

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Summary Sheet

Title

Page

Ref. No.: CURA

Collection Title: Voices of Volunteering

Interviewee's Surname: Currie

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Angela

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer 1985-1998, Employee 1998-2013

Emergency services volunteer, Truro, Cornwall
1985-1988

District Emergency services organiser - Carrick
District - 1988/91 (volunteer)

Emergency services instructor - 1989 onwards
(volunteer)

Senior emergency services instructor - 1993
onwards (volunteer)

Cornwall emergency services manager - 1993 -
2000 (volunteer)

Devon emergency services manager 1998 - pt
time employee

Devon and Cornwall emergency services
manager - 2000 - employee

Senior emergency services manager - south
west and Wales - 2002 - 2005

Head of emergency services - UK - 2005 - 2010

Head of resilience and recovery - UK - 2010 -
2013

Date(s) of recording, Tracks (From-To): 15/07/2014 (Track 1)

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Interviewer's Notes:

Angela Curry (AC) talks about her time as a WRVS volunteer and employee from 1985-2013. AC was involved with Emergency Services (ES) as a volunteer, District ES Organiser in Carrick, Cornwall, she was also a trainer and instructor and talks about courses delivered by WRVS and at Easingwold College. Comments on being an ES manager and transferring from being a volunteer to employee covering the Cornwall and Devon area to covering South West England and Wales. AC also talks about her time as head of ES and the changes that came in 2010 when the service was renamed Resilience and Recovery (R&R). The interview concludes with AC's opinions on the current Royal Voluntary Service (RVS,) its future and what has been her most treasured memory of her time with the charity.

Jennifer Hunt: This is Jennifer Hunt with Angela Curry on the fifteenth of the seventh 2014 at her home in Cornwall. Angela would you just like to introduce yourself?

Angela Curry: Yes certainly, I'm Angela Curry as Jennifer said. I was in the WRVS for a very long time but before that I'd various careers. I started in agriculture. My father when he left the Army ran a big sporting estate in North Wales and at a certain time in my life when I was late teens he was ill, and as I'd been intending going to agricultural college I used his illness as an opportunity to actually run the estate whilst waiting to go to college. Doing that actually changed my outlook and I thought that going to college would be quite boring and I decided to do something more exciting and I joined the RAF. I had a Short Service Commission in the RAF in doing administration and accounts, ending up being the *Aide-de-Camp* to the senior Air Force officer in Malta, met my husband out there, we got married, came back to this country where he was still in the Air Force but I had left. At that stage I decided to go back into the administration side of things and worked for The Crown Estate Commissioners doing accounts up in Scotland for their big sporting estates. When we moved to Cornwall and I decided to look around for another outlet and decided to use my farm and accounting experience and set up a very small farm accounts business so I did, I did that for a while, but it didn't entirely fill my time and that's when I became involved in WRVS.

[JH]: And why did you decide to join WRVS in 1985?

[AC]: For no particular reason except that there happened to be an advert in the window as I walked past their office in Truro and it said 'Emergency Services volunteers required', and I thought 'Oh Emergency Services, that sounds a lot more interesting than some of the volunteering opportunities I've seen' so I wandered in. Big mistake, a large hand comes out, grabs you and never lets you go and it all started from there.

[JH]: And what did you know about WRVS before you joined?

[AC]: Very, very little except that I knew that my grandmother had been in the WVS during the war. But we'd never really talked about it.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: I'd seen a picture of her in a green beret but I really knew very little about it. But what sort of impressed me at that time was that you were able to go in to a nice local office which appeared to be, and to me that was very important, very efficiently run. You know you were greeted and wanted and needed and had my first impression been bad I probably would never have taken it any further.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: But because my first experience was so good I went in and stayed basically.

[JH]: Mm. And what were your opinions of WRVS before you joined?

[AC]: Well, as I say, I knew really knew very little about them but I suppose what I did know was Meals-on-Wheels and that was probably really all I knew. I knew they'd been involved in all sorts of things during the war but if somebody said to me 'WRVS' I would probably have needed prompting and then would have come up with Meals-on-Wheels, so the Emergency Services side of things was completely new to me.

[JH]: And what are your, well you've already spoken about your grandmother but what are your earliest memories of WRVS?

[AC]: Well apart from knowing that grandmother had been in it really my earliest memories of it were, was joining it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And actually thinking of 'Oh' you know 'this is maybe most interesting', and as soon as I joined I did a little bit of investigation as to where it had come from, you know, and how it had emerged. Mm, I suppose because I'd joined the Emergency Services side I very quickly learnt at that stage that it was considered that that is how WRVS had started, it had started as an emergency service and of course, we were all very proud to think that we were part of the sort of original reason for being.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And how would you describe your first role as an Emergency Services volunteer?

[AC]: That's interesting. I hadn't, I literally sort of joined one week and was told we've got Emergency Services training, you know, the following week.

[00:05:08]

And I think I was probably a pain in the neck at that Emergency Services training because I went to it and I did nothing but ask questions, which was pretty fatal because by the end of it again I got to the long hands that comes out and says 'I think you need to be a trainer and a team leader', so I thought 'Oh this sounds good' you know 'I've joined to do something specific'. So I very quickly went up to train as an Emergency Services trainer. And of course almost concurrently with that I became the local organiser, it was one of those occasions where if you showed willing you would be in a position of sort of authority and leadership very quickly, and they obviously looked at my CV and thought 'Oh', you know, 'she's been in the Air Force she was obviously used to leading teams of people'. And so I became sort of local organiser and, you know, progressed from there. But what I found, as with so many of us, we went into the office every day, there was no question of, you know, how many volunteering hours do you do, I quite often went and did my normal work in the office.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Because you were another person to answer the phone or, you know, speak to people and it didn't really matter, mm, you know what I was doing I was, I was there and we always found something to do, which is why we all had that sort of in that era became involved in everything. I probably knew as much about community services and hospital services as I did about Emergency Services because all the local organisers chatted to each other all of the time. It, it was the model for what I'm sure they would love for the modern hubs to be.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: But of course I think a lot more people had a lot more time.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Then. And also we, obviously it was centrally funded but we were seen very much more as a club and that office was always busy, not necessarily with clients but with volunteers to whom I think we were providing as much a service as, as they were to us because volunteers who were often very, very lonely would come in and say that they would answer the phone or things to do. You know make the coffee.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: I mean we drank so much coffee that, that it was unbelievable because it gave people something to do. And, mm, these days it wouldn't work like that because we have to be so professional that there almost isn't room for, I don't know, cossetting our volunteers who are actually the vulnerable themselves. I mean we had some wonderful volunteers, one in particular she would answer the phone and you would hear her say 'Yes, WRVS Truro. Yes she is' and then firmly putting the phone down, you know, and you'd say 'Excuse me, mm, who did they want'? They'd say 'Oh they wanted you but they just asked if you were in and I said "yes"'. And I'd say 'Right, do you know who they were'? 'No'. You know and a bit later there'd be a rather confused person ringing up saying... [laughing] But we were providing this almost a social service for our own volunteers which, which is why we had so many volunteers, but probably they weren't, weren't the most cost effective organisation in the land.

[JH]: No. [Laughing] And can you tell me about the first emergency that you attended?

