

TOSFOR Interview Transcript

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Interviewers	Abigail Mureva and Sandhya Dave (technician)
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Transcription	Di Cooper

00.35

Q. Thank you for letting us interview you and to learn a bit more about your story living here in Exeter. From the information I got from you, I understand you came to Exeter 35 years ago. What was your first impression of Exeter?

00.52

I came to live in Exeter with my mum when my mum and dad had split up, because my dad was in the Gloucester's Army regiment and we came to live in Bucks Road in Heavitree with another family of the same origin as my parents. We stayed there for a while after leaving London because my mum intended, when my mum and dad split up, that we were going to stay in London in the south, me and two other brothers, but the Council waiting list was 2 years in the late '90s and we had nowhere to live, so we took the option - even though my mum and dad had taken the option of separation - she still had the rights with regards to being in the army to have army accommodation.

So in the late 90's we came to Bucks Road to stay with a family and then we moved to Barrack Road and there was army quarters there for families. We stayed there for a couple of years and then my mum got a Council house in Countess Wear. And my first impressions of Exeter after coming from London was a lot of open space, rural people with different views and ideas of life, but from our point of view as a family, we resided in 20 Highway Road and Devon was different to us especially after living in London where we were in an Afro-Caribbean community coming to a community where we were the only black family living there. So my first impression of Devon was, yes quite nice, and people spoke in a different accent and different speech, but we settled in quite well really.

2.54

Q. How many of you moved down here with your mum?

My eldest brother Cliff who is 47 now obviously myself being 45 and my youngest brother David who is now 44 and I've got a half-brother as well because my mum re-married after my mum and dad divorced - she married a gentleman from Okehampton, so I've got a half-brother who is living in London I think, but I haven't spoken to him for many years.

3.38

My first school I went to was Roman Catholic, because my mum was Roman Catholic and we were brought up as a Roman Catholic family, so I went to a school which is shut now, St Nicholas Roman Catholic school which was along Topsham Road. I went there for the first couple of years and then went to ISCA which was Priory High School at that time.

4.13

Q. So how did you find being in the school, obviously in Exeter there weren't many children from black and ethnic minority - how did they interact with you at school?

4.28

On the primary side it wasn't too bad at St Nicholas, because there were other people there from other cultures - people from Italy, there were pockets of other ethnic groups there as well, so on the primary side I didn't experience it so much. I think **4.57** when I went to secondary school - my eldest brother had gone there and experienced a lot of problems - got himself into a circle of friends which some were very supportive and some were quite discriminatory against him really.

5.16

Q. What kind of problems did you experience?

Well obviously the identity of skin colour which at that time was quite highly publicised in the '90s - black footballers, music and how people could see black people. We were stereotyped really and at times it was quite difficult. But I dealt with things quite different to my brother, he was quite confrontational at times and argumentative whilst I ignored it and carried on regardless and focussed on my education really.

5.41

Q. So you said you had lived in London before - how did you compare the two?

We only lived in London for a short time - I'd say a couple of months really with one of my mum's family from the Seychelles, my Aunty & Uncle, and I think there was not so much open space and everyone was quite confined - we lived in Westminster, **6.31** so it was a bit ... different. When you walked out your door you identified that there were other people the same colour, not that it made much difference to me at a young age, not until I came to Devon. I think Devon opened up my eyes really and that was a good education on how people perceived black people. 'Cos I clearly **6.47** identify myself as black as much as my parents my mum and dad, are both from quite a black dominant family, I am quite light-skinned myself.

Q. Where do you as a family keep strong family ties - Seychelles...?

7.28

My dad lives in Blackpool now in a flat, I communicate with him and my mother lives in Exeter in Countess Wear. I think because I married a Devon girl, I identify Devon as my base really.

Q. Coming from the Seychelles - do you speak any other language?

No.

