
Interview with Andrea Cordani

Part 1: Training and supervision

Okay, Andrea. Thanks so much for agreeing to be interviewed; we're really thrilled that you did. Now thinking about the poverty in the UK study, can you remember how you were recruited to the project? How you came to be part of it?

I can't remember in detail, but I think it was to do with when I came to the end of my university studies, I think that it was part of getting notifications through possibly the university careers office or something, but I can't actually absolutely remember.

And do you mind me asking, was your career, was your university degree in social sciences, was that your background?

No, my degree was in English literature and philosophy.

Ah interesting.

And then I did a Postgraduate Certificate in Education, and didn't like teaching so I was casting around for something else to do.

And that's how you...

And the poverty in the UK survey came up, so I thought that sounds a bit like me.

And that's really interesting for us to know that they were recruiting through universities. And can you tell me as much as you can remember about what your job involved? What the work on the Poverty in the UK study involved?

Well it was quite, although in those days things were quite new I think about surveys. And I remember that myself and colleagues that I worked with, when

we found the length of the interviews, and the amount of data that was being collected, we were absolutely a bit gobsmacked because I mean we were aware that Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend were doing this work, but I don't think any of us had an idea that the interviews would take as long as they did, and require so much detailed information.

I mean that's one thing we've been struck by, just how detailed they were. Were you aware of the work that Peter Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith had been doing because of just general information? Or when you were recruited?

Yes. I mean I think we had some very good induction courses. I don't think I was aware of it before, I mean we were asked if we wanted to take part in a UK wide poverty survey. It was put to us that it was very important for sort of social history purposes and so forth, but it was when we were engaged to do the project that we started to get more and more information, and see the scope of it.

I really want to ask about that in a minute, but did you have an interview then for the post? Or how did it...

Yes, I had an interview. I can't remember where it was, it was probably in London, I don't think, it was probably at London, it may have been at LSE, I don't remember going to Essex. Sorry, I can't remember.

And you said that the induction training had been good and thorough; can you say a bit more about that?

Yes. I mean it was impressed upon us that we must adhere very strictly to the rules of the interviewing. I don't think any of us had done interviews before, sorry, had conducted interviews before. And so training was vital, and we were taught various sorts of tricks I suppose to put people at ease, and how to introduce ourselves on the doorstep because literally we were door stepping people, and so I felt that we did need the training. I don't think I would have been happy to go out into the hinterlands sort of unarmed.

So the training was around kind of interview technique?

Yes.

And getting people to talk?

Yes, getting people comfortable. Making sure that people talked, and also particularly making sure you got the right person in the household was very important. And I mean maybe we'll come to that later about some of the...

Or actually even you could say a little bit about that now.

Well I mean in many cases we were asked to interview the woman in the house, and often in practice it was very hard if the husband, or boyfriend, came home for them to start answering on behalf of their wives. I think it was quite clear in the training that we received that the poverty survey, I think we were aware even then that we were talking about the way that poverty related to sort of child poverty, and that therefore the female side of the story, if you like, was going to be, much of the key information was going to be forthcoming.

That's interesting. So there was a kind of sense of family poverty, of concern around children, and that was something?

Absolutely, yeah.

So there was a kind of training in the techniques, and was there a kind of, in the training was there anything about the kind of ethos of the project? Or the ideas that were informing the project, did that form part of the training at all?

Yes, and as I recall we had a sort of introductory spiel that we were, if you like, required to explain ourselves to the people who were being interviewed. And, yes, the ethos was that the project was trying to, if you like; get to the bottom of what the true story and scale of poverty in the UK was at this period. And I mean remember that the period of time was the '60s, was the sort of so called swinging sixties when everybody was supposed to be bursting out of the post war gloom, and yet and yet there was the feeling that all was not entirely well up and down the country.

That's interesting. And how long did you work on the project for? Do you remember how many years or months?

I think I worked from 1968 to 1969, but I can check that and get back to you on that.

