Date: **09/07/2021**

Interviewer: **Brigitte**

Interviewee: **Allan**

Allan is a Park Champion who had a life changing experience after volunteering in the Olympic Games in 2012 which led him to travel all over the world as a Park Champion for various Olympic Games in countries such as Brazil, Russia and also South Korea. He shares his stories and experiences during that time.

Interviewer
Okay, the date today is Friday, the ninth of July 2021, and my name is Brigitte and I'm a Park Champion, and I shall be interviewing Allan today, also a Park Champion, as part of the Oral History Project on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Hi, Allan, and thank you for taking part in this project.

Interviewee
It's a real pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Interviewer
My first question is really, when did you first get involved with the volunteer program at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park?

Interviewee
So, I think it was December 2017 and you know, I may be standing corrected, but I know I did my training in the winter with Ian, a very cold evening, and then I started volunteering in 2018. So, actually, I think it was 2017. So, I started volunteering in 2018 and I did a lot of different kind of roles and sessions in the Park in 2018.

Interviewer
Were you involved with the Olympic Games in 2012?

Interviewee
I was involved in the Olympic Games as a spectator, because I tried to go to as many events as I could and I literally went to about 20 or 25 different events, but then I was involved as a volunteer in the Paralympics. So, I was assigned to, as a National Paralympic Committee assistant to Team South Africa and I am from South Africa so there was a real honor to do that. Working in the Village, with the management team, and the athletes and everybody. So yeah, three and a half weeks of life changing experience.

Interviewer
And what was your experience like? What what were the highlights of that experience for you?

Interviewee

Yeah I mean, every day was different, you know, working with a really fantastic and wonderful group of people, both the volunteers, and also the delegation, and just, you know, experiencing life in the Village and working in such a major event and also, just being involved in, in London 2012, the whole thing for me, there was a real buzz, there was a real excitement, and something I'll never ever forget. And, you know, I keep telling people that really was life changing for me, and it truly was, because, you know, I just saw a different self, part of myself, I think I became a better human being coming out of it, to be honest.

Interviewer
That's lovely. The, the reasons why you became a Games Maker, were… what sort of reason so why did you want to become one?

Interviewee
When Barcelona '92, I kind of thought to myself, "will I ever get to, you know, an Olympic or Paralympic Games?", and I missed the opportunity Barcelona in '92, and when it came to London, I was absolutely determined that I was going to be involved in some way, you know, obviously not competing, that would be nice, but so when the call for volunteers came out, you know, I just jumped at the opportunity. I was working full time in the City at the time for an investment bank, so I couldn't take off too much time, but I did so, rather than doing the Olympics and the Paralympics, I chose just to do the Paralympics, and that was just an amazing experience. So yeah, so my reason for getting involved is, you know, my home city, my hometown, I just wanted to be part of it.

Interviewer
Wonderful! What was your prior knowledge of the area before you took part as a volunteer, as a Games Maker?

Interviewee
So, I knew Stratford reasonably well, because I had a few clients at you know, in the '90s and '00s, I had a few clients that were based, you know, around the Stratford kind of area, some of them in the high rise buildings, some of them in the local council, so I used to travel out to Stratford, but I didn't really know Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park very well. I mean, I had a client at, and I forget the name of the station, but it was you know, I remember getting a taxi there once and it was very hard to get a taxi back because it just wasn't a very easy place to get to, so I didn't know Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park itself very well where the Park is now, you know, that whole derelict area. I didn't know that very well, but I did know Stratford.

Interviewer
I take it you're, are you a local to the area?

Interviewee
Yeah, I mean, at the time, I was living in 2012, I was living in Hertfordshire, but I lived for many years in the Isle of Dogs. So, you know, I saw Canary Wharf go up, I was part of that kind of initial group. Not really sure. But I was living out there. When my kids were really small. I was living in the Isle of Dogs just near Canary Wharf.

Interviewer
That's not very far as it really?
What was your human experience as a Games Maker? You said you were part of the South African area in the East Village.

