Date: 29/05/2021

Interviewer: Ann

Interviewee: Oluwafunmike

Olu lives in the area since she was 5 years old. She talks about her memories from the area before the Games, how she got involved volunteering at the BBC radio and Hackney House in 2012 and her experience as an spectator for the Paralympic Games. She is now a Park Champion and 'feels so part of it, it's like home.'

Interviewer
Hi, Olu. Nice to meet you. I'm just introducing to you about the purpose of the project. OK? And in 2020, the Park will be celebrating 10 years, 2022 sorry, yeah and we said, since the success of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which was 2012 and it really impacted East London. OK? So I am delivering this Oral Project with an aim to capture the memories and experiences of the people that work in the area and lived around Stratford. So is it OK? I'm just gonna ask you a few questions. Be sure if you want to add anything else, do please add it. OK - so be at ease and add what you want to add. OK?

Interviewee
Thank you.

Interviewer
You're welcome. So I must introduce myself as well - my name is Ann and I will be undertaking the interview. So as I said, be free to ask any questions and if you don't understand what I'm saying, and if you want to elaborate, do please elaborate. So the first question I'm going to ask, some of these questions might not invoke, you might not want to answer or you might, if you don't want to answer that's fair enough. I'm just gonna start off before the Games. How were you involved in the area before the, for the Olympic Games?

Interviewee
Okay, so I've lived in Hackney since I was five years old. And I moved to Hackney Wick. What, how old are my, the twins? The last born… they're going to be 24. So they were two and a half I think, when I moved to Hackney Wick so I am living in the local area. Prior to that though, because Hackney Wick used to have like a street market on a Sunday, where we used to go and buy fruit and veg and there used to be other things. Like I remember going to this man who used to do, I still remember it, you know, when you roast the whole chicken in one of these portable chicken things, and so all used to be around this Sunday Market, which was, what is I don't know if you know, The Eastway, but it's a bit like along where the car park is by Here East. So you can imagine all along there and then there was the dog tracks.

Interviewer
Is that market still there then?

Interviewee
No market now. I think what actually happened is they decided to get rid of the market. They initially said that it was because there was a high crime rate in the market. So things like they had found, you know, people selling guns and things like that. I'm not so sure because I was never affected by it, I never heard any stories about it, but that was initially the reason why, and then obviously, I think the dog tracks went, so all of that kind of disappeared. So technically speaking for the, I've been involved with Hackney Wick in particular, even as a, you know, a Sunday, a child with my Dad, going to the market and then when I moved to the area, then I've been here, what 22 years? So I've been in Hackney Wick for a long time, for a long time. One of the things I'd say is that I've found, I like where I live, but I know that Hackney in itself has a bit of a, you know, a stigma to it. Hackney Wick as it was where I live, that hasn't really changed, but the surrounding area has, so you know, it was a bit of a drab place if you like, because there is a place where it's, they were trying to regenerate anyway, so there used to be a lot of tower blocks in the area. So they knocked down the tower blocks and made Trowbridge which is kind of all like bungalows and things like this. There's no tall buildings, where I live used to be like, a goods yard. So it was, it's on a hill, and it used to be a goods yard and I'm right beside the railway. So literally, as the train goes between Homerton and Hackney Wick, it goes right behind my garden. So when I'm in the garden, I see the train going through, so it's that close to me, but yeah, I mean, yeah, from Stamford Hill, I suppose. Well, I've lived Enfield, Stamford Hill, and then back to here, and then Ilford and then back to Hackney, Hackney and then Hackney Wick, so…

Interviewer
I used to, I used to go to Stratford, Stamford Hill, as my sister lives in St. Ann's Road. So I was quite a lot down that area. Just drive down really, 'cause there's such a massive change to Hackney seems like?

Interviewee
Oh, yeah, definitely, definitely, especially in this area and I mean, it's still ongoing, as you know, but it's definitely in this area.

Interviewer
So you must not be that far from the Park, then.