And during that period did you detect any kinds of shifts in what was required of you? Or what the project was about? Or was the kind of task fairly enough...

Yes, it was consistent throughout that period, as I recall, yeah.

And so you were kind of all sort of trained together, what were the other field workers like? Were they kind of similarly recruited to you? What was the...

I mean we were all fairly young. We were all fairly I suppose happy to not exactly rough it, but bear in mind we were out of university, we were required to travel up and down the country, we lived in B&Bs and sometimes it felt as if we lived in the car, and we were sent to various districts, which were sometimes quite stark and so we became I think a team or a unit of people. I think our car took five, so I think there was me and four other people. We became quite a close knit unit for the duration of the project.

That's really interesting. So the people actually were kind of working together, travelling together, sort of living together effectively?

Living together in bed and breakfast accommodation, I think that was organised for us, and we were sent to a location, Coventry, Salford I remember we went to. And I remember that it was part of my task, at the beginning of the period, to allocate the questionnaires and the numbers to other sort of team members.

And from your understanding, most of the people who worked on the project as field workers were graduates, and had been recruited through university?

I think so. I think they were either graduates, or they were from polytechnics maybe. I mean I think it was from higher education.

From higher education?

Yeah.

That's how you think it was meant to be, okay. So that was the kind of contact with the field workers, which sounds like you were quite a band actually.

Yes.

In terms of kind of contact with other members of the team, who had different roles, so for example we've noticed that there is people who coded the work and checked the work, how was the kind of contact? Or to what extent was there contact between people who had different jobs or different kinds of jobs on this?

You mean when the questionnaires were completed?

Yeah, for example, or when you were out on the field, if there was any kind of queries or anything?

I think we were very much on our own. I think there may have been a few queries in the beginning about how we dealt with things like, for example, people's refusal to answer certain questions, or refusal to answer anything at all. And it was established fairly early on, I can't remember quite how, but I think I must have had an area worker that I reported to, and this business of the numbers, can I explain that?

Yeah, please do.

Well we had a sort of list. The questionnaires were numbered with, I don't know, four or five, six digit number at head office or the controlling end of the survey. We had been matched up with addresses that corresponded to these, so if we arrived in an area and we were told that we were going to do a certain street, you know, that this episode of interviewing was going to be concentrated in two or three streets, say, in Salford then there was a checklist and the numbers of the houses was given to us against the printed copy of the questionnaire. And a couple of times I know that colleagues said to me well I've banged on number 22, but they're never in, can I do number 23? And it was my job to say, no,

absolutely not, you must process that questionnaire against that address, and if after the requisite number of attempts, and there was a scenario for each situation like that, then we have to sort of send that back blank with either refused or whatever it was, or no answer, but you can't just pick another house, or another flat or another property, to go and interview so there was those sorts of queries.

That's interesting because what you've described there, there seemed to be a designated person on the ground, as it were, that the others could ask and then you mentioned an area that you dealt with.

I think there was an area leader as well, yes, or somebody who visited the area. And as I recall, I think we got, because the boot of the car was full of these things, and so when they were completed they had to be sort of taken off us, in order that we could then be sent to another area with a fresh batch. And I suppose if there had been queries, we all kept lists of which numbers, which of the questionnaires we had been responsible for. So if there were queries back from the survey coders or headquarters, I suppose, then we would do our best to answer it, but I don't recall keeping any very comprehensive notes. I think all of the notes that we kept were part and parcel of the documentation we handed over to the...

And those notes would be kind of queries that had arisen from the fieldwork?

Yes.

Rather than kind of any other kind of information?

How do you mean?

I'm just kind of possibly thinking ahead to the marginalia, but not kind of impressions of the field or anything like that? Impressions of the interviews, or kind of concerns? I mean the notes that you made, were they mainly about, I suppose questions about procedure or about kind of sampling?

