



## YVONNE GRANT INTERVIEW

Key:

EHdK: Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf (Interviewer)

YG: Yvonne Grant (Respondent)

Date/Location:

19<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Open Arms Development Centre, Kingston, Jamaica.

**EHdK 00:01 I'm here in Kingston with Yvonne Grant MBE who is the Administrative Director of the Open Arms Development Centre. Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me today.**

YG 00:17 Thank you very much Dr Hayes for coming to the Open Arms Development Centre.

**EHdK 00:24 I really appreciate the invitation today because I think that our conversation will help people have a bit more of an idea about how Open Arms functions but also its role. How it works in conjunction with the British government as well. Could you tell me about the centre, when it was established and your role here?**

YG 00:57 The centre here was established in 2006 but it came out of the Ministry of Local Government [and Rural Development] having a committee called the [National] Committee for the Homeless. I had worked in the committee in the community with mentally ill and homeless persons. And as a result of my experience as a Community Mental Health Officer I worked previously within the Ministry of Health Department, I was asked to join the committee. On joining the committee, we were asked to come up with a five-year strategic plan looking at homelessness in general in Jamaica. When I talk later on about myself or how I got there, I have a lot of experience in dealing both with persons on the street. Persons who are homeless and persons with mental illness. On presentation of the five-year strategic plan, the government really did not have the resources at the time to start anything. So, Dr Maureen Irons Morgan who chaired the committee was also the Senior Medical Officer for Community Mental Health. I had worked with her previously so she offered that we could use a little building that we had at the end of the Bellevue property to start operations. Bellevue Hospital gave me three members of staff and they offered to give me a stipend to pay me and so we started as a drop-in centre on November 6 2006.

**EHdK 02:48 Just to explain, the Open Arms Centre is opposite the hospital. Is that correct?**

YG 02:55 We are at the end of the hospital grounds and so they have allocated us, legally, all the grounds that we now operate from. I started off as the administrator and so we were able eventually to...We had a management committee. We now have a fully structured board. We are a registered charity and everything about us is legal. As I said, we started off as a drop-in centre so over the years we have improved and expanded. The drop-in facility is a very small due to COVID, so we are not really taking persons drop-in because of the restrictions that were established. However, we moved into residential care, rehabilitation programs, reintegration and resettlement programs. Just to say from day one, we had involuntarily migrants from all over the world who were also part of the homeless population.

**EHdK 04:12 You would welcome migrants so people who had maybe found themselves in a precarious situation. Where did these migrants come from back in 2006?**

YG 04:23 The majority were coming from the USA. Then we have a few from the UK. We had [people] from Canada, different countries in Europe, you know, wherever Jamaicans go, we have persons coming. So, they've come from all over world put it that way and so we were able to develop our programmes. Very soon after we started, especially when we moved into residential care, you will see all the buildings we have now. These were all derelict buildings, so I had approached the Bellevue Hospital management to ask if we could use the buildings and they agreed. And with volunteers and donations then we were able to take it one step at a time and started having persons staying in residence.

**EHdK 05:21 So how many residential beds do you have at the moment?**

YG 05:24 Our capacity is 85 but it can go up based on if there's any disaster like a hurricane or things that, we could take up to 90. That is men. And have a little house that houses eight women.

**EHdK 05:44 So how many men do you have staying with you right now?**

YG 05:47 At the moment, we have 42 men and two women. Simply because of COVID, because of the restrictions. At one time, we were not admitting, and it was very rigorous. We have just recently, since last month, started, with precautions, taking more persons in.

**EHdK 06:11 Prior to 2008, there was no form of structured programme that facilitated the integration of deported people into Jamaican society. Is that correct?**

YG 06:27 Well, we weren't doing any integration but 2006/07 they were coming in and getting food and clothing. But because it was an 8-4 situation then with just the drop-in centre being open in the day. But once we moved on into residential, it's now 24-hour care.

**EHdK 06:46 From 2008, the British government began something called the Reintegration and Rehabilitation Programme [RRP] so their aim was to provide support to economic development and social welfare in Jamaica. The intention was to help the Jamaican government reintegrate migrants who were returning but also to improve governance around the management of the prison population. How did you become involved with the RRP? What was the relationship with the Open Arms Centre?**

YG 07:24 Everybody knew that we were dealing with homeless persons and that we had involuntary returning migrants (IRMs) that we were taking care of. So, we put in our bid, and they offered. From day one, we have been receiving funding from Britain to take care of – at one time it was everybody who needed care - then it's down to IRMs, the British IRMs.

**EHdK 07:56 What was the living situation of the migrants in that time period? What stories were they sharing? What kind of experiences were they having?**

YG 08:08 Before they came to us?

**EHdK 08:10 When the centre was set up.**

YG 08:14 Most of them were living on the streets. One or two were in living situations that we would say they maybe weren't welcomed or they weren't happy. Some were with relatives but relatives that could not afford to feed another mouth or to take care of them, but I think the majority were off the streets.