Interviewee
I'm literally, if I go to the bottom of the hill, so if I go to the bottom of my crescent, I can see like the, I think I can see Here East, I could probably see on a good day, the ArcelorMittal Orbit. I'm literally 10 minutes walk, I suppose a good strut to The Copper Box, so once I'm at The Copper Box, I'm at the Park.

Interviewer
That's interesting. So I suppose when you just walk it over, you don't really take the bus or anything.

Interviewee
Most time, I mean, it takes 10 minutes to walk to 10/ 12 minutes to walk to The Copper Box from home. If I jumped on the bus, it's actually 1, 2, 3 bus stops.

Interviewer
Ah, that's not bad. Anyway, I'm gonna move on to something else. If you're happy with that? The question I was gonna ask you, I just realised that you answered that anyway. So I'm gonna move on to another question. And when did you first hear about the Games?

Interviewee
I think, I can't say, well, when we won it really, I knew that we were bidding for it, so obviously we knew whenever it was that we were going to bid for I don't know how many years it's obviously like, four years at least.

Interviewer
When I heard about it, I wasn't even thinking about it because I was saying "that's far away."

Interviewee
Yeah, no, so you know in advance, because obviously, when they're doing that, you know, when the last one, the last one is, and then everybody's bidding for the next one. So obviously it has always been something you're aware of, but not anything that you thought would affect you in the way it did. So by the time we won it, we won it, and even then it didn't really hit home until it was like the Olympic Park Stratford and I'm like "Oh, I live locally!" and then it was all the things that started happening in between, that made it kind of real, and it was really real for me at Hackney Wick because they, that's when they decided that we needed to have parking control, because we didn't have any where we live, and then it was like it was free initially. That was how they, because some people say "oh, the council use that to, you know, to get in." So it was free initially, and then it was half price and then we had to pay for it. You know I mean? It was meant to be like a temporary thing because you don't want people coming to park up on your, you know, your roads whilst this is going on, and then it became a permanent thing which, you know, it's neither here or there. But yeah, so I'd known about it but you know, up until it came to the point that "ooh, they're looking for volunteers" I didn't really think much about it other than "ooh we've got the Olympic Games" and that was really it. Once I knew it was coming into my area I got even more excited, because it was also because of all the changes you could suddenly see that were happening in the area. So Hackney being high for crime for instance, all of a sudden, you had the police doing door knocking, and about, you know, they were trying to encourage people who had been involved in crime that, you know "we're having the Olympic Park" and so there was a bit of profiling there as well, which was negative profiling, because you know, there were people that were probably had nothing, they yes, they'd been in trouble before, but you know, this was kind of like, "well, we know you've been in trouble, so we're going to contact you" and so they'd already built up this profile about you, which had its negative effects, but I can understand where they were coming from, but you know, so there was a lot going on in the area. All kinds of surveys, there all kinds of negative things going on, because there are a lot of people who were like "Oh, this is costing so much money, and we're going to have to pay for it and housing" and this and that and the other but for me, I think I'm a kind of person that if something's going to be then it's going to be, we have to get just get on with it and learn to deal with it.

Interviewer
I suppose it's that in those areas everyone's giving their opinion, and then some advantage and some disadvantage, because I mean, I'm going back at my time, I used to take the tube, I used to come Stratford, but I used to have a good friend I had from school days, but that time, the new bit wasn't built up, so I was only used to the old shopping area. So I just, I don't usually go to Stratford, but only just to go to see my friend. Yeah, so it's amazing now!

Interviewee
Different, totally different.

Interviewee
Yeah! I love that Stratford area anyway now. That's nice to hear about that. And have you got any interesting stories that you would like to talk about, or anything funny during that time?

Interviewee
Not particularly, I mean, for me it was, there was nothing funny or you mean up until the time of the Olympics? or…?

Interviewer
Yeah, before the Olympics, you've covered quite a lot in your previous…

Interviewee
It was more about, especially at the time I was working in Camden and obviously didn't, was I working? Yeah I was working in Camden, and there were a load of, I work with a lot, I worked with a lot of people who were right, like, they will protest about everything and anything. So they were protesting about the Olympics, like I said, and the cost it's going to be to the government, to our purse and it's not fair, and housing though, you know, it's gonna be expensive housing, and why should we have to pay for it?

