

Ian: So do you...?

Respondent: Hmmhmm?

Ian: Sorry. No, you go ahead.

Respondent: Well, the [REDACTED] Association is in [ANON] Street, which is in any one... I have not come across that many... I go around the country and visit other [REDACTED] associations, but I bet not many [REDACTED] Associations occupy premises in the city centre. That in itself, if I may add, is the foresight of the founder member of the [REDACTED] Association. In the mid-1980s when [ANON] City Council wanted to dispose of [permits for business 0:47:38], they looked at it and said, "Oh, yes, we have it." You know?

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: That is a plus point. And within the city centre radius, we have a whole block of [REDACTED] sheltered housing. The [REDACTED] Association was instrumental in helping it to be established. Now, of course, a big centre like Manchester, they have two, but [ANON] is one of the centres that is endowed with sheltered housing for the [REDACTED].

About 5, 10 years ago, there was, seemingly, a lot of urges or requests for a second sheltered housing project to be launched, but the city council, of course, by then was a little bit reluctant because other ethnic groups hadn't had their own sheltered housing.

So if we look back, why do the [REDACTED] have two? You know? (Laughter) I can understand their reluctance. Of course, it shouldn't have stopped the [REDACTED] Association working with a housing association, a charity and setting up a second scheme, but in the event, of course, the economic situation changed and, of course, other things put into consideration, the second sheltered housing project was put on the backburner.

Yes, but I do think that helping ethnic minorities for a better community ought to be one strand of any village and township. But if the general mix of the population is not large... Say, for example, in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], we have over a 2,000 population. In [REDACTED PLACE NAME], we don't even have a [REDACTED] takeaway. (Laughter) I know...

When I say, "I know", whenever I'm out walking my dog, I meet quite a lot of people and people drive around, and we acknowledge each other by, in general, just putting up our hand... There is another [REDACTED] woman living in the village. In [REDACTED PLACE NAME], we have one [REDACTED] takeaway family.

So you see the number is insignificant, and it will be difficult to so-called... Well, shall we organise the [REDACTED] New Year party in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] or [REDACTED PLACE NAME]? No, you want it, travel 20 miles down to [ANON]. On the day, the [REDACTED] Association will have a celebration. There will be about 300, 200 people going for the party – that kind of thing, yes.

Ian: I mean, that's super interesting because the [REDACTED] Association is already removed from [REDACTED], and then again, I guess, it's a satellite of a satellite. It's just really interesting. But what I wanted to focus on for a moment is: Do you consider [REDACTED PLACE NAME] to be a rural place?

Respondent: Yes, indeed. Indeed. I describe to others... I say, "I'm a country bumpkin." (Laughter)

Ian: (Laughter) Yes, so what makes it rural?

Respondent: A sparsely populated area, the space available to its occupants. The downside to it is the sparse infrastructure. The community spirit, meaning that closeness, to me is my fondest thing about this rural village setting. People, genuinely, feel they belong to this particular group, this area. Definitely unique.

Ian: So yes, you kind of touched on it there, but what does living in a rural area mean to you?

Respondent: Again, quietness. I live [REDACTED ADDRESS]. Every one is a bungalow. I know every one of them by sight, if not by name. Mostly by name. We are not in each other's pocket, but I know if I want something, I can shout for help and it's there. During the pandemic, the five bungalows formed a small group in the WhatsApp group, and we shared jokes, etc.

When the NHS... When we were supposed to, on the Thursday at 8 o'clock, clap hands, the five houses, usually, at least about four of us would be there to come out and clap our hands to show we appreciate our community.

To me, that is what I like about the village. We have a proud history. When I came to [REDACTED PLACE NAME], I said, "I never knew that it was the last in my close in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]," and when I went to work in the village hall, one of the members, of course, he, himself, was a miner and he told some of the history and what he went through. We can pull each other's leg, meaning that, well, we share jokes, etc. That's the closeness.

In terms of the community feeling, belonging, the first school in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] has a habit of inviting the members of the luncheon club twice a year for lunch. They usually provide song and dance by the pupils, and of course, we are grateful. There have been a few years, a few occasions when the head teacher has had the idea that they have a school council, the election of the school councillors taking place in the village hall's library. We then had a library.

So these kinds of activities, without a village hall, without the statutory agency like the school, we wouldn't have a community. That's what I like about it.

Ian: Yes. You said that the bungalows in your area...

Respondent: Five.

