**Date: 10/12/2020**

**Duration:** 01:17:47

**Participant: \*Project Introduction\***

Okay, so my first question is what is the name of your group, and how did it start?

**Participant:** Okay, urm… so it’s a project called [GROUP NAME]. And urm yeah, it started because urm I became like, in the very beginning just before lockdown I became very active in a lot of social groups online, that was how people seemed to be…. Urm, that was how people seemed to be connecting. The only way we could connect I felt like at the time. And then, yeah, I was really, really active and engaged and then… I was kind of quite aware that there was a huge amount of energy and effort but people, there wasn’t kind of a lot of structure. And to me it was kind of like, a lot of these people’s efforts are going to waste because there’s not really a sense of leadership. Urm, so then I kind of was really looking for ways, for ways that energy could be used efficiently. And like, gathering kind of groups and then – so then I kind of, I, I met someone called [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME] and we were talking about this and then we were thinking about, we were looking at was going on and we were thinking, who out of the community is getting supported? who are the people who are supporting? Urm and then we realised actually that refugee people and asylum-seeking people and migrant people were not even, not in this kind of space of urm, trying to support people, like it was mostly kind of white women who were trying to like do stuff in the community. And then they were kind of subsequently supporting certain types of people as well, and it did seem like there was this marginalisation going on from both sides of this mutual aid thing.

So, yeah, so we kind of realised that that was where the focus needed to be and we thought that it would then be good to like, yeah, take some initiative and get some leadership involved and have some sense of focus, and then we… yeah, and then it kind of and then within that that we created a separate WhatsApp group for people specifically looking at ways to support people from those communities during the pandemic and we reached out to-. It it it it was a huge learning curve because the reason that a lot of these people weren’t being supportive was because they don’t… urm… its not quite as easy for them to connect because of language barriers or cultural barriers or internet issues, or not having a phone, so it was much harder for us to then reach out to them. So, we had to urm, get in touch with organisations who were already, and then find the niche through there.

**Interviewer:** What was the aim of the group when it started?

**Participant:** Urm well… I guess right in the very, very beginning it was just to bring people, bring everyone into a support system, make sure everyone was included. It was a hugely vague idea that we started with. And then and then because we had to reach out to organisations to see how we were best place to support these people, because we didn’t have any experience ourselves, then we had to follow their guidance and then it became food provision, and yeah, internet provision, so providing phones so people could get connected. That was the way that we were most helpful. Urm, so our project kind of manifested into us getting a space and then taking in donations and providing food to the projects food banks but also providing a delivery service for food parcels because projects, we were working quite closely with projects and they weren’t able to provide that so we could. Urm then it did take many forms, many, many, many forms the project, our project did, I’m not sure if you want me to go into more detail?

**Interviewer:** Yes!

**Participant:** Yeah? Okay. I guess interestingly as me and the co-founder became more acquainted and as things kind of changed, we implemented our own kind of [\*audio dips pit 05:24] about the way that we were working, which is why we chose this kind of solidarity approach as opposed to this charity approach. Urm, so that kind of… that was slightly difficult, more difficult approach because urm… the immediate urgency and the immediate need was just donations mostly.

**Interviewer:** Uh-hmm.

**Participant:** Urm, but we also wanted to urr look out, try try and support people who weren’t as privileged as people being already within this country, so we did fundraisers for example and online events and we worked through the solidarity model by, you know, talking to the people we were giving food parcels to and asking them if they actually wanted to get involved in administering these events themselves. So, it was actually quite a nice and positive, you know, quite pleasant part of what we were doing was those nice events and raising money for… urm, larger projects urm, yeah. And then…

**Interviewer:** So, you were involved-

**Participant:** Yeah, so fundraising and taking in donations on a weekly basis and providing food parcels-

**Interviewer:** You mentioned some phone lines as well?

**Participant:** No, yeah that was part of the donations drive. So, in the beginning it was like we needed to give laptops and phones to people, so people could get online and create these networks themselves and get in touch with people. Urm, as well as the food parcels was kind of the main priority. But then we just had the most amazing response from the community. It was incredible, it was incredible. So, then we were getting in donations of TVs and nappies urm and you know cleaning products and then eventually we were just taking everything that we could and giving it out.

But then when lockdown stopped, we were in… a better position to urm, really think about, now we didn’t have to respond to this immediate need, what did we actually really want from this project on a long-term basis because we were really quite sure – we were very, very aware, because this whole process I personally was really trying to learn urm about the situations people were in. So, we became more and more aware that again, the needs to these people… the needs that we were addressing were not, were not new needs, they were just much more apparent, and it was just much more pronounced, and these issues were much worsened during the pandemic, but they were not, not there before. So, we were definitely wanting to continue with this work, but we wanted to focus more on this solidarity model. So… urm within the space that we were taking in these donations I wanted to get the people that we were like supporting, into the roles that we were doing. So, becoming a peer led project essentially and getting urr those people into the spaces that we were working from. And that was wonderful as well. Meeting the people that we’d spent months like not knowing but talking to on laptops and giving food to and checking in and then actually we were, they were able to come into this space that we were receiving donations from and volunteering. And that was just really, really great, this whole concept of integration urm, yes so that’s, so that’s kind of a different direction that it took. And we started easing off on the food donations.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Participant:** Well actually there was a bit of kind of inter-personal issues within the project. And… then me and [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME] who are the co-founders, we kind of split into different directions. So really… although we shared the same values, she really didn’t want to stay in this charitable sphere of just giving people handouts all the time. Urm… she wanted to go into a more kind of creative directions and so did I, but I didn’t want to stop the charity work. Because I kind of thought well, if there are people giving food and its helpful then why not continue it, you know? So, I kind of kept on with that model and she really wanted to move away as quick as possible. So, she started her own kind of a branch of something similar, and now I’ve done that as well. Urm…