**EHdK 08:43 Were the majority of them...were they deported people or were they people that came to Jamaica and then found themselves in difficulty? Or was it mix?**

YG 08:51 The majority were persons who were deported.

**EHdK 08:55 The US authorities and the UK authorities mainly would deport people but then have no plan in place...no structure to actually receive people. And that's a gap that...**

YG 09:08 No, apart from they maybe would have gone to a night shelter or wherever they could get food, that sort of thing.

**EHdK 09:18 So tell me then, once you began to receive funding from the British government and really have support to then provide this infrastructure and provide**

**this facility. Open Arms not only provides and provided short-term emergency accommodation and support to UK deportees but you also, I understand, you put on workshops.**

YG 09:41 It's not really short-term, it's difficult to call it short-term. A few persons might be short-term in that we could find relatives quickly or they could find a job very quickly but there are issues there. It's more that it's medium to long term.

**EHdK 10:00 How long are we talking about?**

YG 10:03 Everybody we're talking about based on the individual needs because each person is individually interviewed and assessed. So, it's vary based on the individual.

**EHdK 10:14 Do you have people with substance abuse problems?**

YG 10:16 We take in everybody. The only persons we don't take are if they are too seriously disabled, if they are senior citizens who are not coping then they would go maybe to the Golden Age Home. If they are acutely mentally ill or they are really disturbed, then we would see to it that they get to the mental hospital. Then after discharge, we would take them, you know, once they're stable then we would take persons in. But we don't really just say no. We do something.

**EHdK 10:53 Does that involve a conversation with Bellevue Hospital then to receive their patients?**

YG 10:57 Yes. We converse with everybody. The Ministry of National Security, the security services, health, education, social services. We communicate with all the various government and non-governmental organisations because, let's face it, when they're still here, they still need to have health care and that sort of things. When we started now with our residential care quite early. When we go around, you'll see. We have the residents that have the section...we have two open dorms. And the place we call Maureen's Place which was named after one of our co-founders. The same Dr Maureen Irons Morgan so we said we would name it after her because it was her idea to put in single rooms occupancy. So, when the British came in, they gave us funding...

**EHdK 11:56 Who specifically came in? What conversations did you have? Was it with the High Commissioner or was it with staff at the High Commission? Or was it, for example, with people who had travelled from the UK to look at the centre?**

YG 12:14 I think it was maybe through the Ministry of National Security who alerted them of Open Arms and they reached out.

**EHdK 12:26 As I understand it, there were other NGOs.**

YG 12:31 Yes, there are other NGOs like Open Heart and Portland Rehab [Management Group].

**EHdK 12:37 Do they serve similar functions or is there a difference?**

YG 12:43 It's difficult for me to say. It's similar and yet it's different...Because straightaway, the British, when we wanted to refurbish Maureen's Place, they gave us the funding - quite a lot of money, thank you all very much! I couldn't now say [how much] exactly but it's on record. They'll have it. But we were able to put in the single room occupancy and they gave us this money. And we negotiated and said alright we would have X number of spaces specifically for the British IRMs.

**EHdK 13:36 Could you expand more on what an IRM is?**

YG 13:40 So IRMs are Involuntary Returning Migrants. So, the negotiation was that all IRMs coming in that we accepted. As long as they could cope, you know, if they were too ill, as I said, they would go to the hospital. But coming straight, we would house them in Maureen's Place where each involuntary return migrant would have a nice little room. You will see the place when we go around. Eventually, I think we started off with about four rooms and then we upped it to about eight. And right now, we have 12 rooms reserved.

**EHdK 14:17 There's 12 rooms that are reserved for IRMs specifically?**

YG 14:21 Just from the UK. Specifically, from the UK.

**EHdK 14:24 Do they get to talk to each other then?**

YG 14:27 Yeah, man. When you go around...everybody. They don't stay in their rooms they just sleep there at night, and they have their belongings and, you know, they can keep it safe and things like that.

**EHdK 14:34 What kind of stories do you hear then from people who have been deported from the UK? What's their personal situation?**

YG 14:44 I think the majority went and overstayed.

**EHdK 14:51 So, the majority of people travelled from Jamaica on a Jamaican passport, arrived in the UK and stayed too long?**

YG 14:57 They stayed and, for some of them, a long time. And then there's another group who went over as children. And I don't think you're old enough to know that children used

to travel on adults' passports. They didn't have a passport of their own. And they went over as children. Some of them are quite young children.

**EHdK 15:16 Would these be children of the Windrush generation?**

YG 15:20 Possibly, yeah. Or after. Soon after or whatever. During Windrush, a lot of children and youngsters were brought to England, and they just grew up believing that they were British citizens. They never thought about themselves as being anything else even if they went up as children. They were ten, eleven, twelve. So, they didn't think it related to them at all.