[AC]: The first emergency, the first real emergency let me think? Yes, it would have been a gorse fire out on the Lizard Peninsular in West Cornwall. I'd waited ages for this, it's fate, you know, you're on tenterhooks you think you know that an emergency, you know, will happen every day and of course it doesn't, which is one of the big reasons that you have difficulty keeping Emergency Services volunteers, or did because things didn't happen all the time. But I can remember I was actually up at the horses before my husband came panting up the road saying 'There's a phone call for you, there's

a very big fire out on the Lizard'. And I thought 'Gosh this is very exciting'. So we very quickly organised a team to go out there. We stopped at, at the first police patrol because we couldn't really see where we had to go and he said 'Keep driving down this road until burning bits start falling on your car', then he said 'then you'll know that you're approximately there'. Well I thought that was wonderful, that would never happen these days.

[00:10:07]

[JH]: No.

[AC]: But anyway to cut a long story short we fed a lot of firemen for a prolonged period of time whilst in the middle of Cornwall in the middle of nowhere they put out a very big fire that was in danger of burning out of control. I'd say that gives you the adrenaline rush to keep you going.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: But an awful lot of what we did was training, training, training. You know we were very well tr..., very well trained, almost too well trained really for what we were going to have to do. We were at the, the point where a lot of people hadn't really let go of the old-fashioned civil defence type training so we were on the, we weren't training any more to build nuclear shelters under the stairs but there was still an element of your training had to be very rigid because you really needed to know what to do if an emergency happened. So even though we're talking now about a long time ago, you know, early '80s, mm, the end of the Emergency Services volunteer, as it then was, was on the horizon.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And I'd really been almost waiting for [laughing] sort of last year and really the entire demise of a separate department for all that time, because you could see it coming, you knew WRVS had to change because it was just a different world.

[JH]: And how did you feel when you were called to an emergency?

[AC]: Oh just quite excited really a sort of a bit of an adrenaline rush and think 'Well at last I can put what I've been trained for into practice', it never quite works like that because you have to be very flexible. But, you know, I was always very pleased to be called if I thought that what I'd been called for we were real..., you know, we were really needed for. Mm, occasionally you went and thought 'Well I don't really know why they, they called us, all we seem to do is make cups of tea for the members of the Council's staff who've turned up', and that really wasn't what we were there for, we were there to help people who were affected by the emergency. Yes you could say Council staff who were helping out they were part of, you know, the response, but I'm sure you've probably heard from people you can have emergencies and they set up rest centres for people who have been evacuated to go to and nobody turns up so all the voluntary sector turn up and the Council staff turn up and good old WRVS end up making tea for everybody but there's actually no evacuees.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Very tidy rest centre then, nobody to get it untidy or ask awkward questions. But on those occasions you suddenly think 'Was my callout at three in the morning really necessary', you know?

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: And if it happens once it's fine, if it happens twice it's fine, if it becomes the norm then that's when you start losing volunteers. And this, as I progressed through the organisation this was one of

the big moans that people had, you know, we get called out and there's really nothing for us to do, or we don't get called out when we think there must be something for us to do. [laughing]

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But you weren't in charge of your own destiny because I'm sure other people have said to you 'We don't self-activate', we never self-activated we always asked, waited to be called out.

[JH]: And can you tell me about the big duck exercise?

[AC]: The what sorry?

[JH]: The... You wrote that on your...

[AC]: No I didn't.

[JH]: No? Grass roots?

[AC]: No. [pause] Somebody else.

[JH]: Mm, so were there any other emergencies or exercises that you can remember that you attended?

[AC]: Oh very many over the years, the biggest one was the Boscastle floods. Mm, I was sitting this, I, at this stage I was a manager.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: You know, I was paid staff and I was sitting in the garden with my laptop just typing away a report about something and my manager who covered Southwest England, I was Senior Emergency Services Manager for Southwest and Wales at that stage, and Barbara who covered this area rang me up and she said 'Please tell me you're at home', and I said 'Yes'. And she said 'Boscastle's flooding'. And I said 'Boscastle's flooding', Boscastle's on the North Cornwall coast.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: I said 'It's brilliant sunshine here', I said 'I'm finding it difficult looking at my laptop in the garden'.

[00:15:02]

She said 'Well it is' and she said 'I think it looks as though it's going to be big' and she said 'if you agree', she said 'I won't come down I'll stay at home and organise volunteers but', she said 'I think it would be great if you could go'. I put down my mobile phone and the main phone went and it was the Emergency Planning Officer from Cornwall Council who had known me for years in all my other roles and he said 'Do you know what's going on in Boscastle'? And I said 'It's funny John I've just, you know, had a call to say something is happening'. He said 'Do you know any of the volunteers in Boscastle'? And I said 'Yes', I said 'I know one very well who lives on the High Street'. He said 'Do me a favour', he said 'give her a ring', he said 'we're trying to find out what happened', he said 'the phone lines are down', he said 'we just can't get hold of anybody but we know something's wrong, we've put up a helicopter'. And I rang Margaret - Maureen sorry - and actually all this noise in the

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background I said 'Are you alright Maureen', I said 'I hear there's trouble in Boscastle'. And she said 'Oh yes', she said 'there is', she said 'the whole High Street is flooding', she said 'there's cars and caravans floating down in front of my house', she said 'but I'm up the hill a bit', and she said 'it's just I've got rather a lot of people in here who've sort of come in out of the floods'. And I said 'Enough said', I said 'I'll report back to the emergency planners', so I did and to cut a long story short they set up a rest centres, they set up a evacuation centre in the middle of the village at the top of the village and then a rest centre out at Camelford. I went to Camelford to run the rest centre. We had volunteers brought in from anywhere that could get to there because the local ones couldn't get in because there'd been this torrential rain, there was months' worth of rain in about an hour just on the edge of the moor.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: And it came down through Boscastle, it swept everything in front of it. I don't know if you saw any of the pictures, it swept houses, cars, everything, out through the harbour and out to sea. Mm, anyway we set up a rest centre to where some, you know, pretty distressed people came, people who'd been walking down one side of the street and the fam..., and their family was on the other High, side of the street, weren't reunited for probably twenty-four hours because you literally couldn't get from one side to the other.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: That was one of my most high profile because we had every news organisation practically in the world there. I think I did my first interview at about three in the morning for Sky News. I had several with the BBC yes, you know. And in fact the my then boss said the first she heard about it was when a friend of hers rang from overseas to say 'I've just seen Angela on the telly' [laughing] and she said 'That'll be her'. And, but, you know, it was a really high profile very important emergency and I did quite a lot of talks afterwards on running that rest centre.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: Because at that stage we had an agreement with Cornwall Council whereby WRVS actually ran and were responsible for the rest centres. So we weren't just there making tea, I'd actually signed up a contract with them whereby they paid us some money every year to take that responsibility away from them. So we had many stories to tell about, you know, the Boscastle emergency.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: A hundred and twenty people were rescued through roofs of houses by helicopter and so you can imagine it was... The fact that Boscastle is very picturesque anyway.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: The fact that you had this, these major rescues going on and the fact that nobody was killed was such an absolute miracle.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: They said if it had happened a few hours later when you had people asleep in camper vans in the harbour car park that just disappeared it would all have happened. And there was a fisherman from Bude interviewed on the television, he said he'd gone out fishing from Boscastle in the morning out to sea, came back in the afternoon, headed towards Boscastle and met all these cars floating towards him with their hazard lights going. He said to himself 'Best I go back to Bude', he said.

[laughing] and went back again. So, you know, that was the very high profile one I was involved in.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: There was a big incident in Torbay where a factory that made... Do you know the sandals that you wear on the beach sort of jelly mould sandals?

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Yes, a factory making those caught fire, well don't ever burn yours they give off the most enormous clouds of toxic fumes so they had to evacuate 500 people so we had, we set up several rest centres there, that was a very high profile one.