No, there was some background info. I mean when we went to area, I really can't recall in detail, but you may find from, I have a slight memory that we had to say, well what the streets looked like and I do remember, I mean this sticks in my mind, is that before ever Coronation Street was screened I knew what those streets were like because when it was on the TV in later years, I thought I've been to places like that for the poverty survey. And I think we had to say this area is back to back houses, they do not appear to have internal bathrooms, they've got loos out in the back alleys and stuff like that. I think we had to do a sort of quick geographic sketch. I mean bear in mind there was no photography done; we're talking a time before there were cameras, pocket cameras or anything like that, or video. There was nothing like that, so an area description was probably needed by people back at headquarters to know what places in Newcastle or Coventry, or Salford were like.

That's really interesting. And these area descriptions would be separate from any notes that you would make?

Yes.

Right, that's really interesting. I mean from what we've picked up, there seemed to be pretty thorough checking processes for the questionnaires, do you have any memories about how those worked, once you passed the material onto the area supervisor about kind of how the checkers, or coders, would communicate with you? Or how you would, any kind of interaction that you would have?

I think mainly only with regard to whether or not we had completed our task properly. So I mean they wouldn't ask us anything like Mrs Jones says she's got no money, do you know the reason for this? There would be never any contextual questions like that, but there would be things like we see that Mrs Jones refused to answer questions about whether or not they had any savings, did you form a view whether this was because her husband was in the room, or whether she just didn't want to tell you? We would sometimes get second questions; I would get those from the area person and then I would have to ask.

If they'd undertake the...

Yeah, if they'd ever undertaken it.

Because you would be the one that had a view of that?

Yeah, and then there was a way of feeding that back.

Which would be via the supervisor?

By these area people, yeah. I think it sort of, I mean I remember them as being very harassed and delivering bunches of questionnaires, which they'd got from somewhere, I mean LSE or Essex I suppose. And they'd come up to meet us in these various -

Locations?

- locations in the Midlands or the North.

Interesting. So you had contact with the area supervisors in terms of, but kind of contact with say the coders or checkers, or Brian Abel-Smith Smith or Peter Townsend, or anybody like that there was none?

No, there was no direct contact. I mean I think from time to time, maybe every month or so, there was a way where we were informed how the survey was going, but that was really just in terms of the numbers that had been completed, and whether we were behind schedule, but those in the North East were not or whatever, and how it was generally going, but there was never any personal intervention from either Brian Abel-Smith or Peter Townsend.

Or from others in those specific roles?

No.

So I mean thinking about kind of debriefing about how the work was going, or kind of just talking about the work, from what you've said that seemed to be something that was within your field work team, or if at all, is that right?

Yes, or possibly with the area person. I mean sometimes we did have some quite difficult problems. I remember one time where word of our knocking on doors in

certain areas had become known, I suppose, and there were issues where people both wanted to do a survey and we said I'm sorry you're not on our list. And they said well you know I've got a contribution to make, and who can I talk to about, I want to fill in one of these, Mrs Jones down the road has done one, and I want to do one. And we had to deal with sometimes quite difficult situations, so most of our sort of training and interventions were about feedback, and trying to get advice about what to do where you had sort of sticky situations.

And then you've either kept it in your team, or gone to the area supervisor?

Yeah.

That's interesting.

Part 2: The interview process

And I wanted to, I mean as you know we're particularly interested in the marginalia and what you all kind of wrote in the margins of the scripts. I mean can you remember sort of how you decided to write in them? The sort of decision making process around putting notes in the margins, how that sort of came about?

Well I think it definitely came about through the difficulty of asking some of these questions, at a time when personal privacy particularly regarding money, and how difficult people found their lives financially; it was not an open topic.

Of course, yes.

And so there were many questions where, I mean my most abiding memory is actually that most people, when you finally sat them down for a three hour interview, usually at the kitchen table, that everybody went all round, the women went all round the houses sort of metaphorically. They would tell you every dot and comma about their sex lives that you didn't really want to know, but they would not tell you anything about their finances. It was very, very difficult to get any information out about them. There was also the particular sort of social thing now that I don't think we even remark on, but was very common back then that

many of the people who were targeted for the interview, the women, did not know what their husband earned. So a lot of the margin notes I remember making were Mrs Blogs gets this much, £2 a week or 50 Bob, I think we called it then, wasn't it, 50 Bob a week to manage the food and shoes for the kids and everything, but does not know how much her husband earns down the shipyard.