Interviewee
So, the human side, it was experiencing firsthand the highs and the lows of a very professionally run team, you know, the coaches, the Chef De Mission, the deputies, the administrative people, the physios and the athletes, and seeing on a day-to-day basis, because we used to go in there seven in the morning and spend the whole day with them, and you know, doing whatever they wanted us to do. Sometimes we drive the Chef De Mission out to the cycling, or something like that, or some days we just take them to South Africa House or other days we arrange for them to go to a restaurant or most days, we just go with them to the various events seeing their athletes. So, the human side for me was really experiencing firsthand, a fairly well-oiled machine, but also having to deal with stresses and strains and unexpected stuff and injuries. One of the lasting memories for me was one of the long jumpers. A young lady who obviously had been training very hard for it, and she picked up a small injury and as a result she couldn't continue competing. The disappointment and you know, her family were there, and just the disappointment seeing that for me was like, wow, they worked so hard and then a small thing, trips them up, but then also the tribulation of the people who, you know, the swimmers did very well, the cyclists did very well, the athletes, you know, did very well, they all did very well and, you know, not just really medals, but just the courage and the competitiveness, particularly for the Paralympics, I mean that there for me was the human side, as I said, I think I really grew as a person coming out of that, personally.

Interviewee
What was your impression of the East Village at the time?

Interviewee
Yeah, I mean, again, I'd never experienced anything like it before. It was incredibly well run, and you know, it was really a comfortable place for the teams, you could see why they build the villages, because they want to remove any distractions, you know, and part of our job was to protect them from, you know, other volunteers trying to get autographs or photographs, because you need to make them feel really comfortable, and no distractions. So, the Village itself, I thought, was incredibly well run, well laid out. I mean, I guess it's a cookie cutter thing. They do this every time. So, they know very well, how to structure the Village and all the different areas, etc. But yeah, I thought it was incredibly well run and you know, for such a nice location as well, because there, it’s right close by, the main Stadium and the Olympic Park where most of the events were. So yeah, I was really impressed with the way the whole Village was put together and ran through all the professional stuff. The thing for me was quite different in the village, which people who don't work in the Village don't initially experience is they have these welcoming ceremonies for the various teams from various countries. So back-to-back, you know, every half an hour, there's a welcoming ceremony of two or three countries together. It runs over a period of

about three or four days, and you know obviously we get very involved in our own country's preparations, and you know, participating in it, where the Mayor of the Village and the Head of the Delegation exchanged gifts and that's quite special, I'd never ever seen that before, and you don't really see that on television, I don't think they really cover on television, but it is quite a special thing, to see how they all embrace it, and you know, the excitement around that and that's all before the Games starts. So that's like a week before the Games start. So, for me, that was, you know, part of running the Village was the welcoming ceremonies as well.

Interviewer
And seeing all the connections being established isn't it exciting? I wanted to ask you your impression of the actual architecture and the design of the Olympic Village at the time, it's obviously changed things.

Interviewee
Yeah so because I didn't know the area before, I had no idea of what was there before really. So, what they had to knock down, I mean, I've seen pictures of how they've had to knock a whole lot of stuff down and everything, but I liked that kind of modular design and the fact that, you know, even the rooms were designed so that they could put in you know, washing machines and stuff, there was no cookers and that there was space for all of that clearly with the future in mind because we did actually, before the athletes arrived, we had to go around all the rooms and you know put the gifts down and made sure the everything was, you know hang the flags and all the other paraphernalia that you hang around. So, we actually got a really good idea of what the rooms and the, you know, the various open spaces look like as well. So, for example, I've got some photographs from the right at the top of some of the buildings looking down into the Park one day I want to try and get back in there, and kind of super impose or maybe, you know, compare and contrast the, just the aerial view from, you know when we were there which, was it was quite bare, you know basic what it looks like now. Yeah, kind of then and now kind of thing. So yeah, sorry, your question was about the architecture. It was, you know, very well planned. Laid out in the center was the kind of main admin thing, the medical clinic was nearby, everything was quite nearby. The workforce, the dining right next to the kind of back-to-back to the actual athletes dining, the transport hub, you know, the Ceremonies area, the entrances, etc. It was very, very well designed, and you know, we were drivers as well so we had to pick up people from the driving area also just the security and I mean, I don't know if you have some questions about security, but I thought the security was incredibly well done. It was quite amazing.