[00:20:06]

I mean over the years I was involved in the London bombings - 7/7.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: I was involved in the aftermath of sort of 9/11 not because obviously we were involved because it was overseas but they were diverting aircraft back to this country and they were bringing aircraft in to St Mawgan here so we were, we had to provide teams. And of course, because I ended up with a, a national role every emergency anywhere in the country I was involved with so I went to rail crashes all over the country, I went to evacuations all over the country. If my managers were out for more than, you know, a certain period of time I always felt it incumbent on me to go and give them a bit of moral support.

[JH]: Mm.

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[AC]: I mean there were some years like 2007 when practically the whole country seemed to flood.

[JH]: Yes

[AC]: When there was absolutely no way I could go and see them all.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: You know, we had virtually every manager out and especially in the Yorkshire area where we had hundreds and hundreds of volunteers out in thirteen rest centres, you know, the, the sort of the backlash for somebody who was organising it like myself was, you know, the numbers of interviews, the numbers of sort of contacts you were passing on to our media departments. But on the other side it was really good for recruitment because volunteers could see that they were really needed and really involved.

[JH]: And one of your early roles was District Emergency Services...

[AC]: Yes.

[JH]: ...Organiser, so what did that involve?

[AC]: That involved making sure that we had teams literally for the count... Cornwall used to be divided into districts, it's now a unitary authority so it's not, Carrick District is this one which is quite a big district. So I was involve... - involved? responsible for making sure that I had teams in every

area with team leaders, that they were all trained and ready to respond. And at that time we worked so closely with Cornwall County Council, which is in Truro.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: So in Carrick District, but we did all our training up in the council bunker. Emergency Planning Officers, at that stage they had District Emergency Planning Officers so what we were doing is we were reflecting how the Council was organised so you had a County Emergency Services Organiser and a County Emergency Planning Officer, and equally District Organisers. So I was, and that was probably my favourite role.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: Because you had such tight control, not that I'm a control freak you understand.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AC]: But you did have tight, you knew all your volunteers.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: You knew when they were trained, you had all their records. You kept their records close to your chest.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: I.e. we had them all in the office in Truro, so there was really very little you didn't know about your volunteers, and to an extent it was the same when I did the County but I think the heyday of Emergency Services when it was probably best organised, best trained and probably highest profile was when we worked so closely at District level with the County Council, the local police and all the other voluntary organisations because we weren't just the name on a piece of paper.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: You know, everybody knew, I don't say everybody, everybody knew Angela in the WRVS, you know.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And even now we have get togethers of the old team leaders.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Who were team leaders in the time when we were sort of local groups.

[JH]: And can you tell me about the volunteers that you worked with?

[AC]: Mm, mm. Of course for quite a lot of the time, for about fourteen years I was a volunteer myself.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And continued to volunteer even when I was a member of staff. And they basically they came from all walks of life. And, you know, as happened sort of over the years a lot of them did do something else in WRVS but there were a hard core of ones who just wanted to do that - emergencies - for all the reasons that they continued to want to do emergencies. They had other commitments, they maybe were working, they, you know, they couldn't do a regular Meals-on-Wheels slot or whatever but they could respond to emergencies. And I don't say a lot of them were ex-service but a lot of them were, you know, tied in with Girl Guides.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: With things that were slightly regimented, slightly military, you know, and very organised.

[00:25:06]

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: And that changed sort of over the years because again that group of volunteers sort of disappeared really or got older and all moved on to other things. But, you know, I had some wonderful volunteers and, you know, I'm still friendly with quite a few now, and we still have reunions and volunteers I knew as sort of late sixties are now in their nineties and, but they still come to coffee mornings and, you know, one or two of the stalwarts still the, you know, they're not in WRVS any more you know but they're still 'Do you remember the emergency in...' and 'do you remember', you know', when we helped out at The Royal Cornwall Show' and you know 'do you remember when we helped out at the air shows'? Because one of the ways that we did a lot of our training and made a bit of money were community events so we helped out at all the county shows, we did the lost children's tents and we did the information tents and things like that, which was of

course, a wonderful way of recruiting and keeping people amused and giving them a nice day out because they got free tickets into the show and, you know, a lovely day.

[JH]: And how would you say that, mm, that changed with helping, doing your exercises at shows and things like that, how would you say that changed over the years?

[AC]: That changed over the years because at one stage, mm, the trustees, our senior management, decided that we shouldn't really be doing community service events we should be sort of sticking to what we did and that we were probably spending too much time and not getting a big enough return for doing some of these community events. I have to say that not being the most compliant of individuals we continued to do quite a few shows in this neck of the woods because I felt that it was a really good training.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Training and recruitment. And in fact there then was a bit of a, a sort of an about face and people were saying 'Well why aren't you doing community events'? And we had to go back through the story of 'Well it had been decided that we shouldn't' so we'd told shows that we were pulling out and once you tell a county show that you're not going to provide sixty volunteers and you're not going to run the crèche and do the information point and do this and the other they can get a little upset.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

And when you say 'Well actually we can' they say 'Well tough we've found somebody else'.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But one of the big changes was, and I think it was a right decision, was that they told us to stop doing things with children because it was just too difficult.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: You know, we had to get so many security checks and it really was such a health and safety sort of issue that, you know, it meant that you always had to have a paid manager on site, ultimately a paid manager on site, you had to have so many trained people that we really had to stop doing that so the shows we did keep and the events we did keep we no longer did crèches, we no longer did sort of play groups but we would do, you know, lost property. We would do lost children as long as the police worked with us.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And we would do the information booths because I felt that that was a really important thing to do because a lot of what we do in a rest centre if we're helping people is provide and accept information, setting up an information booth at a show was perfect. And you've probably heard from people like Mary Howard-Jones that we still do The Royal Welsh Show.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: That is really the one that we hung on to grim death I did.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Having been brought up in North Wales and having been to the Royal Welsh Show since I was knee high to a grasshopper it was one I was very keen on keeping.

[JH]: And can you tell me about the office that you worked in?

[AC]: The Truro office?

[JH]: Yes, the Truro.

[AC]: When I first was a volunteer?

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Yes certainly. We moved a couple of times in Truro but, mm, sort of ultimately the office we had in St. George's Road was run by the Area Manager, those were the days of the Area Manager.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: We had, so we have an Area Manager, a County Community Services Manager, Hospital Services Manager, Food Services Manager and Emergency Services Manager and their various deputies and, and offspring. And we, we worked out of a three storey building - four storey building I should say - with a training room on the top, Meals-on-Wheels office in the basement, reception area and then each of us had our own individual offices.

[00:30:05]

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Mm, it's no wonder we felt a little spoilt.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[AC]: Oh of course we ran a clothing store from there, mm, as well. And we were a very close, close knit bunch.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: You know, we all knew each other, we all knew each other's, mm, volunteers. Everybody knew where to find WRVS so, you know, we'd get officials from the County coming down, you know, from County Council coming down.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And we would get, you know, clients coming in, other voluntary organisations coming in. We had meeting rooms so that we could hold, you know, the appropriate meetings there.