Ian: Yes, you started a WhatsApp group during the pandemic. So I just wondered, either before the pandemic or because of the pandemic, are there any other kinds of new technologies that you've had to use? Especially for something like the way you keep in touch with the [REDACTED] Association, maybe there was a time when you couldn't travel to [ANON], etc., I've just wondered how you've adopted technology and if you could talk about that for a bit.

Respondent: Yes. During the pandemic, one of the members of our five bungalows set up the WhatsApp group because she belongs to a reading club or a reading group in the close or in the surrounding area. She gets a lot of jokes, so she's not: "Well, it's boring. We need to..."

And to set up a WhatsApp group, it's relatively not difficult because, being an administrator, all you have to do is this and the other, form a group, etc. So we use that to our advantage, give encouragement to each other and give, also, that as a sort of fallback position. "Now, if you need any help, a bowl of sugar, give us a shout."

Telephone is another one, and certainly a similar experience for the [REDACTED] Association during the pandemic is likewise. Both organisations – the luncheon club – closed around March last year, meaning just before the statutory lockdown was implemented. When the lockdown was in its more stringent phase, meaning that one doesn't do anything except the most essential activities outside of the home, it forced upon us to use the telephone, the PC, be it smartphone, iPad, desktop or laptop.

Meetings: likewise, Zoom and Teams work became the norm. In fact, during the pandemic, my connections with the patient participation group were all conducted exclusively by Teams. Teams is, I think, by Microsoft. It's not bad. Well, my feeling is that one is the same as the other.

And of course, email. Anything longer than a text message can handle, we used email. My feeling about the use of digital means to gain communication, a way to communicate. At best, I can say it's an alternative. It is 'horses for courses'. But I have made no secret that, I say, under normal circumstances before the pandemic, if you suggest to me, "Shall we meet in Zoom once a month?" I say, "What's the matter? Seeing each other is better."

But that is (a) a personal feeling, attitude-wise, (b) I also acknowledge that using digital means requires hardware, software, personal skill. And don't forget hard factors like whether one has the means. Is your broadband facility up to that? When we come to it, I'm afraid, meaning for many of the users, to have the hardware is number one; number two is: "Is the data availability unlimited or sufficient for that purpose?" So I wouldn't want to take it for granted that, well, simply because I can do it, everybody can. Yes.

But after saying that, I think that without Zoom, Teams, these newer means of communication, it would be impossible to gain access to the essential information pertaining outside of one's home. So I would encourage people to dabble with this new technology by giving them...

I wish I have a solid example of encouragement I can use to encourage people to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. I used to tell them that. I'd say, "Well, look, if we want to see our grandchildren, if we want to, in due course, help our friends, then we have to have the vaccination." That becomes a means to promote something that I want to see. So to promote people's readiness to use digital means to communicate, I have yet to find something solid as during this example.

I would welcome somebody teaching me to share their experience: "Oh, I find that telling people this would be a very useful sweetener."

Ian: Yes. People that don't have or choose not to access this digital world, do you think that's anything to do with being in a rural area?

Respondent: It does. Well, it should be minimising. It should be reducing this so-called inherent difficulty. When I first moved back to [REDACTED PLACE NAME], meaning 2009, getting so-called decent enough broadband speed was more difficult than now, but even then, even [REDACTED PLACE NAME], for a reasonable 10-meg sort of speed broadband, it wasn't yet that difficult. BT offered it. Other service providers offered it too.

So I don't know. Of course, out of the four villages, I only had one occasion – I think two years ago – in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] village. I was intending to get [ANON] and others to support the idea of the Tall Ship Race or Tall Ship exercise. We can stage the summer barbecue in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and broadcast the Tall Ship sail-through, but to synchronise the thing with decent enough speed and equipment proved to be an obstacle, so it didn't happen.

But things like that, it's something that if we are on board to demonstrate to people that "Oh, yes, it's relatively achievable," yes, we need people who know how to do it, the skilful people putting up their hand and saying, "Oh, I can help. I can do this, that and the other," and then an organiser skilled enough to harness all those skills and the hardware.

By no means, I know, as a matter of fact, like anything else, if we have a group of people, like-minded people wanting to give something to the community, we can do it.

Ian: Do you think it's primarily an issue of developing people's skills or do you think access, because of things like having the money to buy hardware or the other stuff you mentioned...? Is that so much a big factor in your village, do you think, or do you think it's more skills based?

Respondent: My feeling is that it's a 'skills' thing, but we have to be practical enough to say, "Yes, in every village and township, we have a group of people who know how to do things, but to tap into them, to engender their support to spend the time to do the work..."