Interviewer
Did they have to make, I suppose you'd have to make any special adaptation for the Paralympics, inside the flats?

Interviewee
Yeah exactly. So, I never saw the, not just inside of the flats, but I never saw the Village before the Paralympics arrived but when we were part of a kind of advanced delegation, there are two or three of us that had to go in and meet the Deputy Chef De Mission on two or three days before the athletes arrived and they were still working in the Village on, you know, more accessible ramps, for example, not a lot of changes, but they did make some changes to the kind of streets and everything to provide more

accessibility stuff and then the rooms themselves, you know, the wheelchair athletes were all based on the ground floor, for example so there was quite a clever way of doing it and then and we did have, you know, we had a wheelchair basket basketball team so there were quite a few wheelchair users, and also the, the, the cycling athletes, but they were all based on the ground floor, which I thought was quite a smart thing to do. The only thing I would say is the lifts used to get quite busy because you know, everybody came out at the same time, there was sometimes a bit of a queue at the lifts but I think that's, you know, that happens when you have lots of people at the same time at one place.

Interviewer
Did you manage to attend any events yourself during the course of whole summer?

Interviewee
Everything. I mean the Olympics as I said when the ticket initial application went out, I think I applied for about 20 or 30 different tickets, I got most of them. So, I had a big cash flow problem! But I handed it off to my children and my wife when I was working but then for the Paralympics, we pretty much went to most of the events because you know, we'd go to swimming in the morning with the team, we'd go to the kind of whatever's going on in the afternoon and then we go to the athletics in the evening. So, I was going to many days two or three different events with the, you know, as supporting the teams. So also I was a driver for the cyclists and for about four or five days, the competition was taking place down in Brands Hatch, so I used to drive them out every morning, six o'clock in the morning and come back about seven, eight o'clock at night, spend the whole day with them at Brands Hatch so, you know, obviously saw all those events as well. But you know none of us, there were six of us in our team, and none of us want to take our day off because you're just having such an amazing time. So, I think I was forced to take one day off because I was at a School Governors, I had a School Governors meeting. I was Chair of Finance at a School Governors meeting, which I had to attend. So, I did take the one day off!

Interviewer
It sounds an incredibly busy time, but very rewarding?

Interviewee
Yeah, it was brilliant. I mean, it was just as I said, in the summer of 2012 no one will ever forget that it was amazing.

Interviewer
Absolutely. Now you obviously, you've been back to the Park since those Games, and what kind of notable change have you seen at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park since then?

Interviewee
Oh my goodness - It's just been an amazing transformation and everything for me is positive. You know the fact that we've got big open spaces, the new buildings, the architecture, and the fact that it's full of people and children going swimming, during school term. I mean, that's one thing I really love when I'm at the Info Point is to see-in the groups of children coming in, using the Olympic swimming pool as their local swimming pool, I mean that's so special. So for me the transformation has been quite magical,

actually and I know it was all planned. I remember looking at the kind of long-term vision thing, 10-year, 20-year plan, before the Games even started and thinking, “wow, this is very ambitious” and you know, we'd heard about what happened in some of the other countries in terms of, you know, not fully using their spaces and I thought it was very ambitious, and I mean, I'm not sure I need to go back and look, but I suspect we've surpassed all expectations, because for me it just looks absolutely wonderful and I know, when Stratford first opened, when Westfield opened, I had some colleagues at work saying that was going to be a big, you know, elephant thing, it was never going to work and I said “just come there and have a look, you know, just experience it.” And, you know, everything just seemed to fit together quite well. I know there's some local opposition, and there was, but hopefully people are coming around to embracing it and understanding that it's, you know, it's for everybody. I think that's the other thing I would say is the transformation, it's not exclusive, you do feel that everybody can participate and be involved and just enjoy a day out in the Park, basically.

Interviewer
How often do you come to the Park?

Interviewee
Quite a lot actually. I mean, in lockdown it's kind of on borderline in terms of how far are we allowed to travel? But my wife and I and our dog did go out a few times. Probably half a dozen times. I love going to the Park, you know, winter, summer, any time of the year. I really do enjoy it.

Interviewer
What’s your favourite part of the Park?

Interviewee
Favourite part of the Park? Well, that's a good question. I think the Info Point!