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Yeah, because I think easing off on the food donations it… it’s a really tricky and also a sensitive issue for me because I feel quite guilty about doing that, and now I’m doing it urm, and I think it’s because part of… obviously it’s a fundamental resource for people but I think the whole idea of donations and some parts of charity work is kind of perpetuating this idea of these people being figures of lack and need and deprivation. And I really want to also work in the realm of, urm… equality and not having this dichotomy between people having power and privilege and people needing, needing something all the time and needing support and it not being enough. And its being this quite morbid conceptual way of understanding people and I wanted to celebrate people and… you know celebrate cultures and have a good time together and so that’s been more of my focus right at this point.

**Interviewer:** And what is it the situation with the group at this moment?

**Participant:** With what group like the organisers?

**Interviewer:** With the – yes, I would like to understand a little bit more that, so you have urm, two founders so you and your colleague, you founded the group and then urr it expanded the coordinators group?

**Participant:** Well… yeah, I mean the whole thing has been really, really interesting because urm… yeah again this idea of solidarity that was feeding into our decision making, but I think… I think [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME], which was the co-founder urm, she wanted it to be this collective which in theory I’m very much a fan of, like everyone having equal urm… equal ownership of a project. So, then we were working with another woman right from the beginning, but she wasn’t a co-founder and then she took quite a lot of urm decision making and then there was just a little bit of conflict there. I think…. I think a lot of people who work in these groups there’s this – you know everyone is trying to do a good thing, and it’s a simple, its as simple as that but its not quite a s simple as that because everyone’s got very different ways of working and I think it’s shown up a lot of my own issues unfortunately. In the sense that I think… urm… urm… urm I think maybe I was… maybe I was quite, maybe I wasn’t quite as good at working collaboratively as I thought I was. Urm I kind of just did my own thing and made my own decisions and definitely did struggle when decisions were made on behalf of the project that I didn’t agree with. Like I did struggle with that. And I think that was part of the conflict, urm, and I did struggle with people people making executive decisions when, you know, they weren’t the co-founders and they maybe didn’t share the same values. Because the reason I started the project myself was because I really had these ideas that I wanted to implement. And when I felt that was kind of being challenged and people maybe didn’t have the same ideas and they were using this project and doing something slightly different with it, I really did struggle with that.

**Interviewer:** And what was your ideas? Why did you get involved?

**Participant:** Well… urm… actually it happened over a specific, I’ll give a very small example… urm… it was, there was a bit of conflict, because we have this quite big Facebook group now and its really how we started and how we got donations and how we got momentum and it was really important and for me it was this space that we were putting this message across and-

**Interviewer:** The refugee and migrants solidarity, is that the group, yes?

**Participant:** Yes, [GROUP NAME], that’s the group. Urm so we’ve got this Facebook page and then one of the people who started volunteering with us, started posting urm… really quite… really political posts. And I really really didn’t agree with that, and I’m not sure, maybe I would change my mind now, I think at the time I was thinking actually… this is going to be detrimental to what we’re trying not do here because this is going to divide people. And you know, what is, what is the benefit of just saying like… of creating this divide, actually we want to bring people together, not divide them. But I think that was a bit of trigger point because then my, the person that co-founded the project was like, “this whole situation is political, and if we’re not political about it like what’s, what’s the point, we need to come from a political stance because the situation has been created because of politics, so,” which I fully agree with, now. You know, but that’s and… urm… yeah so that was kind of just a situation where they had been a volunteer who’d got on board, she was kind of doing what she wanted on the Facebook group and I had an issue with it, and then I think the co-founder was just like, “look [INTERVIEWEE NAME], you need to be able to just like, if there’s a volunteers and she’s doing the Facebook page, just allow her to do it.” I think I was micro-managing a little bit. I think that’s what happened. I think maybe I got quite possessive of it, and I’m quite ashamed in some ways.

**Interviewer:** It’s normal stuff in groups, usually.

**Participant:** Yeah, yeah, I suppose so.

**Interviewer:** Did you have any previous experiences of organising groups like this?

**Participant:** No.

**Interviewer:** Not activism or volunteering…?

**Participant:** Oh. I’ve done a lot; I’ve done a lot of volunteering.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But I feel that sometimes leadership and and kind of taking initiative and activism is a space that often is dominated by very like outgoing and passionate and confident people. And I’m not really that person, and I think maybe on some level, I did kind of take like a duck to water with maybe leadership and management urm and I think the reason maybe I hadn’t done it before is… urm, its normally not really a space that I feel that comfortable in, its normally quite intimidating, and I’m quite shy so. Maybe maybe media and having this kind of like, actually, doing it behind closed doors and through like a screen kind of almost gave me… made me feel more comfortable doing that, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what was your role in the group?

**Participant:** Urm… well… I guess, because I co-founded it… I did a little bit of everything. I think… yeah, there was so many of them, so many random little tasks.