Q. So what language do they speak in the Seychelles?

7.49

Pigeon French they called it. I've got an Aunty who lives in Hyde Park which is my mum's sister and two cousins as well on my mum's side of the family. On my dad's side of the family, none of the family live in England, they all live in the Seychelles.

8.04

Q. When you finished your primary and secondary education, did you go to college?

8.29

Yes I was quite fortunate. In the 1980s I left Priory High School in 1984 with some good qualifications, and as much as the academic side was a bit of a struggle, I left school with some GCSE's and some good foundation building skills and I went to Exeter College for 4 years I got given a Youth Training Scheme at that time as a mechanical engineer. But I had options when I left school, I was very sport **8.51** orientated, I could have had a trial at Exeter City Football club because I was a very good footballer, or I could have become a bricklayer, or an engineer - and I decided on the option of an engineer, because being indoors and learning and so on. I got a mechanical Engineering Foundation qualification at Exeter College so I was a Maintenance Engineer at Ham Alloys at Sowton, did my apprenticeship there.

9.21

Q. So how many years did you do engineering for?

9.41

It was about a 3 year course, so the first year was full-time at college and then I had a bit of work experience and there was always an academic side at the end of the year and I got a City and Guilds in Mechanical Engineering Levels 1, 2 and 3 so I probably did about 3 years at Exeter College.

10.06

Q. And now you are working as a Youth Worker, so what made you change from engineering to working with children?

10.24

When I moved into Countess Wear - I formed some good relationships with people because with my brothers we played football and there was a local team that was playing in the community and we got involved with that. The real driving point for me really was entering the Youth club, which used to be open about four nights a week and it was quite a good forum for the young people of that community to attend - boys and girls - and I really enjoyed it. Because I didn't have many male role models in my life, I met a Community Tutor at the time and he supported me very well and other youth workers listened to what the young people wanted to do, and high on our agenda was sport, we formed a football team within the community being run by the youth workers and we started off on a Sunday morning playing with the local league, which is still established now, still playing.

But that's how I got involved within the community and quite enjoyed it, many years I spent attending the club and then an opportunity arose just before I was doing my training as an engineer the opportunity arose where they were looking for people to volunteer and, I was getting a little bit older, and I wanted to still keep my link within the club, so I applied for a part-time youth worker's job there, started off as a volunteer, got all my training qualifications and they employed me as a part-time assistant youth worker, as it was then, and I sort of developed my work within the community as well, and enjoyed it, enjoyed the community side of it - it did a lot for me when I was young and I thought I could contribute and give something back into the club and that's how I started my career in youth work really.

12.52

My job involves.. I'm the area youth worker for the Phoenix Club in Wonford District, I've been here since 2003. Prior to that I had had quite a few professional roles, so I was a mechanical engineer at Hallmat and I left and

went to Exeter University to work as a Heating and Ventilation engineer, I just wanted to develop my skills. What drove me there was the actual working days, because I had a very young family at the time.

I went to work at the university and I still kept my youth **13.35** work involved. I met a technician up there - as a maintenance engineer we used to maintain the heating and ventilation system, do general repair work on swimming pools etc and I started some links and went up to the main site and met a technician up there who I got talking to really - a very similar age to me **13.39** and he was asking if, as someone who worked in the community, I ever thought of working with problem children. He said my Dad is a manager of a training centre and if you are interested you might want to come and do youth work, broaden your horizons and work with troubled young people. And I went for an interview at Rifford Road Children's Home (which is still at the end of the road here) **14.11** not very far from where I am working full-time, and I got appointed as a Relief Residential Care Worker, working in children's homes, so when I was finishing work at the university - I was working from 8.30-4.30, I would go in and socialise with the young people and take them out on trips and support them through activities. And the manager who employed me, went to work at the Atkinson Unit as a full-time manager, they decided to extend secure children's homes because of a lot of young people being contained in custody and some of them putting themselves at risk and struggling in that environment of an adult prison, so they extended the bed - the bed ratio funding is from 8 to 16 beds, and obviously from extended there was an opportunity for a full-time role. I was still working at the university at the time and really wanted to do some form of training to broaden my horizons rather than just being an engineer.