Interviewer
Come on, you can do better than that!

Interviewee
I think just outside the Info Point, when you look around you, and you see the Stadium, you see The London Aquatics Center, you see The London Stadium or the athletic stadium, you can see The Lee Valley VeloPark in the distance, you can see, you know, Westfield Stratford City. Just standing outside that area looking around. I think yeah, my favourite, I mean my favourite maybe relates back to best experiences as well. I mean, the Village was special to me, but the Village is so different now so I think if you asked me my favourite part, I would say probably, you know, the Lee Valley VeloPark is very special, the London Aquatics Centre is very special and The London Stadium is very special, but I think just standing outside between say the Info Point and The London Aquatics Center, and then just kind of looking around, that would be my favourite place and that just brings back so many happy memories.

Interviewer
Have you used The London Aquatics center yourself, have you been swimming there?

Interviewee
Do you know what? I haven't, and I can kick myself for not taking my swimming costume when I've been on duty there and I know a lot of people, I look at Kerry who serves on a regular basis, and I'm always jealous when she's there and some other people as well, but it's definitely on my list of things to do but I want to go with my family. I want to go with my children and my wife, and you know, go as a group. I can't remember if you have to, I think you have to book, I don't know, maybe it's different in lockdown, but it's very high on my list of things to do.

Interviewer
It's the same here, it's high on my list.

Interviewee
Well, maybe I'll see you there!

Interviewer
Yes! I wanted to ask you, can you describe your role as a Park Champion now?

Interviewee
Yeah, so in the first year I did a lot of different shifts because I was kind of just moving on from a full-time job to kind of being my own boss, so I had a lot of flexibility, so I think it was during 2019 or 2018 I did, you know I was, I was there just about every other week, you know, working with Ian, and Paul, and Alison and Gabi was just joining I think and you know, it was a lot of fun. But then 2019 my kind of role changed. I was doing a lot of travelling overseas, and also doing a lot of volunteering overseas actually, so I didn't have that much free time funnily enough, and then of course 2020 is very different, but in terms of describing my role as a Park Champion, I mean, I think it's quite special for me. I know there's quite a lot of us, but I do feel whenever I go there, I feel quite special because you know, I, I've got so much to learn and I know that I know very experienced people who know everything about the Park, people like Pat, I love going around with Pat, but it's quite special just being involved and having the opportunity to, you know, share some of your enthusiasm and knowledge about the place and, you know, I do need to probably spend, and I haven't really volunteered that much obviously in the last year. I think I did two sessions last year, just when we had a bit of the restrictions lifted, but I, you know, I'm chomping at the bit, I'm ready to get involved again, would love to be back again. I was just, I was, this was my last, the boxing [Boxing Road To Tokyo – European Qualifiers] was the last thing I did there and then the week before I was doing the, you know, the driverless vehicle trial thing, and so that was quite small. It was only a few of us involved in that but yeah, I do, I do feel quite privileged, quite special when I'm involved as a Park Champion - love it.

Interviewer
So, you've been involved in Tesla [interviewer meant Capri] testing, isn't it? The electric car?

Interviewee
Electric cars, that's it.

Interviewer
Are you involved in any of the Community Guiding, the butterfly, the biodiversity initiatives, things like that?

Interviewee
Yeah, Brigitte you know I haven't been. The only thing I did, which is slightly different from supporting events, is we cleared out the river one time so that's kind of environmental and that was a lot of fun. It was quite hard work, but it was a lot of fun. But I haven't done the butterfly counting or the photography, or the community thing. I am quite keen to be involved in that, particularly the kind of guiding, taking people around so I need to do the training to kind of, you know, just make sure I'm up to date on everything, but yeah, I'm keen to get involved in that.

Interviewer
What's the best part of you being a volunteer? Is it the human side, is it being out in the Park?