**EHdK 15:49 What kind of situation did they find themselves in? Was it that the Home Office would contact them to say that they were aware that they didn't have the documentation to remain in the UK?**

YG 16:04 Some persons were picked up and I think they went to lawyers and tried to get to stay and eventually...some of them had committed offences.

**EHdK 16:17 Some were from the prison population, but others are just everyday citizens who found themselves in that situation. How do you feel about that? How do you see that situation?**

YG 16:29 I have mixed feelings because I went there [to Britain] as a teenager. I went in my teens. I had my passport and everything. It was just before...I had my passport and I had everything when I left to go. I lived in Stockwell.

**EHdK 16:53 Was it a Jamaican passport that you had, or a British passport?**

YG 16:55 Then it said British because Jamaica had not...were not independent.

**EHdK 17:02 My apologies but could I ask what year you were born in?**

YG 16:55 I was born in 1943. So, I've never had anything else besides British. But I think I'm smart because when I heard that Jamaica was becoming independent, I investigated it all.

**EHdK 17:35 In 1962? A long way back.**

YG 17:27 Just before the independence. I went in 1962 but I went in June.

**EHdK 17:35 So you arrived in the UK just before the Jamaican independence? What a historic, important moment. What do you remember from that time?**



YG 17:43 I don't because I wasn't here for it. I don't remember here...I don't know anything about the celebrations or anything like that. You only heard about the politics and say, well this one is for it or that one is for it. I have no history of the actual independence itself. And the celebrations when they say it was such a high and all of that.

**EHdK 18:09 But you said that that you found out about the situation. How did you do that? Who did you speak to? Where did you go?**

YG 18:17 It was in the news and relatives would be telling us. You would get letters. It would be in England.

**EHdK 18:27 Do you remember any occasion? What you read or the information that you received about it?**

YG 18:34 There was not much...there was nothing to say really about Jamaica in the UK after independence or anything like that. I don't remember hearing anything about that at all because I was there years. And then when I started investigating and listening to things and all of that and that you will need a Jamaican passport now. And things like that. And that you were actually not British citizens. Then I applied for my citizenship in England.

**EHdK 19:10 Can you remember what year that happened? Can you remember about the cost? How much it cost?**

YG 19:12 It wasn't a lot at the time whatever it was. It wasn't a lot of difficulty. I didn't have any difficulties. It must have been about in the 1980s, I would say. Early 1980s, around about that time. The late 1970s or early 1980s that I had applied for my British citizenship. It could have been the 1970s thinking about it now.

**EHdK 19:40 So do you have dual nationality now?**

YG 19:51 I have dual nationality.

**EHdK 19:45 So, did you obtain your Jamaican passport?**

YG 19:51 You just have to apply for it. I had it from in the UK. Yes, you just went to the British High Commission...to the Jamaican High Commission and fill out the forms and things and got it there. So, yes, to get my citizenship, I didn't have any problems at all. None at all. Just fill it out, went down in central London, got there, got the papers and then it was granted.

**EHdK 20:17 How does that contrast then with the stories that you're hearing from some of the people who've arrived at Open Arms?**

YG 20:25 Well some persons never applied for anything, the majority never applied or even when they tried to apply it was when they were either incarcerated or when they were...when they saw a lawyer before they were returned. I don't remember anybody who had applied legally. And, you know, the law keeps changing and so they talking about red book [red birth certificate/certificate of registration] and all of these things and indefinite stay. I don't know anything about those things at all. The different laws...it's just that a lot of persons who came back had never applied or a lot of the younger ones would say that they didn't really know that they weren't legal.

**EHdK 21:16 How old was the youngest person that you've had?**

YG 21:19 Around 19 years, 20 years old. We don't take anybody under 18. I think the youngest is around 20.

**EHdK 21:29 As I understand it, part of the services you provide is helping reunite deportees with their families and friends. How do you how do you go about doing that?**

YG 21:39 Okay, we question them. Number one, before that we have to get them documented because the documentation is early and that can take a long time. And it means that when they are processed, after they are processed and we might pick them up or they come to us, they have no identification at all.

**EHdK 22:08 Talk me through that process of somebody who might arrive here with absolutely no documentation. Effectively, I suppose, you might argue then they're stateless because they don't have documents. But effectively it's because they're not...they don't have a legal identity document that proves who they are, that states who they are. So how do you go about that?**

YG 22:30 When we go to collect them at the processing centre, the persons from the immigration bureau and officers would hand over the person to us. We would take the person and they would say this is John Brown. So, we would take the person because prior to them being returned, the passport and immigration persons would have to certify that they are who they say because they couldn't put them on a plane without coming in with those documents. So, they actually land with documents. However, we don't get any of those documents and they don't get any.





**EHdK 23:17** So as I understand it, the function of Open Arms...its function has changed principally because when it first started out, it was taking people in from the street but now you're directly taking people who have come from the airport. Is that correct? Were you involved any way in the transportation of these people or is that another service?