And so there was a lot of that sort of explanation because the information you got was very, very sparse in many cases because people themselves didn't know, or if they did know sometimes they wouldn't tell you.

So that was the kind of question that prompted the para data. And I mean thinking about sort of either the training, or through the information or however, were there any particular areas you were encouraged to write about, say, for the benefit of the survey? Were you asked at all to make notes in the margins about particular issues?

No, I think what we were encouraged to do was to account for where there was an absence, or a sort of dearth, of information. I mean I did get the impression from, and I'll call them head office for want of a better word, that questionnaire had been devised by people who were more fluent in both language, and sort of socially comfortable, than the people we were asking what was what. And that when we couldn't get an answer out of them I think we felt, as interviews and field workers that we had to explain more why the entries were so sparse, you know, had we failed at our job? And if so, why? I know that there was one particular field worker that I had who was very shy youngish man. I mean he was the same age as the rest of us, but he had that sort of demeanour of a slightly diffident young man.

And I had to encourage him a bit by talking later when we went through the questionnaires because he had very minimalist sort of responses, and I had to say look, Mike, whatever his name was, can you tell me what was going on here? Did they not want to tell you? Did you press them a bit? And those were the sorts of questions that we had to justify back to head office that we'd kind of done all we could to get the answers.

That's interesting because what you described there is going through questionnaires together as a group, did that happen? Or was it when there was a problem? Or was it continued in...

Well when there was a problem, I mean I don't think, we certainly didn't sit down routinely and go through all our questionnaires together, not at all. There would be a problem, I think what would happen in this last situation would be that I would start to sort of backtrack the questionnaires from that area, and you'd just sort of flip through them and you could see a lot of white space. And then knowing, as sort of team leaders we knew the sort of strengths and weaknesses I suppose of the people in the team, so seeing this was a lot of white space, and knowing this was one of this chaps interviews, then you would ask him a few questions. And then maybe he would annotate a bit more, you know, like why isn't question eight filled in, David? And he'd say well point blank refused. I said well you must actually write that down, but I mean that was only in the beginning. We all got very practiced I suppose at sort of socially doing the right thing, and the timing of choosing the right time for the interview was key because it was so damn long.

So that's interesting. So there were times of day you favoured rather than...

Yeah. I mean there were times of day because I mean life was hard for people. You were going to take three hours out of their day, sitting at their kitchen table or in their front room, or whatever. They were trying to look after children, or get meals for husbands and boyfriends, and families members, and so often you would make the appointment in the day, you'd knock first in the morning and try and make the appointment for the same day. And I think the timing of the interviews was, we certainly were not allowed to do the interviews over more than one occasion, but we were allowed to make a sort of first contact, and then go and book a time when we could do it. Now I think that the favourite time was the afternoon, hopefully sometimes when the, if there was children of school age they would be at school.

So they wouldn't be running around distracting usually mum, but also there was this watershed where the man of the house would come home, and start to throw various spanners in the works, like what's all this, Mabel? You never told me that you was going to be sitting here with, who is she? Because there wasn't really social services, but there were worries that we were from the authorities.

Yeah, I can imagine.

And then there were a couple of occasions where things got really quite unpleasant, where the man snatched a questionnaire of his wife or off me and said what is this? And then it was obvious he couldn't actually read it, and so that was blustering, so I said well perhaps we should continue this another time. And you get all this sort of posh women, we're not answering any questions about our money that's for us to know, what does the Government want to know about it for anyway? And all of that, and you'd have to sort of gradually diffuse a bit of a tirade sometimes.

It sounds like it could have been pretty intimidating actually? Or maybe not.