Interviewee
I mean, for me, when I finish a shift, and I look back on the shift, and I, you know, whether it's been a great shift or not, is the interaction with other people. So I love it when you're able to communicate and talk to people and I'm a buggy driver as well so that's quite special when you're taking a whole family or group around. I can remember one year, one time I had a family from Hong Kong. I think it was five or six of them and I think the mother or father had mobility, kind of challenges, and, you know, they all jumped on the buggy and we had a wonderful time. I mean, we took maybe, took a little bit longer but we took them and we did it in the hour, but you know that for me is quite special, but I think it's the human interaction and also when it's quiet, just chatting to the other Park Champions, because you learn so much more about everybody else and everybody's got an interesting life and story to tell, and yeah, yes jokes. I mean, we all know Ian's jokes and they are quite good but it's just the interaction with the people who visit the Park, but also with the Park Champions and just being back in a place that I have so many good, very good memories from.

Interviewer
Do you take some of your more distant relatives when you have visits? Is it on your list of things to visit when we know when they come and visit London, obviously not in the last 18 months, but prior to that.

Interviewee
I have taken people there and I've sent people to the Info Point and everything I mean; I have a, my sister-in-law who lives in Manchester, she has special needs and she is also not very mobile and she's, one of my kind of dreams would be one day to support her on a buggy drive around the Park, because you know she's heard us speak about, my wife was also quite heavily involved in the Games and Paralympics, she was a Torch Bearer, she carried the torch in the Paralympics, because she's, because her job is, she was the Head Teacher school for children with special needs, but her sister has special needs and you know, I look forward to the day, and I hope it's soon where we can bring her and her fiancé now, also has special needs, to the Park put them on a buggy because they don't walk very much, and just drive them around.

Interviewer
What's your impression of the Park as it is now with the other, I know you've talked about how amazing and it's very positive and things happen, what's your impression now as you come and visit it, there are so many aspects of the Park that are evolving, and part of the plan and some is going ahead, you know, quite sooner than later. It's quite amazing, but how do you see these parts evolving in, you know, yeah, terms of the urban life or 21st century city living?

Interviewee
Yeah, so it's ever changing and you know, as you said, there's a lot of developments going on and roadworks and buildings and everything but I mean, there is a big plan and I, you know, I love the idea that there's going to be a lot of young people there. There are university campuses, and there's a whole mix, there's commercial corporates there as well, as I said, the universities, there's art galleries. You know, that attracts people in, but just to people who kind of work and go there every day, whether it's the schools or universities or the corporates or the shoppers or the, you know, tourists it attracts everybody in. I mean, there's so many different reasons for people going there and yes, there's a lot of stuff going on, but we are starting to see things really shape up and you know, that the university buildings for example, I mean we're not that far away from completion, which is great and of course Loughborough has been there a while already and there's a lot of schools that have been there for some time as well. So yeah, I mean I think the developments are kind of necessary and I can see a stage where it'll just slow down a little bit, and we'll be able to kind of just reflect on the whole thing, whereas at the moment, it just, it just feels there's so much going on. Yeah, every time you go there, this is a new road or new bridge or new building.

Interviewer
When you started, I just picked on what you just said, those kinds of changes were necessary. What do you mean by that?

Interviewee
Changes where necessary? So, in terms of context, I'm trying to think.

Interviewer
Because of what it was before?

Interviewee
No, I mean it was just the, in terms of, so I didn't see it what it was before but you know I've got a good understanding of what it was before and you know, kind of derelict areas and tyres in the river and everything, and now, the fact that it's accessible, people go there, for, you know, work, for study, for pleasure, for shopping, it just draws you in and for tourists as well. I mean, one of the things I now, in the last five years or so, anybody visiting London, I kind of say "yeah, you go to West End, and you go to Westminster and all that, but you have to get a train out to, you know, Jubilee Line or whatever, get a train out to Stratford and go to the Olympic Park", because that, for me, is one of the best attractions in London now and easily accessible.

Interviewer
Absolutely. Stratford is such a central part for your transport there, isn't it and accessibility, for everyone. Now, what's your vision of Stratford and Queen Elizabeth Park, Olympic Park in the next 10 years?

Interviewee
I mean, it's going to become a major hub. It already is a major hub in London, you know, if you think of central London, you know, West End and City, Canary Wharf, Stratford, it's definitely, you know, a major hub in terms of attracting people in opportunities so, yeah, what's the vision? I mean, I, again, I know, there's plans to put up more residential buildings in some of the Park area, the North Park, I think it is at the moment, so there, you know, some of the Park space will disappear but it's still a vast area, in terms of open spaces. So, I'm a keen cyclist as well and I mean cycling along, through Hackney all the way into the Park, you know, you can spend a whole day cycling around there, so my vision is that it will remain very accessible in terms of Park space and openness, but also have lots of things that attract people in, whether it's you know, going for a boat ride or you know going to watch the football, the athletics or a concert or going shopping or you know so that it's a very bustling, very lively community and it's already that actually, I think it's just going to get better.