I went for an interview at the Atkinson Unit, the old Northbrook place, where the swimming pool is still located, and got offered a job as a residential social worker. That meant that I could leave the university and I went up there to work. I spent 7 pleasurable years working at the Atkinson Children's Unit, it was really enjoyable, met a lot of young people and formed some good relationships with people I still have contact with now **16.17** all dotted around the U.K. I thoroughly enjoyed myself working at the Atkinson Unit, great opportunity and great progression for my development.

I stayed there for about 7 years and then an opportunity arose working in the community in 2003 to work as an Area Youth Worker, but in training, that was then it used to be part of the Youth Education Scheme. Devon County Council sponsored me to go to Marjohns in Plymouth and I did a three year diploma in youth and community studies **17.13** which I found very interesting, at times very challenging, but I qualified after three years and I was still working and training and being a worker here. So I was working full-time as well as training at Marjohns and that was about 10 years ago. And now with the restructure I am now managing the Phoenix Club and the 100 Club, which is quite interesting really, because when I went for the interview on the restructure they decided to keep me within the community and I am one of the fortunate workers that works within the same ward, my centres are not very far from each other. **17.59**

Q. So from a social point of view, where do the young people you work with come from?

Well they are all based within the area, Topsham, Countess Wear, Wonford, Heavy Tree, Exeter p they are just attracted by word of mouth and this club traditionally has been a very well attended club and our numbers range from 60 to 150 young people attending this club - the majority are dotted around the Exeter area, it's quite a popular club.

Q. And within the club, do you get to see young people from black and ethnic minorities?

Yes, the majority of the people who come here are from mixed race and some of them moved down from other parts of England for personal reasons. Not a high percentage, only a small percentage of ethnic minorities that come here.

Q. And what do they feel about the club?

I think they adapt, young people become very adaptable in the way they are - their identity and stereotyping. When I think about when I first came here I never had any issues regarding my colour with the young people. There were issues but I think I was very accepted here and I think due to my history of me going to school with the parents of some of the siblings who are here, most of the parents knew who I was and I had a good relationship with them anyway.

Q. So what challenges do you think these young people from ethnic minorities might face generally today in Exeter?

I think a lot of that has to do with the media **20.19** I think the media has a lot of influence on young people - how they think, how they perceive things. I still think that people have still got this mind-set about people still coming over to this country and taking-over jobs, be it black or Polish or any ethnic group. So we do a lot of work around personal identity and discriminatory actions, homophobic views. I think most of them are quite accepted, and I think a lot of that is due to most of them not being treated different by a full-time worker. We've had very minimal incidents of a racial aspect from the young people here. **21.04** I think I have experienced that more as a full-time worker, rather than the young people really.

Q. You were brought up as a Catholic - do you feel...?

No, I don't. Why not? I think my mum was very regimented, from her upbringing it was instilled in her, it got to the degree where we'd be going to church on Sundays and all our friends were in the park, and we were all dressed up smart - most of our friends accepted it, we took a bit of banter from it, but after we left school, my mum still went to church and I supported my mum's beliefs, but decided that.. my oldest child was christened in the Roman Catholic church and my ex-partner wasn't very religious in herself, only perceived church to go to for funerals, weddings and baptisms or christenings. But it's not something I've sort of followed through on. It's not something I promoted with my own children.

Q. Are there any festivals etc that you practise in your family?

No. Only the British season of Christmas and Easter and New Year's Eve.
No, nothing culturally that we actually practice. **22.48** or follow.

