

Transcript of interview with Sonia Quintero, 12 June 2018

00:00

From Colombia, living in London for 12 years; first arrived in Croydon, 4 years ago moved to Stratford; worked in a company, volunteered in Newham; now volunteer job became the paid job; creating community groups: poetry / creative writing; with some knowledge of English, started a poetry group, successful, many people come; 'we start to organise an open mic, spoken word[02:20-30]'; fixed group members; weekly poetry groups in Stratford, in Green St, and in East Ham; everyone has different styles and needs, some have solid background in writing, some never write before;

03:00

Consider self as a poet not a teacher; activities to feel safe and confident, and then start to write; when moved to east London, have more knowledge about London and life here, and about herself; special about east London: the support she gained in her project; the area changes, near Olympic park; when living in South, came here to visit, cycling; 90% different;

06:00

'Since I have been living here for the last 4 years, has changed even more ...'[05:57-06:01]; positive and negative changes; unsafe now in some way; rich area in Westfield, Olympic park, buildings with expensive flats; also area quite poor; gap is more obvious, not so much when just arrived; positive: 'people are more receptive about community groups'[07:20-07:25], no help from the government, so support each other; different groups in last 3 years all have been very successful; people have mental health issues like loneliness and depression, groups will help them feel powerful; community is strengthened because of the changes; environment is changing, people 'back to the basic thing that is know your neighbour, know who is around and support each other'[08:41-08:48]

09:00

Prices of the flat are high; 2 or 3 blocks of flat; hundreds of thousands pounds, unaffordable; not local people live there; try to focus in the present, help people now, for seniors and children; used to volunteer in a community centre; closed, moved to volunteer in the Stratford library; the library is very supportive; East London is artistic, active;

12:00

How to get the group started: apply for a grant, £150, talk with people, leaflet; first two months, only one person; library provides free coffee; from the second month, more people come; now 25 people every week; when first five years, forgetting about writing and poetry, but trying hard to learn the language and be here get involved; years later, want to get connected again with what she loves; in this area, it is easier for her to stay and do things she loves, for longer; published a book; amazed by how talented people are, even those without previous experience can write beautiful poems; book launched in Jan, work for it for 2 years, to put people with different backgrounds in the same place; work in a team

15:00

Big achievement; the library and the council help, financially; everyone believes we can do this; change others' life with the thing you love doing; print 200 copies, free to the community in the library; not to sell; money is not only thing; people from 12-80 years old; 26 poems; everyday, cycle

around; work, study, and live local in East London; best thing: cycle line, Greenway and blue line; have a good university and college;

18:00

Library is good; work in libraries; many activities for free in the community; couldn't go forward in the colleges in Croydon; Newham College, welcoming; help go to university, help open doors (resources) that she didn't realise they exist; giving something back to community; the community have challenges but also potential to grow; now finished 1st year in university, major in psychosocial;

21:00

Received three university offers, but chose here to be local; quality of life; every single journey no longer than half an hour by bike or one-hour walking; not often go to central London; many events, in library, community here, active; everything wants to do can find it in east London; poetry very popular; and art; many groups like dance group, T. S. Eliot, poetry writing, creative writing, many different groups in every single library; in arts there is no difference; in group, different people in different nationalities, different languages, everyone is welcome;

24:00

Polish, Romanian, Cantonese; talk in English; difficult to write in English if it is not the first language; write in mother tongue; explain in English; can read it in mother tongue; creating writing in different languages is difficult; flexible in language; write about mental health issues, philosophical, life, challenges, identity crisis; sometimes write something turned out not be idiomatic in English, even though grammatically right;

27:00

Understand better how difficult for English people to try to understand others; mental health in community and nowadays in society; write from the perspective of the family and friends of someone suffering with mental health; learn in the group how difficult it is as it is not visible; only when you approach the person you can get some ideas;

30:00

How to help through the art (more about writing); use the skills and what loves to do to help others who are suffering, or their families and friends; miss home country at the same time love the place now; one foot here, one foot back there; nice feeling to be able to know another culture and be a part of community and positive impact; 'you can create the community that you want to live in'[32:30-32:33];

33:00

Government can help, the community needs everyone to contribute; to be part of this area; this area also makes me to want to stay here; if try, we can have the community that love to live in; many difficulties, but need to try; love East London, many challenges here, but have many talents; people are more aware of the challenges and responsibilities needed to go through; need to be together, know and support each other, and work together

35:16 audio ends.