Interviewer
Not to break this but, what did they come up with banners or…?

Interviewee
Well, you've got people who protested anyway, but I mean, within, if you happen to be, because I had a load of people who were Union, I worked with a lot of people in the Union, and so and you know, it was then it was unison, and although they're real socialists, and they like to, not so much banners, because they were, they lived in Camden and worked in Camden, but anytime you mentioned the Olympics, it was like "Uh oh, I shouldn't have said that in their presence" because they're gonna kick off on one, and tell you how wrong it is and the cost, and it's not fair, and the government this and the government that, and who's gonna pay for it? And it was a never ending circle, but it was interesting because I remember way after the Olympics, and me being a Park Champion, and different things going on and I remember saying to this one and same person about "oh, have you ever been down to the Park?" and she was one of the most vocal people at the time, she said she had never been down there, but actually you know, she's going down there with her nephew, and then when she came back, she says "Oh, what a

lovely Park!" and I'm thinking to myself, but you were the same person who swore never to go down there.

Interviewer
It's amazing how people change. I mean I've seen quite a few parts and I think it's so nice and you know, there's so many things to do, compared to it not being there before and I didn't really literally see all of that area before because I didn't really go there.

Interviewee
I think that all of that area before, there, it wasn't an area to see, it was a dump, basically a dump so there wasn't really anything to see, and the closest park we had to us at the time was Victoria Park, so and people really love Victoria Park, but Victoria Park is literally five minutes away from me yeah? but I can't compare it; people think Victoria Park is really lovely and it is, but not when, to me when you've got the Olympic Park so, you know, but yeah, there was nothing there before it was just a complete dump yard, it was industrialised.

Interviewer
I find that really amazing, 'cause you must have seen it, when it was like, and it come into what it is now. That's amazing seeing all their works! You're in it girl! I'm going to move on to a few more questions. I mean, I can see that you have answered quite a few questions that I was gonna ask you. I'm gonna say, why did you get involved? Did you get involved with the Olympics at all or?

Interviewee
So what actually happened was, believe it or not, so I applied to be a Games Maker. I mean, I've put down Games Maker, I was but in a different way. I applied to be a Games Maker at the Olympics and I remember I was, as I said, I was working in Camden. The interview was actually on the Camden High Roads, so I went down there for my interview, had an interview, but then basically was, I wasn't selected, which was all well and good, I appreciated the, you know that so many people would be applying, I didn't think there was any reason why I should get it over and above anybody, I didn't feel disgruntled or anything. It's just like, well, and to be honest, it was kind of the first, I've done volunteering before, but in a very different way, 'cause I used to work for the Youth Offending Team, so I've done volunteering on that side, and you know, a couple of other things like going off and talking to people, to children at schools, and that kind of thing, but nothing like this and because it was on my doorstep, I just thought "well, you know, why not try?" but I wasn't selected. However…

Interviewer
I thought we, were there interviews other places as well, it wasn't just in Camden?

Interviewee
You apply, that you apply for where you wanted your interview and because I worked in Camden, that it wasn't like you could apply to different places, it was only one interview. So then what happened was, I was not, then what happened, there were within the, the boroughs of the Olympics, they had their own little, if you like, Games Makers, so I ended up applying for that, and was successful with that, and what that meant was that I think if you remember, we had this BBC Radio Show, BBC, I forget what it was

called in, it was on Hackney Wick and that was on the Wick, they had all these, yeah, they had all these things that were being put in place up to the Olympics, to encourage people to, you know, those kinds of things to get people involved. So they had this BBC Radio thing, it was an amazing event. So I was volunteering there, but also there was this thing called Hackney House in Shoreditch, which I think it's built up with something else, so they had, what used to happen is when the if, what are they called? The, what do you call these people who works? Officials! Officials and other people working at the Olympics, at the end of the day, they'd come and visit Hackney House, and even before that, that's when I saw the model of the ArcelorMittal Orbit because the person who built it, designed it, whatever, can't remember, they had a, they had all these exhibitions at what was called Hackney House in Shoreditch.