Well I mean it could be potentially, I mean to my knowledge nobody in our team was sort of attacked. We were verbally given a bit of tongue lashing sometimes because by and large also, I don't know if this is sort of something that one thinks about these days, but we were university. We were well educated young people who probably, although we were of mixed sort of class, if you like, but we were perceived as posh toffs even though some of us, including myself, were from an equally working class backgrounds, but we were perceived sometimes as a bit of threat, and not often as any sort of help, not leading to anything good. Sometimes the women would think that this might be a good thing sometime in the future, but mostly we were an intrusion, a nuisance and invading their privacy, although privacy was not a concept; it's a modern concept.

That's interesting too. I mean just when you say there, just to hold you there for a minute, about some people thinking that it might be a good thing, I wondered about making decisions to intervene on behalf of some of the people that you interviewed. Was there any possibility to try because I mean some of the circumstances, from looking at the questionnaires that you saw and were in were difficult, and were there arrangements in place to sort of intervene?

No, there was nothing official. I mean when the interviews came to an end, now I don't know whether this, I honestly can't remember whether this is something that we did off our own sort of backs, as it were, or whether we had been spoken to about this. You might find this in some of the training notes, I don't know, but when the questionnaire was closed up there was often time where you could say

well, Mrs Smith, have you taken the youngster to the doctor? They look like probably they seem to be a bit poorly and it's been going on, from what you say, it's been going on for a long time, have you been to the doctor, or this that and the other, but we could only do that as individuals, sort of as we would to a neighbour. And because we'd been in their front rooms for about three hours, sometimes you did build up a very good rapport but, no, there was no official things of us reporting specific circumstances outside the questionnaire.

Not within the team, so not up say to...

No, we didn't, which actually in the context of modern day things I suppose would be quite different but, no, I don't think there was any intervention, certainly nothing that we did. I don't know whether area managers looked through, or the coders looked through. No, but I don't think people did intervene downwards, I don't think so.

And did you get a sense, whenever you wrote your marginalia, of any particular interest that others in the team had that you were looking out for? I mean might you be looking out for interesting cases for the book that was planned, or anything like that? Did that inform any of the notes that you wrote, or not particularly?

Not particularly, except that we knew that child poverty was one of the key sort of drivers; the effect on children of deprivation.

And you knew that from your training?

And we knew that from our training but, no, we were not looking out for specific circumstances. I mean my overriding remembrance of the places we went to is that they were almost; they were to me startlingly bleak places. And I think that many of my colleagues were also quite shocked by the extent of the deprivation we encountered, even though we might have come from sort of relatively poor areas of London or Manchester, or whatever.

Was that something that you noted down at all? Or that you talked about among yourselves?

We talked about it amongst ourselves. And I remember that when I was myself at university, I was in Manchester University and for a while I volunteered, while I was still an undergraduate, to volunteer with something called the university settlement, which was in an area called, a very poor district of Manchester called Ancoats. I did things like visited old ladies, and had a cup of tea with them and chatted, and stuff like that and this was while I was still an undergraduate. And Ancoats was a very bleak place and quite a shock to me, and when I came to do the poverty survey at the end of my, three years later I suppose I found that some of these places sort of mirrored that experience. And I think I discussed that with colleagues that I hadn't really sort of encountered those sorts of areas until Manchester, and then in the survey locations.

I mean you've said quite a lot already, but I'm just wondering can you say a bit more about what it is like to actually do the interviews, and kind of interact with the interviewees? Is there anything else that we haven't said already?

I suppose it was very, it was quite humbling in a way and I think that, I mean first of all you had to sort of door step people, I suppose rather in the manner that sort of chuggers do these days in shops. We had to actually knock on doors, and then we had a good bit of training about stepping back just in case what came through the door, what came at you was a punch on the nose. It didn't, but just in case, and to engage with people and I found, I mean that was the hardest part to say hello, Mrs Jones, I'd like to interview you I'm from, identify yourself and all this and the badge and everything. And to explain how important it was, and to get their acquiescence in being interviewed that was the hardest part, and that was the thing that always gave you great pleasure if they said well alright, yeah, come back at four o'clock or something. And then you'd say, you'd think ahead and you'd think 4:00 is a bit late, not because you've got other things to do, but because of the coming home from work business.