Q. So being from the Seychelles - even though you are British - does your family still have contact?

Yes, my mother has a good relationship with a brother. Obviously her mother and father have only recently passed away and I've met my grandparents. I've never been over to the Seychelles, something that I'd love to do. I'd love to take my children over there and revisit our roots, but unfortunately the cost side of it... it's too expensive, but it's always something that I wanted to do. **23.24** Even though my mum and dad's relationships were very distant, I'd still like to go and visit my dad's family. And I spoke to my dad only recently and he's considering going to live in the Seychelles. He's got quite a large family over there, as well as my mum's. I've met my mum's brother, he frequently comes over, he is a builder over in the Seychelles and his wife is a teacher. It would be a nice holiday, it's just the cost side...

Q. So there's no special life for your mum, groups from the Seychelles...?

No, I just think my Mum has sorted adapted to society, I don't she has lost her identity as to who or where she is. She has got quite a lot of close friends with ethnic backgrounds as well, not just from the Seychelles. She has a friend from Malaysia who lives in the community as well, only lives up the road from her and she's got children with an English gentleman.

Q. So which part of Exeter do you love?

Countess Wear and Topsham.

Q. Why is that - because you live there?

24.48 I think it's got a lot of memories for me, you know as a young person moving there, Mum is still living there. Very close community, made a lot of friends, still see a lot of my friends' families. Got really good family links, as much as them all being white British people.

Q. What do you really like about the city?

What do I like most about Exeter? Access to where you want to go is quite easy - if you want to travel anywhere, if you want to go to the sports club, shopping it's not very far you're not commuting very far. I like the scenery as well - I think the scenery of Exeter is very nice. I think there is a lot of open space, you can walk somewhere..

Q. So being from a different background, does your diet still feel British?

Well, I was very lucky, I was brought up with one of the best cooks and my mother still goes over and brings her curry powder from the Seychelles and goes to London.. When I left living with my mum, I went down to the fish & chips, and the roast dinners. But I love Indian curries, I'd taste any foods.

26.47 Actually going to the Exeter Respect Festival was interesting, very tasty because there were a variety of dishes around. I use the usual take-aways and I shop normally, but I do like spicy food.

Q. Where do you shop for things that remind you of Seychelles?

At me mum's house! She gets it all! I think my mum shops a lot at Dart's - the quality of meat is different. With regard to any cultural food, I think she uses Marks and Spencers. I wouldn't dream of going there because it's a bit expensive. Me, I just use the local shops - One Stop, Liddls, Tesco's in a blue moon.

Q. Do you play any sport now?

When I first came to the Phoenix Club, we had quite a few problems and I always reflected on what it was like when I was young, people giving me the opportunity, so I had to be very creative in what I was going to do, so I offered the young people something that was familiar to me, sport, so I said what do you want to do. Sat them all in here and said "what would you like to do"? I said I thought respect was very important, and I thought that without boundaries it wouldn't occur. I thought that as much as it was labelled as a deprived community around here, when I went into a youth club when I was young I was educated in respecting the elders, if you had issues regarding people, you voiced them in a diplomatic manner.

I think society changed so much from when I was young, the respect for people **29.14** especially in this community had gone down hill. The police were having trouble as well, trying to accommodate young problematic people. I captured the views of the young people - as a youth leader I listened to them, I supported them in what they wanted to do. We set up a football project which was very successful in this community, we started off at the sports centre and won league title and we did really well. It got to the point where the facilities here were not adequate for my team to progress due to restrictions on the premises.

We've got a very good reputation the Phoenix Club as a football club within the community **30.02** in general. So it was very easy to set up a project so many young talented people. I just support them to this day now. Due to the restructure of my job changing, I had to stop the sort of coaching element of what I was doing, but kept my senior team that had been with me from the age of 16 and now we've moved over to a proper football club now which is based in Topsham town. I'm the actual manager there now of the football team which has four teams, ladies teams and youth teams, so I'm senior manager there. I'm fortunate that my players have been very loyal to me and enjoy my company, and I've supported them very well. So I'm enjoying that challenge at the moment. There's so much opportunity to develop.