Now, you asked me. In terms of staging a project, particular, regular work week in, week out, we need people's commitment, and for that, I think that [start 1:08:40] more will be very useful. First, having a group of like-minded people saying, "Well, in your village, how many of you would want to do it?" And we meet once a month to talk about "What's our next project?" how long the project lasts and "What's the requirement of the project?"

Skill: my feeling is that it's available among us. Hardware: again, it's there, but after saying it's there, whether people wanting to share it... Make it available. Because, say, for example, today, you and I meet. You have your equipment and I have mine. We didn't have to share, except the time, but if the project requires you to put out the equipment, the operating of that equipment for a third party to use, it's one of the questions.

All those practical issues need to be there, but I think we can overcome that if the group of people is willing to say, "Oh, each week, I am able to give three hours, two hours for this project, for how long." It's as practical as that. And "Yes, I will share my equipment, this, that and the other to do this job." It's practical.

Now, to give a helping hand, if there is a small pool of money for people in a village – "Oh, can I use this?" – like the community kitty, that we still have some money... If we have a community kitty set out particularly for promoting digital communication in the four villages, a small group of volunteers can apply. It may be helpful. It may give it a sort of start.

Ian: Yes. I mean, yes, I think things like that have worked in other places that I know of, those kinds of ideas.

Respondent: If I may... Sorry for interrupting. Say, for example, "Why money?" Money, I think that is important. Say, for example, the village hall in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] stopped having the landline, stopped having the library. The consequence of it, of course, is that we withdrew the 'community village hall base' free PC service for any user.

Now, technically, can [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Village Hall afford the broadband bill? My feeling is yes, it can, but at the time, very few people were using it, and so therefore, it's not justified. If there are enough people to use it... I always tell people, "Use it or lose it."

Ian: Yes. Speaking about these ways of keeping in touch and stuff during the pandemic and people choosing not to use things, I wonder if you are aware of or if you have been accessing any of the local Facebook groups.

Respondent: Yes and no. I have come across things like a Facebook group. I understand that a lot of people don't want to use Facebook because of – if I may coin the phrase – negative publicity about Facebook's privacy regulations and so on and so forth.

I, personally, have no dabbling of a Facebook group. I am not averse to use Facebook, like I have been registered with Facebook, personally, since 2007 or thereabouts, meaning quite a long time simply because one of my friends said to me, "Respondent, if you don't unpick Facebook, you can't see my photograph." He's a photographer and he's a childhood friend, so I said, "Alright, alright."

I, personally, don't even... Let me see. Oh, I have a profile picture, but from time to time, I change that profile picture. Right now, it's a cartoon drawing. But anyway, that's by the bye. I don't post anything in Facebook about myself for the simple reason that it's a personal 'like and dislike' thing rather than, philosophically, having an objection to Facebook.

But I am not averse in all. I say if somebody promotes a Facebook group to me and says, "Look, could you care to give your opinion in this particular group?" and we are given a purpose of the group, I would not be averse to join, meaning that I probably would join.

It's a little bit like now in the Health Service. Without exception, all the groups, including the Clinical Commissioning Group, they invite all the legitimate participants, meaning patients. Who is not a patient in England? (Laughter) "Join the group and give an opinion." The group administrator would post this particular question and ask, "Anybody care to give a comment? They are most welcome." I think it's the North West Water company promise: "Now, if you give 10 comments, we will send you a £5 voucher."

So yes, there are incentives one can use to promote the digital communication, but I often say that unless we are certain that the communication purpose... Then, promotion of the communication for communication's sake is a waste of time.

When I say, "waste of time", I care to point out that the Clinical Commissioning Group posted a question, "Does the individual value their health in the pandemic?" 1 to 10. So you give a response. At the end of the day, the Clinical Commissioning Group knows that, out of those who respond, the majority of them value their health, but when we see that: "So what?"

So I think, again, promoting communication using digital means is handy to the administrator for the simple reason it requires participants' input mainly, but without acknowledging, thanking the participants in a way that means something to them. The administrator of the group who posted the question ought to ask a hard question: "At the end of the day, for the participants' work, what does it mean to the administrator, the group?"

Meaning that I ask you a question. At the end of the day, I think that the testing point... The participants are not only feeling, "Oh, they thanked me," but the usefulness of the work, the demonstration of the usefulness of the work.