**Interviewer:** Okay, has your role changed in maybe…?

**Participant:** Yeah, definitely. I think in the, in the beginning I was doing… everything, me and [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME] were doing everything when it was quite small. So, I was doing a lot of the kind of… really really long tasks like e-mailing organisations one-by-one and really thinking and and trying to ask for help and writing all of the Facebook posts and then and then finding the space for the donations and doing everything. But then as the project grew, I became much more of a coordinator. Which is magic because there’s like, a a lot of people wanted to be on board and then I felt like my role almost became coordinating other people and then asking them to do various things. And then I was able to try and expand and grow the project and move it in different directions. So, then all the stuff I was doing to just keep it afloat, then there were other people keeping it afloat and then I could think, “oh, what can we do next?” You know, which is quite a nice role.

**Interviewer:** And how does the activity that you do in the group and that you did relate to other parts of your life?

**Participant:** Say that again please?

**Interviewer:** How does the activity relate to other parts of your life, these activities that you do in the group? How do you fit the activity, the group activity in your life?

**Participant:** From like a – do you mean how does it relate to other things that I do like values and stuff or how does it actually physically fit?

**Interviewer:** I think both.

**Participant:** Okay. Urm… I think naturally I have a strong want and desire to… urm, to challenge power. And empow- I don’t really like the word empower, urm but I guess… oh sorry that’s someone at the door because she’s not got a key, can I just let her in.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes okay.

**Participant:** Sorry.

**Interviewer:** No problem.

**Participant:** Urm… yeah so, I think, yeah so there’s a set of values that I have from challenging authorities, challenging power and… urm… really wanting to help people not feel, you know marginalised I guess, or voiceless. And I… urm am very empathic. Urm and so I guess that’s why generally I enjoy charity work, or want, not not so much enjoy it from that perspective because its very very emotional, and its quite difficult. But that’s why I want to do it is because when you read about people or you learn about situations, of me being quite an empathic people I just want to help because I think, “God how hard that must be sometimes.”

Urm… urr and… yeah, I guess practically, from a practical perspective, urm it was incredibly hard fitting it in to my life in the beginning. Urm… I think there was some, something psychological around the pandemic for me in terms of perhaps I really wanted to get a sense of control of the situation or it made me very fearful and panicked so I put - I really did put all my efforts into this project in the beginning. It was taking up all the hours of the day and I’m a student which was just really really challenging trying to do essays at the same time, so I didn’t manage it very well back then. But urm… but then more people got involved and it became more easier and I’ve done it for quite a long time from, I don’t feel such a sense of pressure to be pouring all my efforts into that because before it was like, “why would I do, why would I do an essay, like, when actually if I spent three hours doing this project, I could actually do something important!” And writing an essay at the time was just like – so that was challenging managing my time, but.

**Interviewer:** And just to understand, urm, the, now the group, how is it the situation? So, what kind of thing, it move it changed urr but how is the situation at the moment?

**Participant:** I mean its amicable.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** What I, we don’t talk because we’ve got different projects.

**Interviewer:** So, you have two different projects?

**Participant:** We both have different projects.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm…

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** It was really sad, really sad. And I think one of the biggest eye-openers for me has been… really how difficult it can be, how difficult relationships can be and how difficult it can be to understand each other, and how you can have like common goals and values and they can really get in the way of the work that you’re trying to do. And yeah, just something as simple as yeah, a, a relationship can, yeah, can be so impacting. But we are, we are fine, we’re good. Urm… yeah like I just, yeah, I messaged her earlier asking if she wanted us to post, re-post some of her things and so we can support each other. But I started working with another project.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** And that again has just… gone so downhill \*laughs\*. So, I don’t know, like what field is this kind of a more of a psychological, where are you coming from this study, what field is this?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, its social psychology but we are also interested in other aspects so actually, yeah, but defiantly it’s also a thing we’re interested, the group processes.

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so in terms of geographical areas, urm what, what geographical area has the group covered?

**Participant:** South east [CITY NAME] is hat we claim. Urm, urm… yeah. And, but mostly actually our work has been in [BOROUGH NAME] area.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But we definitely did branch out to the whole of [CITY NAME].

**Interviewer:** Okay, what kind of things does the group do at the moment and did in the past, so you did donations, food parcels and you mentioned a few more-?

**Participant:** And the fundraising things, the events. And then, and then it was donations for a long time. And then… and then we started working with the second group, when I split off form the other girls, urm, we started working with a separate group and then it was continuing this donations thing but then it was about bringing… bringing people into a public space, bringing people we were supporting into trying to be a peer led project and getting them urm into this volunteering space if they wanted to be, asking them to do the social media or, you know, manage teams and stuff. So, that was very much the focus of the project for a while. And then… now I’ve kind of, because there was this… issue with the next group that I was working with, which ended really badly. Because of that… it actually left my project in a position where I really felt it wasn’t really able to do much good anymore in terms of the donations thing.