YG 23:38 Once they are documented, then if they're coming directly to Open Arms, we'll take them.

**EHdK 23:46** Are they detained at the airport until they get their documents and then they come here?

YG 23:50 No, they come to us the same day. It's only because of COVID why they're doing it at the airport but normally they have a centre that they are taken to and then all that work, preliminary work, is being done. Then when they come into Open Arms, we'll collect that person. And there's another organisation right now, the National Organisation for Deported Migrants. If they are going to be taken in different parts of the country, that organisation would take them there. But we would take the persons who are coming to Open Arms directly.

**EHdK 24:29** Does that just depend on capacity as well? Are there some months where you don't have the capacity to take more people?

YG 24:35 We've never come up against that! But if say tomorrow morning we got more than 12 persons, we would have spaces in the dorms that they could go.

**EHdK 24:49** How does that process work? What organisation contacts you to say that they're sending people to Open Arms from the airport?

YG 25:00 What is the head of police called? The sergeant...? There are various persons...the Ministry of National Security. So, talk about national security. They would be on site as well because I would be alerted both by the British High Commission, the Ministry of National Security and the police services. Constabulary. The head, the Superintendent. So, three sets of organisations would say a deported migrant is here...is expected to come at a certain time. When they have all done the processing or are in the process of going through all the documents and everything, somebody would call me and say, "Oh, Miss Grant, we have one for you. Miss Grant, we have two for you." So, I would be alerted and I would literally go there with a member of my staff and escort the ones who are coming here to me.

**EHdK 26:09 Is there any separation then of people who have been in prison? Effectively criminals?**

YG 26:15 No, we don't...you see if they have committed an offence here and they are looking for them, then the head of the Constabulary they will deal with that. So, we wouldn't do it...if there's somebody that they are concerned about confidentially, they might say, "Oh, Miss Grant. We're concerned about this person." But we're not told what offences they have committed or anything. It's only what the individual tell us, all that is kept confidential. So that to reduce any stigma or anything like that. We just take persons in as IRM [involuntary returning migrant].

**EHdK 26:53 Okay. So, I'm interested in this documentation process. How does that work? Once somebody has arrived at the airport? Do they go to a special section of the airport I would imagine?**

YG 27:07 Yes, where it's confidential. As I say, if it's not COVID they just enter a bus. They don't come through like everybody else. They would discreetly, where the planes are nearby, they would just go into a bus, and they would be taken to the centre where they are processed.

**EHdK 27:25 I know that the UK clearly charters flights as well and there's been a lot of controversy around the chartering of flights specifically to deport Jamaicans. Do they arrive on commercial flights?**

YG 27:41 Some persons come on regular commercial flights.

**EHdK 27:46 Do some people self deport as well?**

YG 27:50 Yes. They can agree to come. We call all of them involuntary returning migrants but there are voluntary returns.

**EHdK 28:12 So there are some people who have approached the British authorities and said they want to return?**

YG 27:58 Or they've found them for some reason, especially for overstay. And they say, alright, we'll leave.

**EHdK 28:12 But they will be flagged on a flight then and they will be taken to be processed?**

YG 28:17 Yes, and they'll be processed, and they'll be let out. But their system is very different. If they want to come then they wouldn't be coming to us. Maybe they come and they fall on hard times or something and then we will just admit that person.

**EHdK 28:34 So how does this documentation process work? Are they encouraged from the UK to bring everything they have, every form?**

YG 28:42 They're not given anything.

**EHdK 28:43 Do they arrive on any form of documentation? Are there people that come here...I would imagine there's people that arrive without a passport, right? They travel without any form of ID.**

YG 28:51 No, they travel with ID because they have to have the identification to get on a plane. To be able to travel. But the travel documents are withheld by Passport and Immigration. So, it's withheld from them which means that when they come literally out the door to come into our car, they have nothing. So, when they come to us, they have nothing. It means now we have to start from scratch and go over the same process that was gone through to get them on the plane in the first place. So, we have to get them a Jamaican birth certificate because they wouldn't have any other unless it was illegal. Even if they had the old birth certificate. Say they went there during Windrush and they travelled on the old...Jamaica has new birth certificates so they would still have to get one of the new birth certificates.

**EHdK 29:52 What do you mean by a new birth certificate?**

YG 29:55 They have changed the whole system.

**EHdK 29:57 When did they change the system?**

YG 29:59 I'm not sure because when I came back...I. came here in 1997 and they had already changed it.

**EHdK 30:04 But they've also computerised things...**

YG 30:06 Yes but it's a whole different look. It's a different document altogether and so we have to apply for that and that costs money.

**EHdK 30:19 How much money?**

YG 30:21 I think it's about 4,000 Jamaican dollars.