So you'd say do you think we could make it three o'clock? And she'd say oh alright then come in at 3:00, she said I might be a bit busy, but come in at 3:00. And so once you'd started and you'd got in there, and you'd sort of softened up the atmosphere that was fine, and then when you opened the questionnaire, which as I recall I think was blue, it had a blue cover on it. You got into this detailed bit where they realised, and some of them realised that they'd wished they hadn't said yes because they were going to be put on the back foot about

whether or not they wanted to answer questions. And also there was this rather unpleasant situation of them feeling that you were somehow the authorities or someone in authority, and that they could or couldn't say no. And you were trying to work out whether you had to be even more nice, I mean obviously we tried to be decent human beings, but we did have to get the answers or try to. And sometimes it was just hard to gain their trust, and it was very emotionally draining. I remember that we were all very tired, and sometimes at the end of a day, and particularly at the end of a week, we were pretty clobbered with the sort of emotional sort of adrenaline of it.

Part 3: the personal and political impact

Because I image there's the emotion of actually kind of, like you say, being in that situation and having to keep the kind of trust, without being exploitative, but also I mean as you described I mean it takes its toll kind of being confronted by some of the bleakness -

Oh absolutely.

- and some of the stories that you...

But in a way that sort of helped because it brought home to us that this was a serious project because it was a serious problem in the UK, in a way that I think even though we've been on the training, we'd signed up for it, we knew it was a poverty survey. We listened to lectures in the beginning from Professor Abel-Smith and Townsend, and we knew that it was an important project, but when you were actually doing it on the sharp end you realised, my goodness, there is a need here to get to the bottom of what needs to be done to improve people's lives.

So it sounds like you were very kind of engaged with the task and kind of with the vision of the project as well?

Oh absolutely, yeah. I think everybody was very enthusiastic. I mean I don't think I heard anybody in my bunch, as it were, that said oh I'm not doing this. Everybody stuck with it, and I think everybody was affected by it.

I mean in terms of thinking about the emotional toll that it took, and sort of debriefing, was there any kind of, I don't know, was there any sort of outlet for the kind of difficulties maybe that it brought up out of it?

Not really. I mean only just we all sat round in the evening, or we went down the pub, but we had to be careful not to be sort of like hung over in the mornings obviously.

Yes, of course.

I mean we'd all not long been students, and so we had to be careful. Also we were not that well off; I was paid money for the petrol for the car and things, but obviously that wasn't being spent on frivolities.

You needed that for petrol.

Yes, exactly. I mean the actual logistics were also quite, I'm sure they wouldn't give us that sort of carte blanche nowadays, but we were packed off in a car. I think one of the reasons I think I got to be team leader or something was because I could drive and I had driven for a couple of years when this project started, but then they put me in a car that I'd never seen before, which had a steering column gear change. I think it was a Vauxhall Victor or something, and so I got all these keen interviewers in the back, and a trunk load of questionnaires and I couldn't get, I think I didn't get out of second gear until we got past the North Circular somewhere near Watford, so it was highly embarrassing.

That's really interesting. But the kind of emotional sort of, this wasn't necessarily something you'd write, I mean this sort of engagement that you described, you wouldn't necessarily, did that find its way into the marginalia as well? Was there things that you kind of wanted to bring to people's attention in the team from that?