Because the donations part was… running right from the beginning basically until right at this point. Urm, so every Sunday from one to four we were taking, we would do a call out for basically everything and anything that we could fit that would be useful to someone. We were always doing that right from the beginning. And then we started, I started working with this next project and… again these kind of interpersonal relationships really ended up hindering urm the good that we could do because of really small kind of differences it’s just always so unfortunate that we… and we yeah. And just tricky working with people. They, this other group basically we started off doing two separate things, but we were taking in donations at the same time on a weekly basis. And then they grew really big, urm, and then they stared taking in the same donations that we were taking in and then it became confusing because it was like, “well actually I’m not really sure what we’re doing and what you’re doing anymore.” So, then I, I was just like, “well okay, we’ll just support what you’re doing, and we won’t have this separate thing anymore,” it just became really complicated. Urm… and so eventually we were working in that space and the person we were working with said, “you can’t work in this space anymore.” And then because we were basically doing the same thing at this point, they were taking in the same donations at the same time on the same day with the same donors, and I was left in a position where I was like, “well we don’t have the space anymore.”

And like from the beginning we would, it was our goal to find a niche, to find what wasn’t being done or supporting other people who were already doing something important, not to kind of compete. We wanted, so…. so unfortunately, this was very recent this sort of situation, in the last couple of days or weeks. So now it’s left me in the position of actually… I’m not just going to do literally exactly the same thing, because I think its detrimental to both of our causes if we’re doing the same thing, we might as well find something that’s not being done.

So, then we, so then I’ve moved on with this creative aspect, which I wanted to do in the beginning, but I’ve realised maybe it was impossible to continue this donations stuff while having a separate focus, so now I’m fully focused on integration and again like hosting events and bring people from marginalised sort of communities into urm… into urm… yeah into yeah kind of mainstream I guess things like, especially through music. So, I’m trying to think of like music therapy events or just like, so we’re going to be doing a song sharing event with Syrian families in the area which will be really, really nice and what else have we got planned? We’re using, we’re using some of the funds that we have to give instruments to asylum-seeking families through a project urm… yeah. So that’s the focus.

**Interviewer:** Okay, how many people are in the group, what the size?

**Participant:** Well, it’s tricky, we don’t really have a solid group.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm, in the beginning it was me and [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME], then it was me, [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME] and [GROUP MEMBER NAME 1], urm… and then it was me, [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME], [GROUP MEMBER NAME 1] and a woman called [GROUP MEMBER NAME 2]. But there was various points when there was different people, so when we were doing this… we were doing a music fundraising event and we were getting a lot of people on board to do that, so then there were like a few other people there, and then we did like an art event and there were multiple people working on that. And then throughout, when we were doing the food parcels part had multiple delivery drivers and people who were picking up and dropping of donations like key, key people, core people who are still working now actually. So, I guess it depends what you mean. Because we’ve had a huge amount of volunteers come and go, but you know, that’s kind of, I’ve seen that that’s kind of the nature of volunteering that a lot of the time people just come and go. They do what they can?

**Interviewer:** So, they drop out many people? Why do you think they drop out?

**Participant:** Urm… urm… I, I don’t know, I think…

**Interviewer:** Lack of time, lack of-

**Participant:** I think perhaps, yeah, I think perhaps generally… like, essentially working for free is not something that everybody wants to do. And I think what is, what is an enticing part of volunteering is this part that it is very flexible. It’s not like a job where you literally *have* to turn up and you have to do certain things, you have to do them a certain way, I think that’s why people engage with it in the first place.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm, and yeah. Yeah. But I, I don’t know, I’ve struggled with that, I wish, I wish I really want to be working with more people, I’d love to have someone more committed. Yeah, there’s, there’s not that many people who are really, really committed to spending a lot of time, long term, on volunteer work, I think.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and in terms of resources, what resources do you have? You mentioned some funds.

**Participant:** Yeah. What do you mean resources other than funds?

**Interviewer:** Urr, where do you get the donations, for example? The food donations this kind of thing?

**Participant:** Okay, oh right resources in terms of practical things that have helped the project, I guess.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** Well, we when we expanded a lot and at the beginning we were reaching out to really learn about what we should do, who we should work with and the needs of people and stuff, we, we… created quite a strong network of people that we could reach out to and then we, there, urm, was a group called [ORGANISATION NAME] which is called [SHORTENED ORGANISATION NAME] and they heard about us and they had this space so they just gave it to us for free, which was really, really nice. Urr, yeah because they had it and it was during lockdown and they really wanted to use it for some good. And then all the donations come from people, just people, we would just do these posts and then people would just come in and just give their unwanted stuff or they buy us, buy food. And then we got all these funds urm from all of these fundraising events. But initially, they were always to raise money for projects. So, I think like we raised a few thousand for [unclear 36:16] and various other things. And then we realised that the GoFundMe account was still set up, urm, and people just continued to give, urm… yeah. So then obviously we closed that, we closed that account because we were like, “oh my God, what are we supposed to do with this, why are people still giving us money?” Urm yeah, but the generosity of the community has just been, its been the thing that’s kept me doing it every day or week or-

**Interviewer:** The, they what?

**Participant:** The generosity, just the generosity and the kindness of people. Urm… I think that’s been the thing that’s kept me going, and that’s come from these kind of, this this question of resources I guess, is that people actually, it’s not just an idea of like, “I want to be a nice person in the community,” it’s actually practicing that by given your hard earned money or given your stuff and your time, the time that people were giving, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Mmm. Are there any particular skills that people in the group have that was important, that were important for the group? The volunteers for example, the coordinators?