[JH]: Yes

[AC]: So those were my days as a volunteer stroke just paid manager ,you know, in those.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: When I became Emergency Services for Devon and Cornwall I think they paid me two thousand a year to do that job.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Because it was meant to be part-time, and I did manage to do one or two, you know, other things whilst doing that as well. But of course, things for me very much changed as I, as the WRVS reorganised and I became a paid member of staff.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Because once I became a paid member of staff my roles gradually became more outward looking and I did a lot more work with The Cabinet Office, with, you know, Resilience Boards.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: With The Emergency Planning Society, Scottish Government you know Welsh Assembly I got much more involved in the outside resilience world, whilst internally I could see the change as we became more older people focused, I could see the gradual decline of the Emergency Services, and I would say probably for fifteen years Emergency Services volunteers were saying 'We're just not being used as much now'.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And especially when the emphasis came more on you must get paid for everything you do and you must put in a charging policy, of course that went down like a lead balloon with a lot of the people that had had our services for free for a long, long time. And that started the sort of demise of it really. Mm, I think we were always, and the people who still do it now are very proud of what they do and they do feel that they help people.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But it's gone very much from being the reason for being of WRVS to being... [Pause] I don't say that rather annoying add on but that quite difficult to manage bit that we do as well. And I mean I know everybody finds it very difficult now and I do understand it because, you know, we were a dedicated team of, well at our heyday I had a team of fifteen Emergency Services managers and we had twelve thousand volunteers. Well it, it sort of went down and down and down and down until just before I left there were about three thousand volunteers nationally. I wasn't in the direct management structure I was in an advisory sort of role and I could just see everybody struggling with it because it's not like any of the other services.

[JH]: No.

[AC]: It is different, but life has moved on and, you know, everybody finds it the same. Mm, you get something like The Red Cross whose primary aim really is still to provide an emergency service and they're much better equipped to do it so, you know, you have to sort of step back gracefully and let those who can do. But I think everybody who's ever been involved in Emergency Services in WRVS is terribly proud of it. And when you, you know, look back to the big events, the Cenotaph every year, the lying-in-state of The Queen Mother, The Queen's Jubilee, you know, I would, I was involved in all those, you know, getting the teams together, you know, to, to do that. I mean the lying-in-state of The Queen Mother and I'm sure in archives you've got lots of records of it I mean was, you know, a spectacular event and very high profile, you know, for WRVS.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: And of course we're still written in to plans for the, or we were when I left last year for the Royal Funeral and everything like that.

[00:35:03]

[JH]: And you also mentioned that you were Emergency Services instructor?

[AC]: Yes I was.

[JH]: And trainer so how would you describe that role?

[AC]: An absolutely key role really because the main aim with Emergency Services, and this was really a throwback to the Civil Defence time, was that we had a standard training programme throughout the country so it didn't matter where you were you would have gone through your basic training, a volunteer would take their basic Emergency Services training, they could then enhance it and go and be a team leader. They would all have had food hygiene, they would all have had health and safety, they would have all had training on rest centres and rest centre management because we ended up having a lot of contracts with local authorities to run rest centres. And in fact we wrote our own Rest Centre Management Training Programme, and this was an income stream because we would sell it to local authorities for fifteen hundred pounds a day.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And I would deliver it. There were about half a dozen of my managers who could deliver it so we used to go all round the country to local authorities delivering it. And in fact we got it accredited by the Emergency Planning College at Easingwold and we delivered it there as well, which was really good and high profile. And I did a lot of talks at the Emergency Planning Society and the Emergency Planning College on the type of training that we did so it was a real, it was a really good role. We had the course accredited by Institute of Leadership and Management and some of us were entitled to deliver that, but again we had to make sure that, you know, we had the extra training that would enable us to deliver that. This was a bone of contention with the volunteers in that we used to have a lot of volunteer trainers and then WRVS as an organisation at one stage decided we weren't going to have volunteer trainers so they were all a bit sort of cut off at the knees. And then we did one of our predictable U-turns and they decided they did want lots of volunteer trainers. And some came back quite willingly but others didn't because we had to put them through another trainer, another train the trainer course to make sure that they were, you know, up to par again. But it really was quite a high profile sort of side of the organisation and even when my direct team went and I became an adviser we still were delivering.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: My little team of two and myself we were still delivering rest centre training, and in fact I got approval just before I left that if anybody asked me or my two managers to still deliver it could we, you know, were WRVS interested in it or not? And they said they weren't and we still could, well we delivered a couple of courses but then your street cred goes because you're not in that world then your street cred sort of disappears so we've sort of let that lie. But it was something that, you know, people like The Cabinet Office were always interested in the fact that we'd done that. You know, I at on various National Resilience bodies and Resilience Advisory Board for Scotland and things like that and, you know, they always used to talk about this, the training.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: The way that WRVS did their training, the fact that the volunteers were all trained and that we had taken it to this sort of higher level.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And you mentioned Easingwold College?

[AC]: Yes.

[JH]: What happened to the training that we did there?

[AC]: Well I did, we, when I first joined Easingwold was The Home Office.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And again it was a bit sort of like us, we did everything for free. They gave all their facilities virtually for free and WRVS every year use to take it for a week at a time and they would do their sen..., their instructors courses and their senior instructors courses there. All the candidates, full uniform.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: I mean it was ter..., it was a terrifying experience it really was.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: I mean you had people running out screaming, you know, and not completing the course because the... Or the team when I first did my training who were actually the senior WRVS people it was so scary. I mean they really were scary individuals. Mm, gradually things became relaxed because I can remember sitting there thinking 'This is barking mad, I'm sitting here in full uniform including gloves trying to give a talk on how to build a Soyer boiler out of seventy-two bricks and cook a big stew.

[00:40:07]

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: You know, it was the most sort of unlikely sort of scenario so in the end I just sort of stripped off my gloves and undid my, undid my jacket and I built a Soyer boiler and a cross trench cooker out of Lego bricks as my demonstration for this training thing, and I could see one or two of the terribly stern invigilators starting to laugh so I knew I was alright.

[JH]: Yes. [laughing]

[AC]: I knew I was alright. But it was lovely because it was a bringing together of all the, almost all the instructors in WRVS, the senior, you know, the County Emergency Services organisers, local Emergency Services organisers, you know, once a year knew they were all going to get together and have a good old laugh and a good old moan and a few gins, or a few more gins in a lovely environment. I don't know have you ever seen pictures of the Emergency Planning College.

[JH]: I have.

[AC]: Spectacular, well of course, now it's all different. It's run by an external body, it costs a fortune to hire a meeting room for five minutes.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And I mean long ago we gave up being able to afford it.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But it was an era that was very special.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: I think, and I'm sure again talking to some of the people you've spoken to they've said Easingwold used to be the highlight of their year because, you know, it was to me, you know, you'd hop on the train and you'd get met by the, the college bus at the other end and you'd go in and be treated like, I was going to say 'Royalty' but, you know, a lovely dining room and, you know, you were treated really well, and, you know, for some people it genuinely was the highlight of the, of their year and they would love it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: They did love it. [Pause]

[JH]: And you, you already mentioned the change how we began to focus on older people and also while you joined Emergency Services we also changed from a Crown Service to a charity and things like that, how did you feel about those changes?

[AC]: [Pause] It was inevitable, I could see that it was going to happen. I had seen for a long time that The Red Cross were easing ahead of us on the, the emergency services side, they had had more money, people, more, you know, more resources. I could see obviously we were focusing on older people but the money side the thing was what was going to kill us.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: I reckoned. Once we started charging and putting in a charging policy we lost a lot of friends, I'm saying 'we' as Emergency Services, we had to go round to all our clients that we'd done stuff for, you know, literally mileage, expenses and food costs for years and say, you know, 'We are going to charge you at this rate, we're going to charge a shift rate for volunteers', that went down very badly with volunteers as well because they hated feeling that their time that they gave free was being charged for. But the-powers-that-be said that we had to do that so that's what we did. And that was the gradual, that started the sort of slippy slope because quite a lot of volunteers left because they said 'We don't want to be part of this'. We got a lot of abuse, and I don't, I mean I don't use that word lightly, from local authorities saying we were trying to blackmail them, we were holding them to ransom, [laughing] you know, we were threatening to withdraw our services, and that some local authorities were going to volunteers behind our backs and just saying 'You come and be our volunteers'.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And some of them did, quite a lot of them did and they went and just worked direct with the... A bit like in hospitals when sometimes we, say, you know, we shut down a café or something the volunteers just go in and set it up again.