Interviewer
Right. Would you consider living there?

Interviewee
Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. I have looked at some stuff, I mean, it's very expensive, I mean, that's the property. The only downside is I'm not sure they've kept their full commitment in terms of affordable housing in the, you know, in the area that was previously the Olympic Village. I mean I don't know the details, but for me that would be a shame if they haven't kept that commitment. I'd hate to think a lot of the properties are being bought out by, you know, people who have lots of money that don't live there necessarily, you know, it'd be nice if it's a community that lives there. I think we probably have a balance now, but I don't know whether the balance has gone too much towards, you know, investment type properties as opposed to people with affordable housing, so you know I think that for me, it's not, it’s not a kind of big negative but I think whoever's looking at the vision going forward just needs to make absolutely sure that it doesn't become an exclusive living area, because the original vision was that it should be for everybody and I think we've, at the moment, the balance is too much towards expensive properties and you know, investment properties and maybe we need to just shift that a little bit. Someone needs to take over there, I don’t know who but somebody!

Interviewer
So, what you're saying is maybe you hopefully would see a better socially diverse community. I know that, they some of the housing, Chobham Manor and the East Village, have 30% of social housing. Hopefully, you know, then we carry on to the next phase of housing, obviously, East Wick + Sweetwater. You'll see that, yes.
Do you have any kind of anecdotes that you can recall from your time as a Games Maker in 2012? I mean, you talked about that, that girl who got disappointed and had to withdraw, any other contact with relatives or?

Interviewee
Yeah, I mean, I think because we were team South Africa, you know, Oscar Pistorius was in the team and, we had to manage that whole situation where, when he lost his first race, he was quite outspoken to the press straight afterwards and I just remember the next morning, the, you know, the press were all over the team, and the management team had to deal with that and it was quite stressful, because, but anyway that's probably a negative one. No, I think for me, one of the great things I really enjoyed was there was such a good spirit between the different countries. So, for example, team Brazil, you know, and I still remain friends with some of the Games Makers from that and, you know, whenever we saw each other was like big high fives, and "how many medals?" and "what are your athletes doing?" and of course, Brazil has a much bigger team and then you know, just connecting with Team GB, everybody wanted to be with Team GB and you know we often go past the corner where Team GB were based, just opposite, the kind of Velodrome and it was always a good interaction and you know, bantering as well, is a lot of fun! I've made some really good friends from that time, actually. Yeah, I mean my biggest anecdote is, probably happened at Brands Hatch, where I locked the keys to the car because we had BMWs. I put it in my coat and then when it started warming up, because we used to leave six in the morning, and I took my coat off and threw it inside the car and closed the door and there was something, there's an automatic kind of locking mechanism that kicks in and it was, happened to be the first day of racing, you know, the team management had put up all the loudspeakers, everything on the car, bolted them down to the car, was ready and prepared for the event, which was starting two or three hours later and I mean it, emergency kicked in, because first of all I told the Head of the delegation "oops!" I mean, you know it wasn't deliberate, it was a mistake and then we decided not to tell the athletes because, the cyclists, because they were, they would be upset or something, you know, so we said we would sort it out and what happened is, we phoned the central car management fleet, I think they're based out in Dartford or something, they sent a rider on a bike and a motorbike, who had like priority access all the way through, and I was on the phone to him basically all the time guiding him in, and you know, you can imagine the chaos trying to get through all the crowds and all the security and that he didn't have the right pass, but what happened, he was on the other side of the track because we were all based in the pit lanes where all the athletes were based and he was on the other side of the track, and I'm kind of waving my arms and he waved his arms and he just clicked the button it opened the door. So, tragedy or not tragedy but major catastrophe averted. I could keep my job!

Interviewer
Have you had experience of another Olympic Games anywhere in the world?