I think we did want to make it clear where people were, I know I keep coming back to this, but it was very important to us to make it clear when people were sort of qualifying their answer. In other words, when they wouldn't answer it at all, and we often said what reason we thought that might be, or where we thought, sometimes I remember that we thought that people were not actually

telling the truth. I know that sounds rather severe, but what I mean is that people sometimes didn't want to declare how badly off they were. There was a sense that they would inflate their own sort of living money that they had, or they would play down the hardships because they were ashamed. And there was a great link between being ashamed of being poor, and just being in poverty, and so I think we were quite keen to make it clear to people back at HQ what we thought the situations were. And I mean it was quite sad in some ways when people would not talk about how much they, it was the housekeeping money. I can't remember whether the questions were actually framed like that, perhaps they were in those days, you'll know from the research, but how much housekeeping does your husband give you? Or how much housekeeping do you have? Or whatever the terminology was, and sometimes you could see them pause. And also we became quite aware that there were these double standards that they, sorry these double tracks that some of the women had. In that they were consciously thinking will I tell her that I get 10 shillings a week because if I tell her that she may not know this, but I keep 2 shillings back that he don't know about either, you know, that women had these sorts of private pots of money that they keep separate.

And sometimes they would tell us of these, and sometimes they wouldn't and you'd think that doesn't add quite up. And it was all part of a sort of, I don't know, it was a very sort of emotional sort of rollercoaster of realising the sorts of lengths that people went to maintain themselves. And I mean you did come across some households where you realised that given their head, as it were, the men would give the women a very little amount, or half way through the week sometimes, and I think we annotated these, I'm not sure whether this had been thought about at head office, but the women would get their housekeeping money, and then half way through the week the guy would run out of money, down the pub or the bookies or something, and would claw some of it back. And sometimes the women would admit to hiding the housekeeping, or pretending they'd spent it, in order to not to have to give it back.

And so as an interviewer you were kind of complicit in a lot of, and people would say to you do you have to put that down? And I think we, do you have to say that I keep 2 Bob back just in case? And I think that those were some of the queries that we might have, that they might have written about, yeah.

That's really interesting. I mean I'm thinking also about the kind of overall sort of impact of the project, was envisaged for the project. And you mentioned that there'd been lectures given at the start of your training, start of your contract, and I mean thinking about the sort of overall sort of impact envisaged for the project, did you have a sense of that, as a whole team that you all hoped to achieve?

I don't think I quite understand what you mean.

No, I phrased it quite badly. What I'm interested in is what was hoped for the project? What the project hoped to achieve? Did you have a sense of that all the way through, and from the start?

Well I think we had the general sort of mission, if you like, firmly embedded in us that this was going to be a ground breaking sort of project that was trying to, well to end poverty in the UK for once and for all because the Government would get hold of the report and that action would be taken to address some of these issues. Many of which, of course, were to do with, many were to do with employment or the lack of it, but many also were to do with housing and terrible conditions that people lived in, you know, notwithstanding whatever they did or didn't earn down at the docks, the shipyard or wherever but, no, I think we did have a bit of a sort of missionary zeal, if you like, that this was going to be useful. And you needed it, I mean speaking to you now I can recall that it was very, very hard emotionally, and you really needed to think that you were doing something that was fairly important in order to get your through.

I know that at the beginning of a week in a new area, we would all sort of collectively sort of have to take a deep breath because we were going to have to start knocking on the doors of these new streets, new to us, and make the appointments. And the first day of that was always very hard because you so often got the door slammed in your face, and you then had to sort of figure out what that meant, if you'd seen somebody and somebody said no and just slammed the door, or whether you, you'd got to try again. I mean I think that was fairly clear from our instructions that you couldn't just take one no for an answer, you had to knock again and risk worse.

So you had to really believe that what you were...

You had to really believe that what you were doing was useful. And I mean this is where people said I've had the door slammed in my face five times today, maybe different, can't I try this end of the street; they're all looking what's happening and they seem quite keen? And you'd have to say no, you've got to do number 23 or fourteen.

And as the week progressed, and people became more accustomed to the survey being in the area, then things got a bit easier, sometimes got a bit easier?

Yes, and as I said to you before, sometimes it got the other way around where people tugged on your sleeve to say can we do your survey? And I'd say worry, no, you're not on our list, and then of course when you say things like you're not on our list, people then wonder what the list is all about.

Exactly, and how it was...

And how it was...

Developed?