[JH]: Yes, mm, mm.

[AC]: As they're entitled to do. But that's where I could see the, that's where the sort of rundown started.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: We were a different animal basically.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And once all the focus that came on the older people, although, you know, I did point out that in emergencies it's usually at the end of the day the elderly people are often the most vulnerable, and I wrote various papers on how Emergency Services, or Community Resilience, as it sort of became ultimately called, could really fit in to the hub structure...

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And, you know, I did a, a sort of a silly little story, you know, on the sort of the case of a volunteer, you know, a service user who got involved in an emergency and then was taken through all the stages of having to leave their home, you know, be evacuated for sort of six months into a caravan, back into their home again but all the time being supported by hub volunteers.

[00:45:20]

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Not necessarily Community Resilience volunteers or Emergency volunteers but through all the services that we did in the centre. And that went, you know, down quite, quite well

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And I think that is what they're probably trying to do now but, you know, I'm sort of a year out of it now so I'm not sure what subtle changes have happened sort of over the, mm, you know, over the year. [Pause]

[JH]: You talked more sort of about you being a volunteer.

[AC]: Mm, mm.

[JH]: Mm, and you've mentioned being in Cornwall and Devon, and act sort of County Organiser as well. But as a mem..., how was your role different as a member of staff as opposed to being a volunteer?

[AC]: It was a gradual change really because to begin with when I took on Devon, and I only took on Devon because they couldn't get a volunteer Emergency Services Organiser for Devon, I said I would do it as long as they gave me a car. Well I had a car anyway.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: We nearly all had WRVS cars in those days, scooted them around. Mm, and they said oh well they would pay me a small grant because they did pay quite a lot of people a small grant at that stage. So that was when I sort of started becoming a member of staff, that's when my actual contract started. And it wasn't long after that that we had the big review of WRVS and everything, you know, happening within it and the start of the rundown of the funding. So at that stage they obviously decided they were going to put in a full paid management structure. And my then boss said to me, you know, 'Would you consider applying for a full-time job'? And I initially said 'No', I said 'that's not what I want to do. I enjoy being more a volunteer than a paid member of staff', I said 'I think I will take, it would take away quite a lot if I became a full-time member of staff'. I said 'I'd be prepared to be a part-time member of staff', and I said 'and in fact I know that my mate up the road', who was doing the same job for Somerset and Dorset as I was for Devon and Cornwall, I said 'I know she wants, she wouldn't want to be full-time but would want to be part-time', because they were trying to make me be full-time for the whole of that area.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: I said 'You know it would be silly having the two of us going to interview both trying to put the other one out when we both want the job and we both want to be part-time'. So we still had to go for interviews but they said 'We will split the job, you can have, you know, Devon and Cornwall and Barbara you can have Somerset and Dorset'.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And we thought everything was going swimmingly, we were really, really excited until they said we, we could only have one car between us and we'd have to swap it on a Wednesday morning.

[JH]: Right.

[AC]: Well we thought this was not practicable as I worked in Truro, lived in Truro and she lived in Taunton so we reckoned it was going to take us all Wednesday and a lot of money to swap the cars, so we said we wouldn't do it unless they gave us a car each. I think Alice at that stage, though I couldn't swear to it, prevailed and said 'Give 'em a car each'. And we really took it from there.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And we both stayed until virtually the bitter end. But I then got a job, I enjoyed my Devon and Cornwall bit because I'd been doing it anyway, but they then restructured again and offered me Wales and the Southwest as Senior Manager so I had a team of four under me.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And then they decided that Wales and the Southwest would actually stretch as far as the outskirts of London so they gave me another manager and, you know, the rest of it and I really enjoyed that. I had a lovely team of managers.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Didn't see so much of volunteers but still managed to go to some events and see the volunteers. They then restructured again and got rid of the Senior Emergency, District sort of Senior Emergency Services role and said 'Well you can apply to be, you know, head of the UK if you want'. I thought living in Cornwall, I thought oh why, why the heck not? Mm, and so I, you know, got that role.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But it was at that stage you then start losing touch with the volunteers.

[00:50:04]

I don't say you lose touch with reality but you really do lose grassroots touch. You know, I tried my hardest to go to things and, you know, meet volunteers because I knew it was, you know, it was appreciated when you did it but to me it was important to hear what was going on and to hear all the gripes. And there were plenty of them because we were bringing in more legislation, we were going more and more older people, you know, we were being pushed more and more to charge for things and, you know, there was quite a lot of discontent.

[JH]: Yes

[AC]: Also the fact that, you know, I had a team of managers who all worked 24/7 so, you know, but there was very little slack in the system. You know, the fifteen paid managers were the ones who had the phone and answered it, you know, 24/7. And, you know, if somebody was on holiday then somebody covers, you know, and we knew that that couldn't go on. Again health and safety and, you know, employment law et cetera. And also because a lot of them could see the, [Pause] the value of what they were doing being gradually discounted by the organisation, you know, you could see pay scales changing so they were on less than, than other managers but still with the 24/7 and accountability. And gradually they started looking for different jobs, better paid, not on call all the time, and I was then not allowed to replace them as I lost them. So we were getting people with bigger and bigger areas still with the same responsibilities and you just knew something had to give.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Well of course, what gave was the complete restructure that brought in Area Managers and the, and the start of the Hub system really, and cut my team down too. I was slotted in as Head of Resilience and Recovery and my training manager was slotted in and then I had to interview for the one other post. And you could see it sort of imploding at that stage because you knew, and I don't blame them, you knew that these Area Managers the last thing they really wanted was to take on a 24/7 responsibility and I don't blame them. I mean I set up an arrangement with a call centre in Coventry that would take the initial calls at night but they still had to have people to pass the calls on to when they took them, and of course, this meant setting up a system whereby these Area Managers, mm, were sort of on call for two weeks a year, two separate weeks, but they absolutely hated bec..., and I, again I don't blame them because they've got a very stressful job in the daytime.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: So to, you know, be potentially involved with emergencies as well was not easy, so when the Locality Managers came in one of the last things I did before I'd left was set up another system whereby the Locality Managers were starting to take, you know, some of the responsibility for call outs as were the call centre in Cardiff.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: So we put in a new system to hopefully reflect that. Mm, I occasionally get a call from Cardiff or from other people to what did you do about whatever or who did you pass the... [laughing] Sort, I think it's a year ago that I departed... [laughing] Oh dear, and it's, it's like the wreaths. About a week before Remembrance Day last year somebody rang me up and said 'Where do you keep the wreaths'? And I said 'What do you mean where do I keep the wreaths', I said 'this should have started back in April order, 'you know, 'ordering wreaths from the British Legion as per all my instructions that I left'. And you smile to yourself like it's a good thing I'm not a volunteer anymore otherwise I probably would still be doing all these things. I did stay on as a volunteer for a little while

but it didn't really work because everybody still wanted you to do everything that you'd done and I, I just wasn't prepared to do it. I was sad not to be prepared to do it but it just didn't feel right somehow because if I was doing it then it usually meant that somebody was abrogating the responsibility for it, you know, saying that, you know, you'll do it.