Interviewee
I've been to everyone since then! Always as a volunteer. So, I went to Sochi 2014 in Russia, as the Paralympics. My job was different there, I was working in the VIP stands and that was great because I was the only English speaker everybody else was Russian in our team and I mean it was just amazing. I've never been to Russia before. It was very, very cold and was very beautiful being based there so that was quite special and then my wife and I went to Rio 2016. We've spent, we had an amazing, again, I've never been to Rio before and that was just absolutely wonderful. I loved that so much, you know, very, very special.

Interviewer
I was going to ask you how it compared with 2020, I mean 2012, sorry, it's difficult obviously because we've got so many different criteria.

Interviewee
I also went to PyeongChang, I was in PyeongChang for eight and a half weeks doing the Olympics and the Paralympics and, in South Korea in 2018, so you, each one is different. I mean, for me London is always going to be very, very special because it was my first, it's my hometown, but I also thought London, and I mean, I'm not saying this unfairly, but London was very organised, and you know run very, very well. You know Brazil was interesting, because it was quite relaxed but it was just, I mean, we had such a wonderful experience, I can't complain.

Interviewer
Was it all chaotic?

Interviewee
Well, now, I don't want to say that. It wasn't, but you know, there's some things that are quite similar, but things, some things are completely different. You know, and you kind of smile about that because it's almost like, it's cultural as well and, you know, it's, they're all great experiences but you know, Russia was very security conscious, very strict, very controlled, a little bit serious but we had a lot of fun, but it was quiet, you know, it was quite strict I think. Brazil is just, it's a big party. PyeongChang was very special, because I've never been to South Korea you know, the culture is very, for me, quite different. The food's very different, I loved the food. I love the people, it's brilliant, it's wonderful people. Slept on the floor for eight and a half weeks, but that was great. I mean, that was part of the deal and they all looked after us very, very well, so I've got you know, that was just brilliant in what they do, and also meeting all the other volunteers, you know, from countries right around the world and again, I've made loads and loads of friends from those. So, you know...

Interviewer
That must be a plus there, isn't it? Meeting people from all around the world and…

Interviewee
And then I've also done two other Olympic related ones. So I did the Special Olympics in UAE in 2019. So my wife and I went, so this is, it used to be American based, but it's global now. So, the Special Olympics for people with intellectual, I guess challenges, so that was quite different and probably the most special one for me because just the nature of, because it's not, doesn't have a big razzmatazz and the big sponsorship that the Olympics and the Paralympics has, but it's just wonderful working with the people there, and then we did the Youth Olympics in Switzerland last January. So, although it was Lausanne, we were based in St. Moritz and, you know, it's such a beautiful city, and I'd never get there myself but anyway, we went as volunteers and again, it was very, very enjoyable. Very nice.

Interviewer
Had you applied to go to Tokyo this year?

Interviewee
Yeah, yeah, we decided because we've both kind of retired now, semi-retired, we're going to try, and do both the Olympics and the Paralympics and we've done all the training and everything. So yeah, disappointed but I think it's the right decision. I mean, I think, it would've been nice to be there. I mean, I, just stuff coming out in the press in the last day or two about not allowing spectators. I just feel for the athletes, I really feel for them, you know so many preparations, yeah, it's sad, but hey, some people are suffering a lot worse so…

Interviewer
Absolutely, absolutely, yeah. Well I think I've given you quite a lot of question, then you've given me SO much to think about, and wonderful, kind of memories you've had and secondly a lot of points you can prepare, because you have been to so many other Olympic Parks I would say. What is the, you know in terms of, in comparison, I know you can't compare culturally and politically different situations there, but in terms of what you have in London, what is the positive side that can be used as a model to other places, that have maybe become white elephants?

Interviewee
Yeah, and that's a really good question because when I was in PyeongChang at the end of the Games, so I was there for the Olympics and the Paralympics, at the end of the Games I was part of a small group; I think it was about six of us; two Canadians, myself, and I think one other person from Europe, that the volunteer management had, you know, invited to interview as a group, as a panel, so we spent several hours with them and they were asking us about our own impressions of the Games, what went well, what didn't go well, what other experiences we have from, you know other places, etc. and I spent quite a bit of time talking about London and you know, I still hope they will make it out there because they were committed to come and visit London at some stage to just get an idea of it, so I'm sure there have been but I haven't been involved.