**EHdK 30:29 OK, so that's not cheap. Who pays for that? Is it the British taxpayer that pays for that?**

YG 30:36 No, we pay. If we get in our project beneficiary allocation for a year. If it doesn't say documentation then we have to pay for it from donations. So, they need the birth certificate. They need what is called a voter's ID, they're going to change that to a national identification [National Identification System, NIDS] but we don't have to pay for that one. It's mainly the birth certificate we pay for. Then they have to, you know, we say TRN...it's the Tax Registration Number. We call it something different in England...Your national insurance.

**EHdK 31:24 Do you also help with drivers' licenses?**

YG 31:30 Well, driver's licence if they had one to renew it, we have to pay for that. I'm not sure. It depends on much. But the idea is a birth certificate does not have a picture. So, they have to have a picture identification.

**EHdK 31:43 And biometrics, as well, do they take people's fingerprints?**

YG 31:45 No. But we have a picture identification. So even if they have a birth certificate and they have the TRN then they still do not have a picture identification because it's not on the TRN. So that's where the voter's ID comes in and that's where the driver's license comes in. Because those two...some things you're doing like opening certain bank accounts, you need two picture identifications. So even if they can get money from abroad or anything, they won't be able to get a picture identification in under six months. Because the voter's ID, they only print them twice a year. So, if you miss it you have to wait until six months. So, they'll be here for six months waiting on documentation, on a picture identification.

**EHdK 32:38 What kind of issues does that cause?**

YG 32:41 It creates a lot of issues because some of them, they might have a little money somewhere and they want to open a bank account. If they're not at Open Arms then, you know, we do it legally but there's so much we can do. They have relatives sending them money.

**EHdK 32:41 They need a voter ID and they need a driver's licence to be able to open a bank account.**

YG 32:07 Some banks will take one [picture identification], but you need a picture identification.

**EHdK 33:12 Do you help people with...? Tell me about the kind of workshops that you have here and the kind of training...**

YG 33:17 When they first come, they need a lot of psychological care. So, we have to do detailed assessments, detailed individual and group work with them just because...to get them settled. And getting them settled can be very difficult. That's when also we try to have them have links with family. So, we have a computer room with computers and things so that they can go on social media. Some of them have children. At least they can see them, they can talk with them. Those sorts of things. And keep in contact with the relatives there and at the same time very often they might not know some of their relatives here because they might not have been back, so the relatives abroad are very helpful to say you have an aunty there or you have some cousins there. Or they might have heard of them and we try to link them.

**EHdK 34:20 Have you had the case of anybody who's been here who has no family whatsoever in Jamaica? Has no connection to anybody because they've either been in the UK for such a long time...or because they weren't aware of how to so-called regularise their status in the UK that they didn't even think they were Jamaican or that they had a link here?**

YG 34:45 A lot of them don't think they're Jamaican because, remember, especially the ones that went over younger. It's hard, it's hard for them to even begin to think of themselves as Jamaican. It's just as we take them out and take them places and they begin to get used to the culture. They might never. Some people might never think that they are Jamaican because some families would bring up their children...put it this way. So, when I went to England in 1962, in some areas there weren't a lot of Jamaicans or Black.... We moved to Neasden and there were hardly any Black people. So, where did the children go? They went to school at Bridge School. There were nearly only white children. Maybe one or two cousins that they might have met or one or two others. So, there were just real, real British people and they went through that school system. It's not all the parents who would have a tight link with Jamaica or come back and bring them back. They had never been here. They never come back. So, they just see themselves...everything about themselves as British. And so, it's very difficult now for those ones to say...We even had a man here. He's a senior citizen now. He's moved on but he was more or less adopted by an English couple down in Kent. You know?

**EHdK 34:24 So he has white parents?**

YG 34:26 Yes, so he was brought up...so even now he, on one level, you might say, yes, Jamaica, Jamaica. But at heart there's no Jamaican there. At all! Do you see what I'm trying to say? There's none. He doesn't know it. He wasn't brought up down in Brixton or in places where there's a large Black population and things like that. You get to see. And sometimes they see the worst part of the culture, they don't see the better part of it. And even though

they say, "Oh, you're a yardie man or whatever." But deep down...nuh-uh. Everything else about them. So that's hard. That's hard. Sometimes you just have to take them that they accept that they are here. Sometimes they say, it's only for a while, I'll be doing back whatever. So, I say make sure when you go back, it's going to be legal. Then gradually persons...that's very difficult. So, linking back to family is important.

**EHdK 37:26 Would you say that you've encountered anybody, over your career and in this position, who has been potentially deported under false pretences that were British? That were entitled to their documents but maybe because they didn't either understand the system or they didn't update their documents?**

YG 37:56 There was one young man, but he had moved on but recently I heard that his case was turned around and he returned.

**EHdK 38:13 OK, so he come here? He stayed at Open Arms did he?**

YG 38:16 I think it was several years ago. I think it was after he left here. While he was here, he met relatives and they took him so they must have worked on it.