Interviewer
Listening to what you're saying, it seemed that there was quite a lot of activities going on in Hackney regarding the Games really?

Interviewee
And not just in Hackney, in all the other in all the other boroughs, in all the Olympic boroughs. I think they had something similar but for Hackney, that's what I did, so I was working at Hackney House, I was doing all kinds of things in Hackney House, meet and greet, supporting some of these stands, all kinds of things all in relation to the Olympics, and then during the Olympics the same sort of thing. So, in as much as I wasn't I, I did attend twice, because as part of my role with Hackney, I ended up going, I was at the Paralympics and I did, I also attended when they were doing the, you know, when they do the introduction, so the dancing and everything before the…

Interviewer
Like the rehearsal…

Interviewee
The rehearsal!

Interviewer
I was there somewhere, popping somewhere, oh that's interesting! So what you said you were volunteering before; what was your role as a volunteer at the House, Hackney House?

Interviewee
Just general. It was like, it could be anything. It could be just meet and greet. It would be supporting other people, exhibitions, it could be you know VIP, it varied, it varied.

Interviewer
Very interesting because I can say I was in Lambeth for, at the moment I can't really remember what was going on, because I was sort of doing so many things working, this, that, the other, so I'm not sure what was happening in Lambeth.

Interviewee
But Lambeth wasn't one of the boroughs, so probably nothing! But you know, like Newham and Hackney and those places, the areas within the Olympics, they all had something going on.

Interviewer
It's amazing really, and time goes. Nearly 12 years, 10 years so I just think you've been part of it, girl!

Interviewee
Yeah, definitely, definitely!

Interviewer
Um, so I'm gonna move on to, I was gonna ask you, when was the first time you came to the Park but as you're in the area, can you remember? Can you reflect back on that?

Interviewee
I think it was, you mean once it had reopened after the Olympics or before the Olympics?

Interviewer
After the Olympics, yeah.

Interviewee
I think it was not too long after they reopened it, um, I had, we have, so we, how can I put it? So Mark, I'm going to talk about Mark. Mark is German and Mark is now, he'll be 24 in November. So when he was 14, so that is literally just after, just, I think it was just after the Olympics. He came down on a school experience with two other German boys and they stayed with my mum and they used to go, they'd meet their teacher at the local church, and then they'd come home to mum, and they would then have something to eat, they play, whatever.

Interviewer
So, she was sort of trying to help them?

Interviewee
No, she was just their host. She was just, she was just the house because she's got a large enough house with nobody else living there. So Mark was only quite young and the other two boys were a year older than him, but they seem to, he seems to be a, quite a lot more mature than them. So what would happen is, they would go off and play GameCube as it was, in the bedroom, and he would sit down in the living room with my mum, and watch telly and talk about politics and, trying to learn English. So she really built a rapport with him. So when they were finally leaving, she said to him "you know, if ever you want to come back again, feel free" so I think he kept in contact with her.

Interviewer
What country did he come from? Germany, okay.

Interviewee
Yeah, and then he, um, about a year later, he came back and all this time, we'd never met his parents, and then a year later, he came again, he spent the time with my mum, but as I call her, his adopted mum, grandma.

Interviewer
Oh he came back again, so lovely.

Interviewee
Then what happened was, his parents came so I brought them to the Olympic Park. So, we spent hours, so me, my cousin, Mark's mum, Mark's Dad, Mark, and my, one of my twin boys, we, I brought them to the Olympic Park, so it was not too soon, maybe a year or so, I've been to the Park before then, but a year or so after that, I brought them to the Park.

Interviewer
Oh, lovely. Yeah, those were the days really. When I can see that you've got such an interesting journey. You got a very interesting journey, and for the Olympics, because I was in Lambeth, I didn't know the whole of what was going on, from what you're saying, so lovely to know about that. Right, OK, so, is there, is there, I might ask you a few more questions? You can add anything else you want to add which I haven't asked a question.