[00:55:08]

But in fact, mm, in a way it was almost a relief to sort of hand back everything and say 'No', you know, I left on this date, I've done six months as a volunteer, you know, doing further tidying up of bits and bobs, you know, now's the time to say 'no'. I mean I would love to be a volunteer but not as it is now.

[JH]: No.

[AC]: You know, it's, it's just very different.

[JH]: And you mentioned being sort of responsible nationally for Emergency Services, you went to different, what sort of events were you attending.

[AC]: Well, my main, mm, sort of roles as head of were such roles as being on The Cabinet Office Community Resilience Committees where you worked with people from all different departments and different voluntary organisations involved in emergency response. And we set, you know, various agendas for the community sort of resilience world. I sat on the Resilience Advisory Board for Scotland, used to fly up sort of once every quarter and go to Scottish Government buildings there. Again you were sort of setting the agenda for the voluntary resilience world. I did various activities for The Emergency Planning Society to which I belonged, you know, I went and spoke at one or two of their events. The Emergency Services Show, which was a big national show with a conference that went alongside I spoke at that on a couple of occasions. I would go to any of the big

sort of DEFRA, Highways Agency, mm, events where they were planning on flooding response and things like that. I worked very closely with Environment Agency and Hydro..., Highways Agency over their response to emergencies. I was on the voluntary sector, mm, sort of national board where we used to plan for emergencies and how we would respond. After, mm, was it after the seventh? After 9/11 the, and after the *tsunami* The Cabinet Office were very keen that they had one point of contact for the emergency sector in the event of a really big emergency.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: So that if the Government suddenly thought 'Phew this is huge', we're going to have to have a national response' they could ring one person, and so The Red Cross and The Cabinet Office set up a Voluntary Sector Forum and they invited me to be on it plus representatives from regional government, local government, Salvation Army, St John, and Victim Support sort of initially and we would meet sort of quarterly and again, you know, talk through what we were doing. But it was used for example in the 7/7 London bombings, I was up at, in Harrogate at the Local Government Association actually with our then Chief Executive, Mark Lever, and we were just about to sign with other voluntary organisations a sort of a national compact basically as to how we would respond in an emergency and suddenly, you know, televisions and faxes and things went absolutely mad, and this was the first bomb going off in London.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: So I was getting texts from my managers all round the place saying 'Don't know if you've seen it a big bomb in London' et cetera, et cetera. So I went and found Mark and I said 'You know, something's kicking off big in London', I said 'it will be interesting to see how it evolves but, you know, you'll have to excuse me for a minute because I need to speak to one or two people'. And in the end the head of The Red Cross rushed off to London and the head of The Salvation Army rushed off to London and Mark said to me 'Do we need to rush to London'? I said 'The last place we need to go is London', I said 'I entirely trust my teams to do whatever is needed wherever it's needed', I said 'we'll stay here, we'll sign the compact and, you know, we'll manage things from afar'. Well most of

them didn't even get into London, you know, because the trains weren't going in to London for that they were shut.

[01:00:04]

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: But, you know, over that period I think nearly every manager in my team was involved in a response somewhere because you not only had the direct impact of the London bombings but you had bomb scares in Cardiff and bomb scares in Edinburgh and bomb scares in Luton. But on that occasion the Government were able to ring the then chair of the Voluntary Sector Forum and say 'We want to set up a family assistance centre for all the people who've been involved, can you do it'? And literally I got the call and you, you then, can you do it? On a sort of similar basis as we'd done for the, the big *tsunami* which happened two days after I took over as head of Emergency Services. You know, the Government rang one point of contact, they rang the Red Cross and said 'Can you set up a help line'? They rang us and said 'Can you help'? And so it was a one point of contact, you know, for the Government for the voluntary sector instead of having to go, you know, all round the houses which is sensible. And The Cabinet Office has a representative on the Voluntary Sector Forum so they're always up to date with who's on it and who's doing what.

[JH]: Mm, mm. Does that Forum still run?

[AC]: It still runs. Quite, it'll be, this last year will have changed things considerably because The Red Cross restructured and the two Red Cross people who were on it left. We did when I left... [Phone rings] I bet that's my family.

[JH]: We'll just pause and we'll start it again.

[AC]: Yes.

[JH]: Okay?

[AC]: Yes. The Salvation Army lady was about to retire so the people who'd been there since the start were all leaving.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: The Cabinet Officer were changing staff as well so I would imagine it still does run but it may be, you know, in a slightly different format, but it, you know, it was an important forum. But, you know, looking, looking back a lot of the changes externally in Emergency Services came when they brought in the Civil Contingencies Act in 2004 which they actually implemented in 2005 because they were still at that stage working to The Civil Defence Act of 1948, so there were a, a little behind the times. But we got very involved in what the voluntary sector response in an emergency should be as far as the Act was concerned, and Mark Lever and myself went to a Joint Committee of The Lords and The Commons who were actually asking the voluntary sector, they wanted their views on what should happen. And because the other Chief Execs from Red Cross and St John were going Mark said, he said 'I don't want to go', he said 'you go'. I said 'No you've got to go because the other ones are going', I said 'but I'll sit behind you and I'll pass you notes', which was very, very funny. So one of the questions was 'This definition of an emergency in the Act, did you think it's, do you think it's right?' Various people said, pontificated about what the definition of emergency should be. And Mark turned round and looked at me and so I wrote him a little note 'We respond to need and not to calls, we don't care'. [laughing]

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And, and so Mark in his lovely way he said 'Well my Lords', you know, 'we respond to need and not to calls so the definition of an emergency is really immaterial', and this guy said 'Good answer'. So you could see Mark's shoulders shaking as he laughed. But we were, you know, genuinely so inv..., involved. But, you know, it was a privilege to really go up and, you know, be involved in a Committee like that. We sat there thinking 'What on earth are they going to ask us'? But, but, you know, we did have that involvement. Because what some people wanted, the Act was putting a statutory duty on local authorities and statutory bodies to respond to an emergency, to prepare for and respond to emergencies. And some people wanted a statutory duty put on the voluntary sector and we said 'You can't put a statutory duty on the voluntary sector, we are a voluntary organisation'.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: So they took a long time deciding what the wording should be and it was that the local authorities, because we didn't want to be written out, we thought 'If we're not mentioned at all we just won't be used, we won't be involved'.

[01:05:00]

But the actual legal term was that the, mm, the responders as far as the Act were concerned, i.e. local authorities, health services et cetera, et cetera had to have regard to the voluntary sector in their area and involve them in exercises, response et cetera. And at that stage in a way I used that as a sort of a trigger to up our game again as far as training is concerned I used that as a bit of a sort of a lever to sort of say 'Look, you know, this new Act has come in, you know, it talks about the use of trained volunteers and things we can't let it, you know, slide, we must keep going'. But I was fighting I think a bit of a losing battle because people used to say 'Well, what you do in an emergency it's just common sense'. It is, but if you don't know sort of who you report to, how, you know, you could, you know, how you respond, what you were expected to do you can cause more harm than good, there is nothing worse than having people rushing off at a tangent. And one of the problems with community resilience and this involvement of the general public in emergencies is nearly everybody

has a wish to help at time of emergency but they can't half get in the way if, you know, you get all these people turning up wanting to help but not really knowing what to do.

[JH]: And you've talked about sort of the restructures as well.

[AC]: Yes.

[JH]: I wondered, and so in 2010 your change to resilience and recovery...

[AC]: Yes.

[JH]: Was that part of a restructuring?