**EHdK 38:25 And he was able to get his British passport?**

YG 38:27 But only that one person that I heard of because I think he went up quite young as well.

**EHdK 38:37 We've seen quite a lot about...it's called a Coming Home to Jamaica booklet, a DVD. And this was information that was provided by the British High Commission. I understand that Luke de Noronha, he writes about this in his book as well "Deporting Black Britons". Were you ever involved in giving information leaflets? What kind of information did you provide to people?**

YG 39:06 The information was just making them aware of what happens when they actually come. A lot of our input was just saying Open Arms, what we would do. Also, the input was information of the health system where they would get...how to get to the health centres, registering with the health centres, those sorts of information. Mental health clinics, where they were. And those sorts of things. It was mainly how to get around and to get access [to] various services. It wasn't extensive what it was. It was sort of an introduction to Jamaica because while it's not fully as the British health system, but we have general hospitals now that persons don't have to pay. If you go to the health centres, it still centres around the place. You might have to wait a little bit longer and that sort of thing but it's a very similar structure. But some of it can be expensive. But there is backup and things like that, so we tell people about it.

**EHdK 40:25 What do you know about the Windrush scandal in the UK? When did you first hear about it? Was it talked about really at Open Arms?**

YG 40:35 Windrush is something, a name that was always there, the name of the ship! [laughs]. And that's what it was to us at the time when I was living in England. And then you would say, you come on the ship, but I came on the plane! So, it's only since they're talking about a scandal now, that persons say, "I went there at the same time. I was there during the time when the Windrush was coming in and we had relatives coming on the Windrush." And things like that.

**EHdK 41:05 But what did you personally...when did you hear about the scandal? Was it in the newspaper, for example, or was it maybe word of mouth or on the radio?**

YG 41:18 I think it's people talking about it. When people started to demonstrate in England and, you know, they were seeking redress. I get a lot of the British news and especially when there's a protest or people are lobbying. So that's how I first heard of heard about it.

**EHdK 41:44 Did you have any discussions with the British High Commission here, for example, or with maybe any Jamaican politicians? Were there any discussions that were raised about what was happening and the controversies around people being deported from the UK? Was that something that became a part of your meetings?**

YG 42:11 Yes. It was always in the British meetings because we used to have a stakeholders meeting, I think, once a quarter.

**EHdK 42:19 Tell me about the stakeholders meeting. Who was sat around the table?**

YG 42:22 Anybody who is everybody! All the NGOs, the various ministries, people were involved from the High Commission, of course, sometimes other high commissions.

**EHdK 42:43 Were they talking specifically about the British situation or were talking about more broadly about the migrants?**

YG 42:50 When the British called it, it was really mainly about the British side. It was headed by the British High Commission because they were chairing all these meetings.

**EHdK 43:02 What were the agenda items that were on the table during those meetings? What were the main concerns that came up?**

YG 43:10 I think my main concern is that when people are returned that number one, the British are going to do everything to make sure it's legal and a lot of it is making sure that we do what we say we're supposed to. Whatever we said we would do, they wanted to know

that we are doing it and that we were actually working together. So that whatever services the IRMs are getting, it's well-structured, well organised, the money is spent wisely...those sorts of things. And just giving...bouncing ideas and different...it's not that the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing. Various organisations would say, well, this is where we are, this is what we're doing, these are the issues we are having. And, you know, we would just work together to see.

**EHdK 44:14 It was very much led by Britain.**

YG 44:16 Yes, they called the meeting.

**EHdK 44:20 I'm looking at some statistics here. These are statistics from the Planning Institute of Jamaica National Intelligence Bureau of the total number of persons returned between 2000-2012 by country of residence. And overwhelmingly, the most people were from the US, which was 19,987, there were others 5,936. Canada, as well, which is a large number 2,781 and the UK which was 12,357 persons recorded which is a high number. In terms of returned persons, the UK is the second largest country. So how involved was the US? Not present?**

YG 45:07 They [the US] don't give.

**EHdK 45:09 So they don't provide funding?**

YG 45:11 They don't provide funding, Canada, once or twice, we might get donations. None of the other countries. England is the only country that provides funding.

**EHdK 45:30 So, since 2008, the UK through its Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Forced Returnees to Jamaica programme [report by Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, prepared for the International Organization for Migration, 2014] has been very active and very present. Why?**

YG 45:41 I wish I had the answer. It's not for asking. It's not for engaging. Whenever I go to functions, I meet with them, the High Commissioners, and let's face it, they do communicate with me because when they have persons coming in and when they have an issue and the Canadians, they would always call me. We have so-and-so coming in or whatever. And I said, "What about some funding towards it?" Oh, yes, we are going to...but they never. The US don't even ask, they just send out a charter flight every month. Every last Thursday.