**Participant:** I don’t think so, you know.

**Interviewer:** No?

**Participant:** Because I think… I don’t know, maybe this is me like, thinking too much, too much about it, but actually I… it kind of brings up an argument I had with a person on a separate project that I was working with. And I was trying to, I was trying to bring volunteers and like facilitate volunteer work and volunteer roles, because this other project had lots of stuff that they needed to get done. And he said, “do you know actually, I don’t think these people are well suited to his particular, this particular job, I don’t think its appropriate.” And that, that really just just really, really, really hit a nerve because urm… I don’t think there’s many skills, in terms of this project which are more important that others. And I think the whole project is about really all of us learning together and all of us sharing skills. And so, I think from that perspective, nobody, I would never, I don’t think that anybody’s skills were more valuable than any others. Apart from time. The more, the time was the most valuable thing.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how did you get volunteers involved?

**Participant:** Urm… urm mainly, yeah, mainly through social media. Social media has just been the most incredible and strange thing, I just-

**Interviewer:** Just Facebook?

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And-

**Participant:** Yeah, and WhatsApp.

**Interviewer:** WhatsApp, okay. And how did you coordinate, organise all of the donations and all of the things that you did? For example, how did you know who needed help?

**Participant:** Yeah okay, yeah so maybe I’ll talk a little bit more about, seems like you’re asking a little bit more about logistical side.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant:** Yeah. Urm… so I guess it was all just this, for me, it was all just this learning curve and I saw that there was momen- I, I knew that there was such things as Facebook groups and WhatsApp groups so I knew to kind of join them, and then I could see how much, how much support you could get for your cause if you just created a group and the just got people to join it. So it was all about, now we’ve created this group and we’re asking people from other groups to join our group, and then when we were in that group we were saying, “oh, do you know anybody else we can speak to?” and from that we were saying, “oh well we’ve got this Facebook page,” and blah-blah-blah, reaching out to more and more people, and that was how we gathered momentum and that’s how we gathered support. Constantly asking support, constantly putting ourselves out there.

Urm… and the way that we reached the people that we were trying to work with was through this - well established projects and charities. I think maybe that would be quite different to a lot of group because of the people that we wanted to work with. Urm… because there’s again like this, the whole reason that we wanted to work with these groups was because we felt there was some kind of either like conceptual barrier that was stopping people from accessing the same things that other people were accessing. An even when, when, when we were really working so hard against that and trying to alleviate that, it was coming up time and time again because the only reason, the only way we could kind of get to these people and reach them was through this barrier, urm which was… organisations. And organisations, these long-established projects and… rightly so they were very, very protective, because of the real kind of sensitivity around these people’s urm… situations. So, it was really difficult because really you needed to be, we needed to have, they needed to foster a sense of trust of who we are and what our intentions were before they were ready to hand over you know their clients. Urm, so it took a long time.

**Interviewer:** And how was the engagement of the local communities, so migrants and refugees, did you get these people involved in the project?

**Participant:** Yeah, and its still a really, really tricky, it’s still a really, really tricky thing. Urm… really tricky, urm and that remains kind of the focus, because the whole kind of principle, I think, of what we started was to not… was to ask people what they want, ask these people and talk to these people and it was just a challenge right form the onset. And I think, from knowing kind of other organisations who wanted to work, who were trying to support vulnerable people, they really didn’t face these challenges as much. They faced their own challenges and I’m not trying to compare but I… from working closely to other projects it’s like people can… people are not as afraid, for example as the people we were working with, to get in touch. Or they didn’t have, or they at least had Facebook to say this is what we need.

Urm, and… its always been… urm, working with projects it’s not always been this and it’s not like this so much anymore, but right from the beginning for the first few months, it wasn’t about working with the people, it was about working with that projects. And that was, that was a bit of a problem for me because I, this whole idea of solidarity was not, was about… not talking to people in positions of power about what other people need It was about asking those people themselves about what they want, what they need and how we can support each other. Urm but eventually, yeah now there’s, now there’s been some trust established and its quite a… and through this food parcel project I got the details of these people, because we needed their addresses, we needed their telephone numbers. Urm and that’s largely how I managed to speak to individuals themselves as opposed to the projects that represent them. And the thought that, against his whole idea of like building one relationship and then like, trying to say, “well are there more people that I can talk to?” or, “do you know other people?” And that’s the part of the process that we’re in now, so I’ve got a few individuals now that trust me and that I kind of know, and then it’s it’s, but yeah, it’s quite a long process.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Urm, so more practical things, is the group part of any national network? No?

**Participant:** No.

**Interviewer:** And what is the relationship like with the local council?

**Participant:** Really good.

**Interviewer:** Yeah?

**Participant:** [BOROUGH NAME] council are amazing.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Yeah, urm… yeah, they’re really, really good. It’s kind of been a blessing and a curse because I remember talking, I remember talking to like the head of another charity and I said, I was saying like, “how can we be most helpful?” and she kind of just said, you know, “go to a different part of [CITY NAME].” Because this part is like, it’s quite well set up actually because it’s a borough of sanctuary now, and the local, the local council really, really work, like really, really work well in the community. Like I’ve been quite, I’ve been quite close to people, to members within the council and they’ve been very much on board, like with in the beginning on the WhatsApp groups and…

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Very, very engaged with the local, local grassroots organisations and very supportive.

**Interviewer:** Okay, any other organisations that you are connected with?

**Participant:** Yeah, we urm-

**Interviewer:** So, you mentioned a few projects so, urr, organisations in the field working with migrants and refugees, yeah?