[AC]: Yes it was. That was when, well basically what the structure is now was put in, into place. They didn't want Emergency Services as a title anymore, they wanted it to tie in with the sort of Community Resilience Government agenda, so they decided to call me Head of Resilience and Recovery. Because I had said that one of the areas where I thought it would really tie in to what we were doing for working with older people is what I was talking about earlier is the recovery of people after an emergency. So if we only targeted the elderly after an emergency there's nothing wrong with that, but if we were able to go to a local authority and say 'Look if you have lots of flooding in your area and you have to temporarily rehome people don't reinvent the wheel and set up a drop-in centre, you know, for the elderly who've been rehomed, you know, see what we've got in the area'.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: 'You know, ask us to do it', get them involved in something we are already doing. And they did like the idea of that, but again it takes time, it takes effort, it takes money to actually sell this, sell this to people and I know it wasn't really being sold because we had so many other things. I say 'we', the organisation had so many other things going on. When you think of all the systems that were being put into place that all these poor managers had to learn and teach to their volunteers, they didn't have time, they almost didn't have time to be thinking about a new way of running the business, you needed a dedicated team to be able to go out and, you know, do that.

[JH]: Yes. And were you still involved with training volunteers at that time?

[AC]: I was still involved in making sure, we were still training volunteers, I trained quite a lot and my managers trained quite a lot but we were trying to ensure that each area had people who could do the training. So what we, when we left we arranged with Cardiff, we'd put online, you know, packs, training packs so if, say, you had been a Locality Manager in your area you'd be able to get on to Cardiff and say 'I'm training twenty volunteers next week, can you whack me off twenty packs of, you know, what I need'? And everything was, we literally put everything there from the letter that you needed to write to the volunteers to say you're invited to training and why to the packs that you needed to give them to, you know, to go away with in theory.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: We know it was there but, you know, how well it worked in practice, but I mean literally we'd say 'You know this needs to be printed in colour, this is black and white, this...' So we did a sort of a complete guide to what they all needed.

[01:10:01]

But, you know, I, I liked some of the training, well I really did enjoy some of the training I did latterly, it was mostly to, actually to Locality Managers so that, to ensure that they knew what that they were meant to do.

[JH]: And then they'd go off and train.

[AC]: And then they could go out and train expertly.

[JH]: And generally were you working from a WRVS office or were you working from home?

[AC]: I, I've worked from home for the last, mm, since I became a properly paid, as soon as I became a properly paid manager we, basically we were working from home.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And we all went to one of the restructure meetings and we were all handed a computer and a mobile phone and it was then back to your, you know, back to your home, set it up and get on. Because we went through some ghastly stages when offices were shut, and I'm sure you've heard tales of horror where people turned up on a Monday and there's a sign saying 'We shut your office on Friday'. Because the first round of office shuts, but when the grant started going there was a bit of a sort of a panic and it was 'Oh we must shut everything because we can't afford them and need to give them back', or, you know, whatever they, the reasons were. And so a lot of offices were shut, a lot of the local offices were shut but they tended to keep the county ones so you'd have, you know, one in each county. And then of course, we went to sort of regional admin centres, but I was office closure person for quite a lot the offices down here.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And it was hideous, it really was. The volunteers were in tears, you know you had to get rid of everything literally, you know. I can remember leaving the Truro office and I had something like a hundred blankets in the roof and they were old army blankets and we weren't allowed to use them for emergencies anymore. And nobody seemed interested. And we had some old Soyer boilers and old equipment we had and I said to somebody 'Tell you what, let's just put them outside the office overnight and see how much has gone by the morning', there wasn't a thing left in the morning so I think they went to the right people.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: Now, you know, the people who were homeless et cetera had, had come and taken them. But it was really sad, you know, sticking the 'office closed' notice on the doors. Because when I started we had offices in virtually every town in Cornwall.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: I think we're going to be joined. Excuse me.

[JH]: Yes, okay.

[AC]: Yes, so the last one to go was obviously the County Office and one, once the County Office had gone there was the Regional Office up in Exeter and I used to try and go there about once a week just to see another human being, because this was one of the main downsides of, you know, working from home, you could go, you know, quite a time not really talking to anybody. That was in particular when I was sort of senior for Southwest and Wales. Once I became head of the place I never saw was here.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Because I was, I seemed to be on the road all the time. I'm an expert on Premier Inns and their various problems. And Travelodges, I know every road to everywhere I think, [laughing] I think by every route depending on where the traffic jams are. Mm, but actually ultimately I really enjoyed working from home because, you know, it's... Some people hated it but, you know, I found it fitted in quite well and latterly Jim was very busy, he was in the Airforce and then he went into local government.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And latterly he was out all the time so I found being at home was actually sort of quite nice and the last couple of years I probably wasn't away more than a couple of nights a week.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: But it took away something from the organisation, they were the hub of the organisation, you know, the office was going. It was never quite the same when you didn't have an office. I mean even, you know, even towards the end if you actually found somewhere where there was an office, you know, the hub was working from it was quite exciting to be able to go into somewhere, you know, [laughing] where you could talk to other people and, you know, see volunteers and things.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: I must be a very sad person but I can remember being very excited going in to an office.

[laughing] I did some training in Hertford in the Hertford office and there were real WRVS people there, you know, real volunteers and things and it did make a lot of difference the old... And a lot of people joined the WRVS because they were lonely.

[JH]: Yes.

[01:15:00]

[AC]: And not having an office to go to meant that they were still lonely because quite often what they were doing they didn't see many people either if they did, you know, if they did a meals round once a week they probably didn't see anybody else, you know, in between times.

[JH]: Yes. Because other people have said to me that when they joined there was a lot of camaraderie and social, a real social aspect to it which was lost over the years.

[AC]: Yes, it was, oh it was absolutely. It, you know, and you had lots of parties, we were always having parties, you know, it was somebody's birthday party or Christmas party or a, you know, we'd have a county party every year and things and we would use it as a training, usually the Emergency Services would do all the food and we'd have, you know, a good get together and things. But, oh, the days of the sherry bottle in the, in the office have long gone unfortunately. But I mean we used to, as I say, have lots of parties which was nice. And, and it also meant that you knew the people so much better. In the old times when I was district and county I never worried about ringing a volunteer at two in the morning or three in the morning because I knew them.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: I think it must be absolutely terrifying ringing somebody you haven't the faintest idea about at two in the morning and saying, you know, 'This is, this is WRVS can you', you know. 'can you go to emergency at', because apart from anything else you don't know what their personal situation is.

[JH]: No.

[AC]: You probably don't know how they're trained, you'd, you know, you don't know if they like driving at night, all sorts of things like that, whereas we knew exactly the ones who would be the driver at night and would go and pick up others because they don't, they didn't care. But a lot of people, you know, have bad night vision or... You know, if somebody who's been recently bereaved or has got a fri..., or a relative who's ill don't want a phone call at two in the morning because they immediately think the worst. And I felt this was all getting just, it wasn't as tight as it should have been anymore and one of the main reasons was because we didn't have the camaraderie of an office.

[JH]: Mm, mm. [Pause] And sort of thinking about all those changes that you've experienced since you started, what's been the most significant change?