**EHdK 46:31 The strategy then from the UK has very much been one of the collaboration. One of using international development funding to support NGOs and community organisations. So, it's to give the impression of kindness in a humane way. If you can say that.**

YG 46:53 I'm still, as you can see, very much British and I always tell them it's the best. Because you understand volunteerism. No matter how you have to work, you volunteer for something. You do something. And it's just that kind-hearted nature of being compassionate and being caring.

**EHdK 47:16 But within a system that is brutally violent because the part of the deportation infrastructure that is being built is shockingly violent, right? Who are the High Commissioners who attended these high stakeholder meetings besides the British High Commission?**

YG 47:43 Sometimes when they have receptions America come and Canada come.

**EHdK 47:49 Were there any other Caribbean nations? That might talk about the UK deportations? Might have an interest in them? No? Are there any unanswered questions? Are there any maybe issues that you think the High Commission has not addressed in terms that you think are important to support you in your day-to-day work and support the centre and the needs of the people who are residents here?**

YG 48:18 No, I don't have any issues with it. I'm so grateful. All our questions are usually answered. They talk to us on a weekly basis. If we have anything to say, we work it out. I don't have any issues at all. None at all.

**EHdK 48:37 Do you have any contact then with people...with former residents so people who have either been able to reconnect with family or have able to find employment?**

YG 48:50 We do have contact but some of them...especially now we're doing the reintegration and the integration, and we are dealing with persons who have never come to Open Arms so our interventions have widened a bit. That that is very beneficial, but we do have interactions but some persons once they get to a certain level, they want to forget and put that behind them. And we don't have a problem with that. But there are others who will turn up from time to time and we have a link, and they are excelling in what they are doing. So that's behind them. Because, as you know, there's still some stigma attached. So, persons we respect their wishes when they don't always come forward. We had mentioned about the...you'd ask me about the enterprises. The enterprises that we are doing that's usually very active is active skills training. The skills training is barbering. We haven't been doing it lately because I'll show your skills training room. It needs major upgrading because sometimes we use it for small conferences and meetings and that. And I must let you know

that 28 of my friends came from England and put a roof on that building. It never had a roof and did a lot of things to it. And the British came in and gave us the money for the computers. They're getting a bit old now!

**EHdK 50:36 How many staff do you have working here as well?**

YG 50:38 Right now we are really down on staff through the COVID and because our numbers are down. So, I have a caseworker. My rehabilitation officer died. But I have another one who started, just came in straight away. And so right now, we have three on day duty. And we have two night and a security.

**EHdK 50:59 So five or six people.**

YG 51:02 We don't have 80 right now. We have 40 but we will up it as we admit in more. So, we have our caseworker. I haven't got a secretary now so we are doubling up because, you know, under 40 we can try and manage. But we also have a secretary, we have two or three rehabilitation officers, we have two psychiatric aides because most persons who come in have mental health problems. And then we have two nights and a security for the women's house because they are separated during the day. That's all the staff. We don't employ a cook because a lot of our residents have...and we train them, and they can get certified on the job here. So, it's the participants who will help to run the kitchen. We don't employ janitors. They're on duty rosters. So, they must learn to cook and clean and take care of the property. That sort of thing.

**EHdK 52:07 I'd like to hear a little more about you now because I understand that you were recently awarded an MBE. Do you want to talk about how that came to be?**

YG 52:16 I have to go to the beginning. Born in Jamaica, as a teen I went to England and I finished schooling, college and, in the meantime, I got married and having children at the same time.

**EHdK 52:38 How many children?**

YG 52:40 I got three sons. They're all born in England, they're all there now. We moved out to Harlow. So, one is in Harlow. He's married now 30 years. He's got three children. The second one lives in Birmingham...The last two live in Birmingham. The one in Birmingham, he was at one of them companies that does pensions and that sort of thing. He have a little business on the side that he does... a cleaning company, janitorial. And the other one he lives in Birmingham but he has a house in Harlow still. But he lives in Birmingham and he's not very well. He has a problem with...he has a thin nerve in his brain and sometimes he gets like seizures but they're not really seizures. He is managing and he does work and things like that. So those are my three children. Anyway, went to school, went into nursing. My first nursing was at Neasden Hospital...fevers. You don't know about fevers. Nowadays,

it would have a posh name. They would call it infectious diseases. But in those days, you had measles, you had mumps, polio but not many polio at that time...but TB and all that was rife in the 1960s. So, when I trained at Neasdon Hospital. Then I went at Barnet where I got the registered mental [health] nurse, worked there for years. Then I went down to Whittington and the general nursing unit. Then in central London I went and did counselling and all of these things. So, in the end, I ended up at university with a specialist practitioner in community mental health. So, you know, you up through the ranks and everything. I been there, quite happy, enjoying myself, children grown. And I came out to Jamaica on a holiday because I was a little bit ...I needed a break, I needed to come and relax, enjoy myself. The college there at the time, they couldn't get anybody to teach mental health and management. So, when I went back to England, they called me and offered me a job. Everybody say go for it, go for it. So that's how I came to Jamaica. But in England, in my church I'm a Seventh Day Adventist and we have a strong community services department in our church. You might have heard. And a strong health department and, you know, various departments. So, I was a part of the community mental...community services department. So, they gave me 18 small groups to run as a volunteer. I do my full-time job. I do some counselling part time [my kids] were big by then. So, in those 18 groups in community services, we had to go to central London, to feed the homeless and to get them into night shelters and to get them into jobs and things like that. So that's when I really did a lot of work with the homeless in London when the IRA was dropping the bombs in central London and sometimes the bombs were behind us.