**Participant:** Yeah, well, I think… yeah, our project is again, would be slightly different in this case because of the sorts of people that we’re working with. We really *had* to engage, or I felt we did. I know other projects who are, were trying to work with these epopee and chose not to really engage with other projects. But for me, where I felt I had no expertise, urm it was really, really, really important to engage with other projects. Yeah, and so… I think there is probably… six different projects in the area that all work with refugee people and asylum-seeking people. Who I’ve got really strong connect- relationships with now.

**Interviewer:** Okay, what kind of relationship, do you share resources, information?

**Participant:** Urm… well I guess like a couple of them from a personal level because I was also volunteering for different projects-

**Interviewer:** Before?

**Participant:** Pardon?

**Interviewer:** Before COVID or during?

**Participant:** No, during. Urm, but then on a professional level. We were yeah, just sharing resources I think and…

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm, yeah. A few of the larger projects, there was different intentions in mind, I guess in creating networks in creating communication relationships with them. Like the larger, bugger kind of established charities, there was less of a reciprocal relationships there because … urm… I was just asking for advice the whole time and trying to reach the people they were working with and help. So, it was very much like, “how can I, how can I help you?” But I think in return, I suppose what we got was this level of trust and then they, they kind of worked with us in the sense that they allowed their clients to benefit from the sorts of things that we were offering. So, I suppose that’s kind of how those relationships worked. But I think the relationships with the grassroots organisations were very different. That was more of a mutual thing where… you know, when I was really engaged in food provision, sometimes there would be, like the most random things happen like you would just get thousands and thousands of bottles of Innocent smoothies donated somehow somewhere. And then you would reach out to all of these other organisations and so, “would you like this?” and then vice-versa. Or… yeah just, just generally, just talking to people and seeing how things were going. But its interesting because the relationships with the grassroots organisations, like the pandemic organisations were, was very different to the kind of relationships that we had with these kinds of long-established charities.

**Interviewer:** In what sense?

**Participant:** Well, the way that we did, the way that we did things was very different. I think that, for me, there was this general feel like, the kind of ones that were set up quite quickly the grassroots ones, were kind of very like go with the flow and just do it. That kind of mentality. Urm… and not really maybe playing by the rules as much. And then, and then I’d speak to the larger charities who were maybe a little bit – and I’m not, this is not a criticism – that were maybe more kind of regimented and not very flexible. And maybe not, didn’t really have as much time for us really. Urm, well probably because they’re doing really, really important stuff, you know. So that’s fair enough.

**Interviewer:** And has your group tried to get official recognition, for example becoming a company or a charity?

**Participant:** Urm… there were questions around that a while ago, because one really, really wonderful woman from one of these larger charities, larger charities said, “why don’t you try and get charity status?” Urm, but there are definitely contradicting ideas around whether that’s a help or a hinderance, charity status. Because I think largely, almost similarly to what I just said is the fact that when you do get charity status, I think urr, it can become quite bureaucratic, and then there’s things like trustees and then you get these kinds of power dynamics and control, and there’s you can’t be quite as flexible as I kind of get away with more in doing things your own way if you’re not a registered charity, if you’re not official. So, I think [GROUP CO-FOUNDER NAME], the person who co-founded it, because she works for a charity separately, she was really keen for us not, not to get that, not to get that status.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** But I haven’t really looked into it more after that because I really, she knows a lot I just, I just yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you talk a bit about your own motivation for getting involved, and in your opinion, what are the motivations of other active participant? Why did they get involved?

**Participant:** Urm… it’s a question ire ally think now that I probably should have asked people. Its just such an interesting question. Urm… and quite a nice question. Urr, so I, I’m not sure. Urr…

**Interviewer:** It could be different motivations.

**Participant:** Yeah, yeah. I mean I obviously I guess that everyone’s got their own very individual answer but I just… I guess, I guess most people who volunteer must have this sense of… empathy… urm and... yeah, I guess some people for some people maybe it’s this empathic thing or, it’s like almost like this fight mentality or really wanting to make a difference. Or you know it could be… people what to have a stronger sense of community and togetherness.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, do you think, anything else?

**Participant:** Urm, yeah, I think some people come, maybe have come from situations themselves, come from difficult situations themselves and then there’s that kind of connection to wanting to help other people out of certain situations. Urm, I think maybe some people urm… feel like charity work is a way to alleviate things that they’ve done.

**Interviewer:** Do you think so?

**Participant:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** I do think that some people can get involved in stuff for the wrong reasons. Because especially at different levels of the volunteering space… I think in any kind of leadership roles you can kind of question why people want… authority, or want to be manging people. And I think you get that a lot where… or almost like a white saviour complex as well, those kind of of ideas of like…. That’s also fed into what we’re trying to do is like making sure we’re tackling ideas of people trying to impose power and like victimise people… that I guess is quite a morbid way of thinking – a very morbid way of thinking about volunteering. I think generally, generally also there’s this sense of like urm, escaping, escaping a society which, which is kind of urm… I don’t want to make and generalising statements but is focusing on certain, certain values which isn’t the same for everyone, like money. And I think like volunteering roles… open up so many different opportunities for people it’s a way for people to meet people, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Urr, you mentioned a few challenges, is there any other problems that have affected the group? Problems urr challenges, things like that. For example, not enough people, or too many people, lack of resources, differences in aims, these kind s of things, communications?