Ian: Yes, apart from those groups you've mentioned, were you aware of any of the groups in the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area around helping people during the pandemic or are you are aware of the groups that are focused on [REDACTED PLACE NAME] on Facebook?

Respondent: No. No, I have not dabbled. I have not made a search. That's probably my own... Well, I wouldn't say 'mistake', but that's my limitation – that I did not make a search of in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], in Facebook, "What did it say?" If I put in the keyword '[REDACTED PLACE NAME]', it would probably throw up a few.

Ian: Yes, yes. Yes, so your experience of Facebook groups has been...?

Respondent: Very limited.

Ian: Yes, yes, and more through your other work you're doing with the Clinical Commissioning Group?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Rather than the local-community-facing work?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Do you think Facebook is a good place? I know you've just talked about it a bit, but do you think, in theory, it is a good place to organise community work and community-focused projects?

Respondent: I don't have a preference and I don't have a prejudice; I hope – if that's the right word, 'prejudice' – against it, but I just do not have enough experience. Now, it would not be right for me that I don't have any experience with a Facebook group.

(Laughter) In fact, talking about politics, Hong Kong's situation in 2019 until late 2020, 18 months, has been turbulent, and I do... I am not party, I am not a signed-up member to any one of those groups in Facebook, but I come across them. I care to say that there have been occasions I have responded to one or two, a few of those Facebook groups.

Like internet-based groups, I have experienced abuse, but I pride myself... Yes, I know how to deal with, so I tell them to piss off.

Ian: (Laughter) Yes. So I realise we have gone over time, but I would just like to ask you one more thing if that's okay. So you've got a lot of experience of how community work happens in the real world, how to get things done, action.

All these things, you've talked about, and I just wanted to ask, if this is not too hard of a thing to think about: If we were to imagine an online space for these community-based things to happen, for people to exchange information, exchange skills, tell people about things happening, if we were to create an online space or forum, from your real-world experience, perhaps, what three things would be the most important things we would have to think about, or the most important values or characteristics?

Respondent: Integrity. Any group that fails to display, uphold integrity, meaning any information knowingly massaged to such an extent that you say, "God, this is far from true." That would destroy the group. So integrity of the group is number one.

Declaring from the outset the purpose of the group is important. It's no good simply to say that it's for building a better community. It has to be levelled down to something that is meaningful, measurable.

The third one, it has to be mutually respected, trusted by the user, that it's a productive place, and no abusive behaviour will be tolerated. It mustn't harm anyone. Well, I wouldn't even use the word 'unintentionally'. It mustn't harm the user.

And of course, I care to say that every group has its rule book, and the one who upholds it is the administrator. It has to state clearly so people know the boundary.

Hello, your dog.

Ian: (Laughter) Oh, yes, it must be the postman.

Respondent: I have a dog on the mat.

Ian: What sort of dog do you have?

Respondent: A [REDACTED DOG BREED], 11½ years old, so she's an old girl.

Ian: Mm. Well, my dog is only three years, so he's still got a little bit too much excitement in him, unfortunately. (Laughter)

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Right, well, I've taken up a lot of your time. I'm very grateful.

Respondent: Well, you are most, most welcome. I am delighted if I can be of any help to you, and if following today there should be any clarification required, just call me. Secondly, it's that if you feel that I could be of any use to community work, future of the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area, based on the Digital Framework sort of design, call me.

Ian: Yes, I will. Yes, certainly. I mean, the same for you. If you want to tell me anything else or ask me anything else, feel free to use email or [whichever 1:27:15]...

Respondent: I will, I will send you. You are one of the useful contacts, and my partaking of research-based projects... You are the second one. The first one was Manchester University, and that happened about, well, two or three months ago. It's to do with ethnic minority groups. You know?

But obviously, I'm interested in not mainly to help people. If I can be of help to others, it's all well and good, but my primary concern always has been, yes, it will do the world we are living in that much better – make it that little bit better. So I certainly would call upon you, and good job that [ANON] University has, in my book, a good name. I have worked with [ANON] University – a researcher or staff – on and off in my work. And thank you for your time.

Ian: Oh, thank you so much for your time and for your honesty. Yes, and just sharing so much. It's been really interesting. And yes, I'll keep in touch about the next stage of the project.

Respondent: Yes. Thank you very, very much. You have a good working day, and send my love to your dog. (Laughter)

Ian: (Laughter) You have a great day. Thank you.

Respondent: Thank you. Now, buh-bye.

Ian: Bye now.

Respondent: Buh-bye.

END AUDIO

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