[AC]: The most significant was when we, we stopped being a Government funded organisation.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: That really... [Pause] Well that, that changed everything really because you looked at yourself differently, people looked at you differently. One of the reasons a lot of us joined, not me because I didn't know about it at the time, but quite a few people said to me 'I joined WRVS because they didn't fund raise, I didn't want to be involved in fundraising'.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And suddenly we became an organisation that had fundraisers, we were asking for money and a lot of people really didn't like to do that. They didn't mind having a saucer on the table and, you know, somebody tipping in, you know, a few pence if you'd, they'd had a cup of tea from you or something but the aggressive, as they saw it, fundraising they didn't see that it was what they had joined for. The, mm, loss of uniform I saw as an absolutely key thing, I didn't mind, I was, you know, fairly balanced about it. I quite liked having a uniform it made life simple.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But I do think it took away, you know, something from us.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And again a lot of volunteers felt the same. I think probably modern day volunteers probably feel differently about it but I think some of the older volunteers still feel, and this is why I still get photos sent to me of volunteers turning up at the, you know, at various cenotaphs round Britain in full green, some very strange things but they're green. I can remember going down to Penzance office when we still had uniforms and opened a cupboard and all these green things fell out and I said 'They're not uniforms', they said 'No but they're green'. They said 'Every time something green comes into the clothing store we put in the cupboard just in case we need something', you know, on Remembrance Day'.

[JH]: Mm.

[AC]: You know, and they're be green skirts and green jerseys and things. But it gave again the people this sort of sense of belonging, a tiny little badge isn't enough for, you know, most of them. They, this thought that they belonged.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And of course, we wore uniform all the time, if you went up to County Hall you would go in uniform because people immediately knew who you were and, you know. And people felt that it just gave them a bit of status.

[01:20:01]

And again it was sort of part of this camaraderie thing and of belonging.

[JH]: Mm, mm. So you've mentioned the uniforms okay and the loss of the uniform, how did you feel about the colour changes that they made in 2004?

[AC]: I wasn't terribly excited about it. I like the colours now.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Which has almost gone back to the old colours but just slightly muted. But no, no I didn't like it. But obviously I was a paid manager at the time I had to sell it to people but my heart was probably not in it.

[JH]: No.

[AC]: No.

[JH]: And how were you selling it to people then?

[AC]: Oh, a bright new image, things have changed, we'd moved on, we have slightly different focus, you know. Much easier to wear, you see it, you know, understand better for, you know, recruiting younger people, all the stuff we were told to use to sell it. And I mean I wore it quite a lot, I had sweatshirts and polo shirts and things. But somehow it wasn't quite the same.

[JH]: No. And what sort of response did you get from volunteers?

[AC]: [laughing] Some said 'I don't think you mean that', and others saying 'Well you can say what you like, I don't like it, so there, and I shall still wear green', and of course, you couldn't stop them and so they still wore green, and they still wore all their badges, you know, regardless. I mean, you know, when we did the Cenotaph and you had to have them, you know, in green and, you know, they were really proud because they were wearing the old uniform, you know, the London Cenotaph.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But then of course, we had to pull out of that because we just weren't able really to provide people in a smart enough uniform. It would have meant have, doing what the Red Cross do who actually made, made to measure a uniform for whoever was doing the Cenotaph every year, but we didn't have that sort of money so it, I said, you know, rather than having them looking scruffy or looking out of place you need to make a decision, you know, do you actually pay for them to have

decent uniforms or do you pull out'? And of course, directors said to pull out. So I went to tell the organiser and he said 'I'll have to tell The Queen you know', I said 'Well you'll have to tell The Queen' [laughing]

[JH]: So there.

[AC]: So yes, it was meted, met with mixed emotions. And I mean you must see volunteers turn up in green things still.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Yes, you have?

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: I still have a few green things around.

[JH]: And how has your opinion changed of the org..., since you've joined the organisation?

[AC]: Well I've always been very proud to be associated with it, and very proud of the volunteers. And I, and I still am proud of the volunteers. I don't necessarily agree with everything that is being done at the moment or the way it's been done but the volunteers are, as the volunteers have always been, completely dedicated and doing a super job. I think a lot of them would do what they were doing with or without WRVS, or Royal Voluntary Service but, you know, that's the banner under which they work.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: And of course, that was another thing of great contention, The Women's Royal Voluntary Service, WRVS, never call it Women's Royal Voluntary Service, you know, RVS.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: Don't call it RVS call it Royal Voluntary Service, that really got the goat of a lot of volunteers. They were a lot politer about it than they could have been but you spent so long putting out one message you felt a real clot coming and putting out the next message.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: And I think that that was what quite a lot of them felt, waste of time, energy and money doing it, you know. But, as I say, I think what they've got now is most attractive, yes. But I have to say I've seen very little sign of it anywhere, you know, I've seen no, nothing. I mean we used to see things in the press, local papers nothing, now, you know, which again I find sad because when I talk to people now who I used to work for most of them are still saying 'Who'? And if you say 'Royal Voluntary Service they say 'Who'? [laughing] Which is sad.

[JH]: Yes.

[01:25:00]

[AC]: You know.

[JH]: And where would you say Royal Voluntary Service's place in society is today?

[AC]: I would say it's a very difficult place in society at the moment because there are so many local groups and local organisations doing exactly what they're doing, and it seems to me that the local groups are getting the funding, they're getting the publicity and they're probably getting the clients because they're doing it probably cheaper and with less baggage that Royal Voluntary Service has got.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: I mean every week, again we have a very good local paper down here, and every week there are articles on what the various organisations are doing with the elderly and, you know, in hospitals and things. There's two free pages of adverts for volunteers, there's lots of organisations advertising for volunteers to do exactly what we're doing and never a mention of us, which I find very sad.

[JH]: Yes. And what do you think is the future of The Royal Voluntary Service?

[AC]: Again I would have to use that word fragile. I think if it's not careful it could be sort of, it could lose its place in society, which would be sad, because I think a lot of stuff will be done locally, devolved locally and they don't want an org..., and they may not necessarily want organisations with the high overheads that one of our size has.

[JH]: And do you have anything else you'd like to share or any other memories you have of your time in WRVS?

[AC]: Well I think I've had so much fun and I've done so many interesting things that I never would have done if I hadn't been in Royal Voluntary Service. I've been to two Queen's Buckingham Palace garden parties, one as a WRVS nominee and one as a Red Cross nominee amazingly enough. I've been to Downing Street probably three times. I went after the Boscastle floods, I was nominated by the Regional Resilience Director to go as one of the Boscastle heroes. I am, I went to Downing Street nominated by Lynne Berry as Chief Exec, as kind of a local hero and took another volunteer with me, you know, those things I would never have done. I would never have had the sort of privilege of being involved in the Jubilee and the lying-in-state, you know, as I have been. You know, even things like the Cenotaph, I used to organise our attendance there every year and spend, you know, Remembrance Day in The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and, you know, again a great privilege. You know, so really, you know, I've had a wonderful career, career with them.

[JH]: Yes. And what would you say is your most memorable or you favourite moment of being in the WRVS?

[AC]: My favourite moment? That's a difficult one. I have... [Pause] I think my favourite moment was probably at The Queen's Jubilee when we were, we had five lost children's facilities in London, we did an information booth, we were running round London like demented fleas but it was such a buzz and, you know, such an exciting occasion. I mean as was I suppose the, you know, the Queen Mother's lying-in-state was very, very special.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[AC]: So that I think some of those big events were, you know, were the most sort of memorable.

[JH]: Yes.

[AC]: But the things I will really remember most are the volunteers and something as simple as a training day down in Penzance with, you know, twenty of my Emergency Services volunteers. Those were the... You know, I think the friendships you made, you know, were probably the most memorable really. So, you know, the big events, yes, you'd never have done them probably otherwise but, you know, the volunteers you met and the stories you heard from the volunteers about their lives and things were very, very special.

[JH]: Well thank you Angela for talking to me today.

[AC]: A pleasure.

[JH]: And this will make a really good contribution to our Voices of Volunteering Project.

[End of Interview 01:30:02]