**Participant:** Yeah. There were a lot of challenges. The biggest ones, the biggest ones and the biggest – with the biggest impact were definitely like these interpersonal conflicts of values and how to manage and how to do things. That was the biggest challenges. Urm… urm… I guess another challenge was this, what we kind of spoke about earlier in the way that… like having like, not being able to depend on volunteers. Like for me I guess I was not expecting that, like I I – like if I say to someone, “I’m going to do something, or be somewhere,” then I just will do it regardless of whether I’m getting paid for it or… or who I’ve said I’ll do it too. Its just like, that’s what I said that I’ll do. And I just feel that suddenly volunteer work was treated very differently to any other type of work, and people just come and go and I really struggled with that.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Because I feel that I really couldn’t depend on anyone, urm… and you really can’t, it’s not like I can be demanding obviously because everyone’s giving their time freely so there’s an interesting dynamic which means that, yeah, you can’t always just get things done the way that you want to. Urm… resources… was… another problem, I guess. We were very limited, and I guess… urm… I guess there were just many many issues around the particular, the particular group we were trying to work with. Again this, like big kind of barrier around actually creating relationships with the people themselves and the issue with trust. And I guess like… it was a huge learning curve, that was another, that was another issue. Like I felt, how do I talk about these people. How do I, how do I support these people, I don’t know them. And there was this other kind of, then there was this whole political thing that kind of created a bit of an issue because it was kind of like: how do you work in a society, trying to so something really, really good, whereas the reason that you’re working, the reason that you’re doing that work is because there’s a fundamental flaw in the society. How do, you know, how do you kind of do the most efficient thing? Decision making was challenging.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how-

**Participant:** And I guess – sorry – just, I guess the biggest challenge was, who do we tackle these like really fundamental deep rooted issues which are much larger, much, much larger, that represent much, much larger… urm… much, much larger urr structures in society and much larger, you know, politics essentially, that’s really what we should be challenging and what we’re actually challenging is the symptoms of that. And managing the symptoms instead of… yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urr… and how about the things that maybe you did that helped the group keep going?

**Participant:** Urm… well I think, I think largely… you mean me personally?

**Interviewer:** As a group, as coordinator, yeah.

**Participant:** Right okay, well personally I think I… urm… I’m quite positive and excitable and so I think, an empathic still so that works well when you’re coordinating because, and because of this this concept of working in solidarity with people, its like I very much tried to, not just treat people as volunteers or people who was working for my project, but very much as individuals, as friends. Same way as everyone, we’re all just kind of like friends. So, its about being very human to human to people, I think I tried to be. So, I think just generally I was about just asking people how their day went, as opposed to just kind of being like, did you – just talking about work. And… I think maybe, yeah, I was just very excited about kind of the whole project and very urm… urm… very grateful, very very grateful and like almost complimentary, like almost acknowledging people’s efforts. Urm… and like being very, very grateful to everyone.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm and also, I do think that leadership played a strong role because I do, I recognise that actually there was very different types of people, obviously and some of them responding really, really well to me actually creating very, very specific detailed roles. So, some people really wanted me to be like, “on Monday five ‘till six, can you do posts? and can you post about this, this, this and this?” And then some people would hate that. So, you know some pole you’d just have to be like, actually you, you know you take full authority of your role, and then people really thrived off that, really, really, really motived people to work, that if I’d, if I’d have told that to someone else, it would have made them recoil because they wouldn’t have known what to do, or they wouldn’t have felt comfortable. So, I think the way that I kind of kept people on board was recognising people’s strengths and, you know, where people ended maybe a little bit more support or direction.

**Interviewer:** Mmm, did you have a regular meetings for example?

**Participant:** Urm, yeah. In the beginning definitely. Maybe not enough? We did say that, we did say that when we argued, we were like, “we didn’t have enough meetings. We didn’t, we didn’t talk enough.” But that was kind of the core, that was the core group.

**Interviewer:** Mmm-hmm.

**Participant:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay, urm, were any of these things that you did strategic?

**Participant:** What did you mean?

**Interviewer:** If you planned to do it or if they were just ad-hoc?

**Participant:** Like throughout the process of the whole project?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Participant:** Urm, that’s a good question?

**Interviewer:** Do you have to go?

**Participant:** No, no, sorry, my, I’m just aware that I told my sister that we’d call now, but its fine. Urm… urr… yeah, I think defiantly a bit of both. I think, urm… I think the way that the project has moved and developed has not at all been, well no in some ways, but the very specific tasks that we were doing and how we were most supportive was urm… not at all planned. Because it was very out of our hands because we didn’t have any experience, so it was literally like reaching out to the people who did have experience and saying, “what can we do?” And then obviously because, urm, we were responding essen-essentially in the beginning, to the pandemic. That also evolved without us having much input because we’re we’re responding to different needs as it was changing. So, once it was food, and then after it wasn’t so much food because people could go to foodbanks again. So, in that way there was a lot of kind of task that we did and kind of activities that really wasn’t planned. But I think kind of, this kind of common thread that was running along through it was the kind of core values that we have. Urm, and in that way there were certain things that were planned but it was much more a vague plan, like very, very vague idea of creating this urm… having solidarity, this sense of solidarity at the very heart of everything we do, regardless of kind of what it is. But still keeping in mind the way that we’re doing it. So not just what we’re doing, but the way that we’re doing it was very much about like thinking about the process that were involved. Urm… yeah and thinking about… this… this this difference between a charitable model and… urm… a solidarity model.