Q. Well it seems that your young people are very loyal to you, why is that?

Because I've always been there to support them. There have been difficult times, and I always remember when I was growing up having difficult problems in life, and experiencing problems of not being employed **31.19**

really struggling, having a lot of health problems as well. And I think they've always been loyal to me because I've always been fair to them and supported them, and we've always been successful. Initially, it was difficult, but they've enjoyed it and always come back. I've made a lot of friends through football.

Q. Do you work in a team or have other people working with you?

We've got other teams in Exeter as well, I work with an area youth worker, we've also got street provision as well. Now we've just amalgamated with Exeter East and Devon teams, with Exmouth, Sidmouth, Exminster, Honiton so we've all become one service working within the Exeter East and Mid team due to the instructor.

Q. Media-wise, what do you like to watch on TV?

I always like to watch 'Old School'. When I was growing up **32.34** the media covered a lot of Grange Hill and it had a really good base of people from communities, there was a good balance and I think Grange Hill was something I watched a lot when I was young. A lot of sport as well, a bit of Coronation Street because my mum used to like watching that. Anything that bears resemblance to what is happening in society, popular films always interested me.

Q. So which teams do you support?

I am Tottenham Hotspurs fan and I'm very proud of that.

Q. How does one become a supporter? Because I am always intrigued people from mid Africa supporting Manchester United!

While I was quite lucky - when I went to the Youth Club, the 100 Club, the community education leader was Tottenham Hospurs fan and I remember he got tickets to watch them play at Wembley and because I had supported them well, he asked me if I wanted to go up with him. **33.39** and I said yeh, I'd love to. And I just got captured with the Tottenham Hospurs fans. I've been up to White Hart Lane and I've taken young people from this youth club to White Hart Lane, I've followed them quite closely. Steve Perriman, he's linked with Exeter City - I've met Steve Perriman. I just enjoy it, I like that team. But I also like going to other arenas, it's not just all about Tottenham, I've been to Old Trafford, been to Goodeson Park, Aston Villa.

Q. Have you ever been to Exeter City?

Yes, I've got a very good relationship with Exeter City, but they've always been very supportive of us down here at the club. A few of our members have gone through their apprenticeship **34.37** In Group 1 there is a professional footballer there who did really well. So yes I have a very good relationship with Exeter City.

Q. there is a lot of media reports of racism in sport now, what do you think of that?

Well I was always educated that sport is a good opportunity to bring people together, never bring politics into sport. I think they've come such a long way with kicking racism out of sport **35.02** but it's still evident. It's only the minority that spoil it for the majority. I think all the work they have done has been great and I think the recent events on telly have been more highlighted - it needs to be dealt with. And I've experienced that as an amateur footballer as well **35.38** More in rural settings, I experienced that on a football pitch, chucked bananas as a young age, and I always rose above it and let the football do the speaking. Whereas my brother always took a different reaction, he was more confrontational and very opinionated. I always let the ball do the talking and I was a very good athlete and made friends through being quite talented really in the sport of football. I also captained Devon as well.

Q. So what other aspects of racism did you experience, do you see within sport, football you work with?

From my point of view, growing up in white society, people just felt they could jester and say things about you, you know and I think that was down to a bit of media confusion with 'Mind your Language' you know and I think anyone who was black was still being perceived as being lower class, we've always been seen as lower class minority really. And again I think the media had a lot of influence on that. But a lot of things that really made people aware was when the riots happened, because a lot of people were standing up and feeling they were being oppressed **37.14** in society and I think that drew people from different cultures together saying "yeh, you think you are being victimised, and we'll support you on that". And I think that as much as the whites cause a lot of problem to people, we are living in a multicultural society and perhaps we need to start considering other people's views.