Well why is she doing it and not us? And all of that, and as quite junior individuals sort of in quite tough areas that was quite a big thing to handle.

Yeah, I can imagine that. What do you think the impact actually was? I mean you've told us a little bit about what you'd hoped for, when you were undertaking the field work, do you have any sense of...

Well I know that as a result of it the Child Poverty Action Group was formed, and I was really pleased. I can't remember how long after that happened, but I was really quite heartened by that. And I thought, when you look back on work that you've done, and you think that organisation has kind of grown out of it, and was advising Government and various things then, yeah, I was very pleased about it, but I suppose at some stage later as years went by, and my interests weren't sort of focussed on that anymore as I different jobs and careers, but I was always aware of it in the back ground and thought, yeah, I've worked for that. We've now moved into the modern age and we still haven't solved it, one begins think

that you're kind of going round, or as a society we're going round in circles but, no, I did think it was worthwhile, very much so.

And now you've reflected back on your feelings, do you think about anything within the survey that worked particularly well? Or alternatively, anything that you would have done differently with hindsight, that could have been done differently about any aspect of it?

Well I don't know. I think that with, I'm not knowledgeable enough about survey methodology to know what would or wouldn't have worked. As a sort of interviewer, it would have been possibly good if an area had been sort of pre warned that we were going to be -

Be knocking on the doors, yeah.

- appear, but then again in practical terms, or in research data terms, that may have actually kind of affected the results. I mean obviously presumably one wouldn't have then gone for people to self-select to go forward to be interviewed. That would not be probably kind of statistically correct, and also it might have given people the opportunity to sort of over think what they were going to say, but I mean certainly as a researcher, just knocking on those bleak doors for the first time, when the door opens four inches and a nose pokes out, and somebody says what do you want? It can be very daunting, and so if you can say you may have heard that we're doing dah de dah that might have helped us, but I'm not sure it would have helped the survey.

It just occurred to me, were you given any kind of identification or anything like that?

Yeah, I think we had a badge.

You had a badge?

I think. We certainly had something, which we produced, and we had, I can't remember whether they signed anything or not. I think we sort of showed them the questionnaire, but I remember one of the things was we were not to let go of it. People were not to...

Really?

Yeah, people were not to rifle through it themselves. We couldn't say this is what we're going to ask you, do you want to have a look at it or anything? We had to keep it in our possession but, yeah, we had our identity but I don't think, I mean all that did was ratify that we were somehow the authorities, and it probably wasn't clear to everybody on whose behalf we were doing it because again, you're talking in a time when there wasn't much general sort of communication knowledge of who was who. There was the council, there was the NSPCC, there was various officials who might bang on your door, but mostly in those localities people only banged on your door when there was trouble, if you see what I mean?

Yeah, I can totally see.

So the first job was to, as I say, to step back, to smile and to introduce yourself. I think the women actually, the girls did better than the boys because the young men who were on the team, I think I had half and half, two boys, two young men and two young women. The young women were perceived as less of a threat than the blokes were, inevitably in those days, but then again maybe the blokes got more sort of an authority, were more authoritative in the sort of social perception.

I think that's nearly everything I was hoping to ask you. It's been really fascinating, but is there anything that I haven't asked about that you'd like to add, or anything you'd like to say?

No. I think I'd only like to ask how big the coding operation was because I don't think I've ever known.

Right.

But maybe you can tell me that later?

You know what, I'm going to have to get back to you on that, but I'm sure I can find out. I don't have that information at my fingertips, but actually it's interesting that it's a little bit of a mystery to you that sort of layer up.

Yes because all I can remember is week on and week out a bunch of these things were handed by me from the boot of this car to the area person, and I don't know what precisely happened to it next. I know of course that the Child Poverty Action Group finally resulted, but the kind of process is a bit of a mystery to me.

Sorry, just one final question. Was there ever any question of you contributing, or any of the field reps contributing, to any of the publications or being involved in anything like that?

No, I don't know any of that.

Lovely! Andrea, thank you so much. That's been brilliant. Thank you.