**Interviewer:** And urm, have you learned anything from coordinating the group?

**Participant:** So much! So much! Urm… so much, I think… urm… yeah… I think, but I think personally it’s really, really brought to light some strengths that I never knew I had and some weaknesses that I didn’t really want, didn’t rally want to know that I had. So, this whole, its defiantly been a huge, a huge learning curve in in multiple, multiple ways because of this urm… urm… learning not just about myself and how I relate to people. Which again was both the strengths and weaknesses around like leadership in general being a good and bad thing. Where I was impressed that I was able to kind of take initiative because I’ve never done before because I was intimidated by things and people. And actually, being very, very proactive and hard working which were skills that, which were really exemplified in this situation. But then also being aware that I can be quite controlling perhaps, and quite uncooperative and urm this this determination that I’ve got is great because it’s got a lot done, but its also, its also meant that I’ve maybe not thought about the implications of what I’ve been doing.

On a personal level I’ve learnt a lot. But also, a lot about other people, definitely a lot about relationships. Urm, and obviously of course the the the situations of the people that we trying to work with. And the concept of mutual aid itself. Because obviously running alongside our kind of core value was this idea of we need to constantly be checking ourselves and really think about what we’re doing, and how we can be helpful. And that really involved a lot of learning of what mutual aid meant and what the difference, like *why* we’re not working more specifically with the charitable model. And what solidarity really means and… urm... why we’re in this position in the first place, and a lot about politics. And and urr, yeah, the situations of refugees and migrant people and… yeah.

**Interviewer:** So, you make a clear difference between mutual aid and charities, why? What is the, what are the differences?

**Participant:** Well, I actually think urm… well firstly I think there is a difference between charity and charities. And that’s important because I don’t want to be criticising charity generally, urm… when we’ve worked with charities who are incredible and they’ve got this really, really incredible holistic model that doesn’t really, isn’t really representative of the issues I have with the charitable model at all. But I guess the concept of charity is… urm… is really about just… I don’t want to generalise here, I feel a bit bad doing this, but I guess the… the way that we want to work differently is not just be… urm… treating a symptom of a problem. And so, I think sometimes this charitable model just… works on… like giving things to people essentially and supporting people. But kind of like not, not addressing sort of the fundamental issues that create the problem in the first place. It’s almost like addressing a problem and then filling a problem but not really thinking about the kind of whole, and then maybe all of the other elements.

So, for example, this whole idea of donations which is why the other two women kind of separated off is because they didn’t really, really didn’t want to be a group that just gives donations to people. Because the whole concept- the whole idea of that was that…. Thinking about the multiple layers of when you do things, when you’re giving donations to people is its almost like you’re recreating urm… the power dynamic between people. So, there’s this idea you’ve got one, you’ve got this group of people and… they have they have all of these things, like in the form of possessions, but also in the form of power because that relates power often it’s like economic. So, you have people in privileged economic positions and then there, and then you’re, you’re like giving to people what they need but in only doing that I feel like it kind of keeps people in marginalised position because, it just, it just enhances this dichotomy between people that have and people that have not. And this this sense of privileged and keeping this person in this space of like lacking.

And I think what… mutual aid does and what this concept of solidarity does… is looks at the reasons maybe why this person doesn’t have what they need. Because actually it’s almost like – what is a good illustration of the difference actually is this… urm… it’s almost like if you give a man a fish then he can eat for one day, and then if you teach him to fish, then he can eat forever, or something like that. And so, I think the charitable model is almost like constantly giving people fishes and keeping these people like needing something from someone else. And then if you maybe break down the issues and work on the route causes, I think that is more of the way to do it. And just creating equality… you know… that’s, that’s kind of fundamental is this idea that were completely, as human we’re completely equal. So… everyone has something to share, and so its about kind of creating a situation where we can all share and support each other.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so final question, how do see the future of his group?

**Participant:** Urm… I really, really, really would love to see a really big team grow. Urm, I’d love to… meet lots of different people. Urm from the backgrounds that we’ve been trying to get, you know bring out of marginalised positions. I just love to do this whole kind of sharing thing. I’d love, I’d love to have, create space where we’re all kind of learning from each other and enjoying each other and sharing stories and urm… and and and supporting each other, and just become friends really, just create a sense of community but not only with the people who are leading the mutual aid networks but the people who are benefiting from those mutual aid networks.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Participant:** Urm so I guess that sort of sense of community is what I’d really like.

**Interviewer:** How do you see yourself in the group in the future?

**Participant:** Urm… I think I’d really like in the future to really take more of a back seat. Because the whole, the whole idea right from the beginning was to become peer led project. And it’s become – it’s just such a challenge. Urm… so I think really, really in the long, in the long-term I’d like to see myself kind of removed form… managing, removed from… the part of the project that is working and just being able to take a step back and seeing that there is a whole new group of people from these backgrounds and and they’re in this space urm… and just to… yeah. And so... yeah, that’s a what I want. This peer led, for it to be a peer led thing. And just to be friends with people and just kind of see the project go by and be like, “I was a part of that, and now its like, it’s doing what it was meant to do and now it’s being taken off in this whole new direction by the people who should be running it in the first place, you know, because they’re the people who know about these situations.”

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you, I don’t think I have any more questions. Is there anything that you want to add? No? okay.

**[Debriefing]**

**[End of Interview]**