Interviewee
I think just getting involved, just when I went back to the Park. I mean, at the time, I mean, the Park then is nothing, I thought the Park then was amazing! And every time I look at the Park now, there's something that's changed and for me, I know a lot of people say "Oh, it's a shame. They've built houses there. Oh, it's a shame that they've done this, it's a shame, they've done that" but for me, I just look at it as well, it was a legacy, they did say this is what they're going to do, they got the Games on that basis, and now they're fulfilling the legacy. So, I kind of, I can't, you know, I, every time I go to the Park and I see something, I learned something new, so, as I said, all back then it was a Park and when I look at it now, it's like, wow! And it's a place obviously that I bring my grandson to, he loves it. He lives in Raynham but when he's here, we come to the Park because he loves it. I love I just feel that, I feel so part of it. Like it's my, it's my second home and so there's so much of me that is in the Park apart from this pandemic time when, you know we've had to lessen ourselves, but in being out and about but yeah, no, it's just I personally think that the Olympics is one of the best things happen to Hackney and neighboring boroughs, that's my personal opinion. I don't know where we would be today if it hadn't happened, and if it wasn't in our area, because as I said, there's a lot of stigma attached to Hackney but I think Hackney is the place to be and when you look at the caliber of people, it's a very diverse borough, exceptionally diverse borough, and so if we're inviting other people in with all the stigma that's gone before, clearly, that's a positive thing, so, you know,

Interviewer
It is a bit of a belonging. I mean, because I'm thinking to myself, if they weren't, if they didn't have that site for the Olympics, I'm just really thinking, where else in London would they have pitched it?

Interviewee
Well, it probably wouldn't have been in London, let's just put it that way, and it might have ended, well, ended up in Manchester or, I don't know but you know, I'm grateful it was London. I'm grateful it's Hackney Wick.

Interviewer
I think it's a lovely place, because I absolutely do admire that Park. I'm just, I'm a Park Champion. This is a Park Champion. Yeah, so I do admire, but I've not even been there for a year, but I have to go there soon. Anyway, but, yeah, that always said, you're always talking about the Park and I say "yes, it's my second home!"

Interviewee
Exactly! I mean, so much so, just, by the way, so much so, I've been doing the interviews for the [volunteer] Rugby League World Cup, as I mentioned earlier, and it's amazing because I've interviewed a couple of people, one who lives in Old Ford, the other side of Victoria Park, and a lady who actually lives in Hackney Wick. So she mentioned the fact that she has really got into volunteering, that's why she wants to volunteer, it's not so much about the sport, but she loves the area and that what she currently does is, she volunteers, she's a litter picker along the canal. So I just said after the interview, I said "Oh, you really like, you know, what about the Park?" and she's "oh, I love that Park!" and you know, this, that and the other and I said "well, look, there's so many different things going on in the Park and we've got a volunteering scheme as well" so literally, at the end of that interview, I said to her "look, do you mind giving me your email address, I can send you a link so you can read up about the Park you can read up about what we do and, you know, it's up to you whether you want to apply to you know, all the information is there" and she goes "yes, please!" I sent her the email, she came back with "oh my God, so thank you!" she probably thought I wasn't gonna do it, but I did! And you know, as time's gone by and I've been thinking "oh, you're Barinda" because I, you know, this is how you meet people as well, so it's just networking.

Interviewer
Yeah, that's it, I mean, I've introduced some people to the Park, to be a Park Champion in the early days, but you know, you get some people, yes, some people "no, no, I don't want to do that. I'm not getting paid for it. So, you know, you get to serve other people. Why do you want to do that?" But to me, you learn a lot of skills. I've done so many things at that Park and of course, as well as being Park Champion, because I've been doing it from the beginning, I could see the change. I've learned so much. I mean, even now look at all those new buildings and the areas and everything is quite interesting. Otherwise, I wouldn't really have known who would do that to tell you the truth! I'm going to sort of, do you want to ask any more questions, I'm going to sort of round it up 'cause the questions I was gonna ask you, you sort of covered it which is very, very interesting, um, because I didn't know that was happening in Hackney really!