Q. So where you lived, did you experience racism in your community?

Oh yes, when I was growing up, very much so when I was growing up. People calling you names that they wouldn't be able to call you now. And it was quite flagrant. **38.09**

Q. Were there any people you could tell?

Nobody really, apart from talk to your mother and my mother didn't really need the burden of that. And that was quite good being able to go to a youth club and talk to other people about it, talking to the youth workers, to my peers. And teachers as well, teachers were very supportive at the time. **38.27**

Q. So what names were you called.

They used to call me chalky, wog, nigger was a word used quite a lot especially with the 'Roots' programme - people watching that on telly and making comments "you deserve to be chained up", but I think a lot of that was determined by the media as well, you see. As much as that was quite a good education story for a lot of people - the "Roots" chapter, and I thoroughly enjoyed that. But I think media had a lot of influence of communities and people's views. **39.14** There were still a lot of people who were ingrained on how they saw black people living in the community.

Q. So which kind of area did your mum experience racism?

I think more through us, bringing three boys up as a single mother, if we did something wrong where parents were banging on the door and lecturing to my mother about 'you lot, you shouldn't be living here, you should be going back, go back to your own country' you know. **39.47**

Q. Do you notice now that things have moved on since your generation?

Of yes, considerably, people are aware they can't say things they could say 10 or 15 years ago.

Q. Talking about identities, how do you identify yourself?

I am black British. I've no problem ticking a form, you know. At times I put 'black other' but I identify myself as being Black British. I was born in Wrexham in Wales, never resided there for a while. One of my brothers was born in Germany, Berlin, **40.41**, one was born in Torquay and my half brother was born in Devon, Exeter.

Q. So how would you answer the question "where are you from?"

Where am I from? I am from the United Kingdom. Not England, the United Kingdom.

Q. What message would you like to give to Exeter people?

To everybody in Exeter, or to the minority groups in Exeter? To everyone. To minority groups and everyone I would say that times are very difficult at the moment. If anyone offers you the opportunity to express your aspirations in life, take them forward, do something for yourself, make yourself and your family proud of who you are. **41.39**

Q. What would you like to change about Exeter?

I personally think we should have a festival every month - I think there should be a cultural festival and something going on for all cultures every month. Not Exeter Respect, which is a brilliant event for two days that is. I think there should be more cultural events for not only black minorities, but for everyone for the British people as well. I think we should celebrate Christmas every day.

Q. What do you think that would do for people?

People would interact more, there doesn't seem to be a lot of community cohesion nowadays, community spirit. It's very institutionalised, part of a club, you're in a pub and people don't socialise together - groups and families. And I think that is something that I really enjoyed when I was young and I think there should be more going on. **43.00** Like fetes, festivals, little events like variety shows. But now unfortunately there is a cost to everything now and people are determined to...

Q. I think we are coming to the end of our interview now, but just going back to the beginning, must being nosy - how did your parents meet?

Obviously my parents lived in the Seychelles and I think my dad was a police officer there and my mum was very young when she met my dad. And he left there and decided to go to join the Gloucester's. My dad's father was Chinese and his mother was Sychellois and my mum's parents were both of black origin, but my dad is very light in his skin, he looks very Chinese but his mother was a very dark lady but his dad was Chinese and very fair skinned, so that's probably why I've coloured ? but my mum was very dark. **44.28**

Q. Is there anything you want to say?

I've got 4 beautiful children from my first marriage; I'm not married at the moment, my eldest daughter is 23 at the moment, she's 24 this month and she's working, she's a hairdresser, and the next daughter she's 22 and works as a dental technician in training. My youngest son is only in part-time employment, he's 20 and he works for the City Council and my baby who is 15, he's still at Isca at school and I think they all enjoy it. But I don't think they experienced what I did when I was young - IK am glad to a point, and that's due to the laws changing. I think they would define themselves as British and they are very light skinned as well. My eldest daughter resembles more my family and the youngest one is more like me, but you can tell they are of ethnic origin. I think they enjoy living in Devon, they've got a lot of good family support that works well. I think that's quite important for them, and for me, really. As a father that does everything that you can for your own children really and they're lovely, they're lovely.

Q. Thank you very much John. You have such an interesting story, I hope it goes to help us with our project.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.