Interviewer
They have been round, the delegation, official delegation and they were looking at the legacy of 2012. It was fantastic, there was a group about 12 Civil Servants from the Park, before COVID.

Interviewee
It was after the PyeongChang Games, which was in 2018.

Interviewer
They were amazed at, you know, how well planned it is and how well we are sticking to the plans, basically, and all the thinking and the long-term thinking.

Interviewee
And I mean, one of the things I really reiterated, because I was already then an established Park Champion, was, I said that you know, and this situation is different because it's quite small. I mean, Sochi, no sorry, PyeongChang is actually quite a small town, it's not even a city but then they have two

different locations; one at the coastal region and one in the mountains. So their situation's a little bit different and you know, they don't have the size and the scale, but you know one of the things I was saying is they should really look at continuing the volunteer experience, because, you know a lot of the South Korean, and the majority of the volunteers were from South Korea, a lot of them hadn't volunteered before, and they had a life changing experience from, you know, my interactions, we became very good friends with many of them and I was saying to them, they should really look at the London model from the Park Champions, because for me that's such a, not an easy but it's almost a logical, it's such an easy win in the sense to have a group of people that are already committed, and were involved and knowledgeable about the locations and everything to help carry the legacy forward and be involved, and you know, I hope they will, and maybe they have, I'm hoping they will.

Interviewer
It's interesting because volunteering is very much a British thing. Talking to them, it's a concept that they have to actually bring forward a lot more, because it's new, in Southeast Asia in general, is not something they do on a regular basis, if ever, only on this occasion. So, I think that's really become an example for, you know, how sort of volunteering activities and organisation.

Interviewee
Yeah, and I mean, I think we've got a lot to be proud of, from a, the Park Champion perspective, because it's not just about the physical you know, the buildings in the Park and the spaces, it's also about the human element in the role of keeping it forward and I mean it's almost a no brainer because the people, and it's not just the people that are involved, because more people come in, getting in you know, the younger people come along and its, which is great, because you need the younger people and I'm trying to encourage my children to do it at the moment, but they tell me they're too busy but I think they will eventually, because they've seen what it's done to me in terms of being a life changing experience but you know, the point I'm making is it's not just the environment and the Park space and the buildings and everything, it's also about the volunteers that help support that.

Interviewer
On the human side, isn't it, it's very important. Alright, if you wanted to add anything at this stage that we might have missed out, or you want to share with us?

Interviewee
And yeah, I mean, I think for me, it's also what I really enjoy is the human element and I'm going to share one quick anecdote with you quickly, the Park Champion is such a blend of such interesting people, and you know, from all over the world, people from South America or Europe, it's just great doing that and just meeting up with them in other environments. So when we were in Rio, Dame Kelly Holmes was there as, I guess, you know, in her role, and she set up an impromptu, not she did, but someone set up an impromptu Park run thing. I'm very involved in Park Run as well, you know, the 5k runs every Saturday, they set up an impromptu Park run on the beach, on Copacabana beach, on a Saturday morning because it's always on a Saturday morning at nine o'clock and there was a notice, went around to mainly the British volunteers and we all kind of gathered there. We had to get a cab out very early in the morning because we were like getting there 50 miles away or something and we all arrived, and it was lovely to see, you know Dame Kelly Holmes, and we, she didn't run because she

had an injury, and all of us kind of ran. It wasn't timed or anything and we took several photographs and everything and when I came back, who would be in the photograph but Alison. I mean, I didn't know her then but of course, I know very well now. It's a small world that, you know, we're kind of halfway around the world or around on the other side of the world as Park Champions in the photograph.

Interviewer
From your volunteering experience at the Park, you have made some long lasting friends?

Interviewee
Exactly.

Interviewer
Yeah? Oh, that's brilliant. Oh, well. I would like to thank you on behalf of the Project Managers there for you know, your time first and your contributions. Been lovely talking to you. I hope you enjoy watching a little bit of the Olympics on television.

Interviewee
Yeah, thank you for your time. It's been great to meet you and I hope to see you at the Info Point soon or otherwise in the swimming pool!