**EHdK 56:07 Did you ever have contact with the Jamaican High Commission when you were in London? It was more through the church and church networks?**

YG 56:17 At one time, we had an England-Jamaican little group like and that was when we had the most dealings with them because they would come now and again and talk. But not much. Mainly about passports and birth certificates and things like that. That was in the early/mid-1970s.

**EHdK 56:45 That's very interesting. So, the High Commission was aware that people of Jamaican descent and Jamaicans who weren't recognised as British needed to...I don't really like the word regularise...but they had to make sure that their documents were up to date.**

YG 57:08 Yes, because some of the key persons have died now but to think of it most of us who went to that group never got caught because we already, we applied for British citizenship.

**EHdK 57:27 But what effort did the High Commission go to to reach out to the broader Jamaican community? Was it flagged as being an important issue?**

YG 57:40 I think maybe persons weren't that interested. Jamaicans weren't that interested because they just didn't believe, even now, people come back as say, "I've been there so long I never thought..." It might not just be lack of knowledge because when the government, when various things change, it's well-publicised and you hear it. But people just think it doesn't apply to them. I think so. But at that time, in the mid-1970s...when we used to have a little meeting...they weren't no big-time meetings but, you know, a few of us used to get together and yes, we did have links. But I think it was because quite a few of those persons had retired and come home and they were ok.

**EHdK 58:33 You have this Jamaican-British perspective where you're a British citizen, you have your British passport but you're also working now at a centre where you're receiving people deported from the UK. Also, you've acknowledged that one person who was British. Did you have any insight into how big this scandal was?**

YG 59:06 No, I still don't know how big it is. Being here, I don't know how big it is. I really don't know.

**EHdK 59:15 Finally, tell us about your MBE then please.**

YG 59:19 I think because...well I suppose somebody must have been following me somewhere because then once I came and I taught at the school for a little while. I used to take the students out. So, because I left Jamaica for so long, I didn't understand the community and I didn't understand what was happening. From day one, I saw people on the streets, homeless and so I left the teaching full-time to come and work with Ministry of Health in community mental health as the specialist practitioner. Which was nice and I enjoyed it. But then again, I left that because I thought the Lord had something else for me to do. That was when I was called...so being called to that committee, I was able to give my experiences of working both with mentally ill and working with homeless persons. So that was when everything came together and we co-founded this organisation. I've been here ever since! I've said, I would give them two-year full time and one-year part time and it's now 2022 and I'm still here doing more than full time! So, I think it's the impact that this place has made because it's a model. And it's a model even for the Caribbean. We are a member of the Citygate Network which is the American international organisation where they do missions. Inner city missions is a part of it and everything. We are a part of international organisations and many of them come and look at what we are doing here because it's kind of unique. Many persons would just take in homeless persons with addiction or mother and children and the mother might have an addiction problem or something like that. Now, we are doing so many. We take a person with addiction and we prepare them to go for detox. We don't actually do the detox but we do the social and psychological rehabilitation and take care of some of their health because we have a mental

health clinic here on the third Thursday of each month. And the one-to-one interactions that we have. I think it's the impact that Open Arms is making not just in Jamaica but worldwide that got me there. I'm still not so sure but I am grateful for it. And I think it has done wonders for my immediate family. I brought my children to care and they're all doing things that involves caring. And their children are doing that, and they say, "Look, my mom, my grandma, has been rewarded." Because my youngest son, he took a year off from everything. And he came and spent it here with us, you know.

**EHdK 1:02:24 Thank you so much for sharing all of that. Especially your personal story with me. I really appreciate it and it was a pleasure to speak to you today. Is there anything else you'd like to say?**

YG 1:02:36 I would just like to say that when the guys and everyone come here, they work. They have to have a good work ethic. The businesspeople know us, and they're known for their good work ethic and our social enterprises are geared to help them to work and to learn and whatever skill they want or if they want to go to university we will raise funds and make sure they get it. And we help them to resettle whatever they need to get settled. We will do it whether physical, psychological, social, whatever. And live out in the communities. We don't like them living with families. We like them to be independent, have money in the bank, and be independent.

**EHdK 1:03:17 Thank you so much.**

[END OF AUDIOFILE].