Interviewee
Yeah, no, a lot has been happening in Hackney! I just think that you know now like, you know, there's all, it's all the other, if you like, pop-ups or side things that have happened. So, you know, like the new road that's gone through the Park, people think "aah right, it's a park, a road through the Park" but it

was always planned to be there and actually, it doesn't look too bad, you know, you've got Westfield, you've got all the new housing, you've got Hackney Bridge.

Interviewer
They're putting up all those new houses, it's quite a change, I'm not going to recognise that place because I haven't been for over a year nearly.

Interviewee
I remember when I used to walk back through The Copper Box, and on the opposite side they had all the hoardings where the Gypsies went in, and they had to evict them, but along there, they used to have all these wildflowers. I used to love taking pictures of those wildflowers and then obviously when they wanted to start building that whole area went, but the other day I passed it on the bus and it was like, they've started opening it up, I mean that all the houses are there and it looks, I would love to live there and look out of my window and see the Park, I'd love it. You know, I mean? Yeah, I love it.

Interviewer
You know, to me, there's so much of a build up to what it was and when the Olympics, when they had all the Games, it's such a massive change really, because I know my nieces, where she did the basketball, but I said, if you ever go to the area where the basketball was, I'm sure there's flats or something there.

Interviewee
Opposite it, yeah, there's all kinds of things. For me, it's sort of better. It's definitely better. I'd rather that, than what it was because it was a dump yard. So they've, you know, things have improved.

Interviewer
So I'm gonna round it up a bit, if you don't mind, and what I'm gonna say, what do you think the Park being like in say, the next 20 years?

Interviewee
Um, in the next 20 years, I mean, obviously, I think it would have, you know, we had a legacy, we would have obviously, completed, God willing, the legacy, so everything will be in place, as we said, it should be and then it will just be, you know, reaping the fruits, it will find what, the Park will just be the Park but I think it's going to be a place of interest forever, because it will always will be because this is where the Olympics took place. I think that the reason I say that is because if you think about other countries, where the Olympics has taken place, I can't think of any of them that have got, are in a position to say "look at us, look at our stadium", for instance, or "look at our Olympic Park", or "look at the area where we had the Olympics", I can't think of many of them that can compare to what we've got, because we have really, really maintained our Park.

Interviewer
Definitely we have, I would agree with you, we have really kept it up because I mean, as you said, as you said, some countries that have the Olympics, is probably a dump now but we have really kept it up. So I mean, even if someone didn't want to come down to Olympic can say this happened, so and so

this happened, this is the ArcelorMittal Orbit, this is this, this is the plan. This is where is it, Greg [Rutherford] did his running [long jump] and you know, things like,

Interviewee
We've got all these things still in place, we keep on, we are still maintaining it, the London Stadium, if not for the pandemic, it's being used for football, we've used it for Major League Baseball, we've used it for concerts, and so, so long as we can continue to do that then, you know, it's always going to be there, there's always going to be a need for it and we have the Park runs, we have so many things that go on, we've got conservation, there are so many activities that normally would have happened, if not for the pandemic, that so, as long as we've got the will to keep it going and we can, and so long as we've got the volunteers, which I can't see that that will ever be an issue, then, in 20 years time, in 30 years time, it's you know, I'll probably be one of those people that's being driven around the Park in the buggy! So that's what I look forward to, being driven around the Park in the buggy, that's what I want. So I think we're going to be there; stronger, and you know, it's just going to be one of those places that people come from abroad and say, it's one of those items on there, it's one of those places on the list. That is a must. Yeah, and must be set. That's what I hope, that's what I hope.

Interviewer
Right, and anymore, d'you, is anything else, any questions you want to ask? So anything else you want to…? Well, I'm gonna say thank you very much to taking part in this and I can see that you have gone through quite a lot of experience, and that was all good to know, so thank you very much.