

Presentation by Mandeep Rakhra to Barcapel Foundation.

Looking back, I'm not sure what I expected from the Mark Scott Foundation Leadership for Life Award Scheme. I knew from school friends who had taken part previously that it was a worthwhile thing to do but it strikes me now that it's not until you complete your project that the penny actually drops. You say to yourself, "I have been involved in something which has affected people's everyday lives."

That may sound like an idealistic summing up, typical of youthful exuberance. But I would ask, what is wrong with idealism? And why is it that in my lifetime people presume that apathy has more appeal to young people than idealism?

The project allowed us to utilise our idealism, our enthusiasm and latterly our biceps in a very practical manner. We created a sensory garden for the senior citizens of Crossmyloof Resources Centre in Glasgow. Along the way we designed, planned and carried out our ideas, trying at every stage to involve the residents in the decision making process. This led inevitably to our ideas evolving to suit their needs, after all they would be the people we hoped would benefit from our labour. Perhaps less predictable were the numerous proposals of marriage us girls received on a daily basis from the elderly gentlemen. The phrase "life in the old dog" seemed particularly true in this case. (PLEASE LAUGH).

Seriously though, not only did we become to depend upon each other but very quickly we supported and when necessary bullied each other until the job was done. Each of us played our part and each of us benefited equally. There is no room for Prima Donnas in the Mark Scott project. Thinking back to last August and our first tentative meeting with the team, I could never have envisaged planning let alone completing everything we have managed this year. Every great team has to have its leader, it's Jock Stein or it's Alex Ferguson.

It's easy to be flippant now that it's over but I remember being waist high in freezing cold water, blindfolded, miles from anywhere thinking to myself, what have I let myself in for? As I waded through muck and slime hand in hand with my group I tried to think of things which took my mind off the cold, dirt and uncertainty. Central heating, a hot shower, Richard and Judy, my mother's cooking.... Things I had always taken for granted, the same things which made life special and worth thanking God for.

It might have been a crude way of illustrating that fact but few could argue with its effectiveness. Similarly, the fact that we had no choice other than to co-operate with our group became more and more apparent as time went on and tasks piled up. This part of our training had all the subtlety of a Norman Wisdom movie, something akin to being hit over the head with a frying pan, but it established us as a team, co-dependant and aware of everybody's strengths and weaknesses. It ensured that we were all pulling our weight, hopefully, for the sake of the success of our endeavours to come, in the same direction.

Knowing the history of the Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award, I did at times wonder if what we were doing actually had any relevance to the fate Mark suffered and the consequent spirit of what the foundation hoped to achieve. Again I was missing the point. It's true, at times I felt like the token black face, my background and culture being far removed from those of my colleagues. It's also true that the level of bigotry in this country is getting worse not better.

With hindsight, having given the experience considerable thought, the point is, and I don't think I'm wrong in this, that the Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award promotes the notion of good citizenship, of social, religious and ethnic harmony. Of acceptance rather than judgement, of negotiation rather than attrition, of a group identity which recognises difference as a positive thing, indeed as an

advantage to the group as a whole. We might only represent a fraction of people living in the West of Scotland at the present time, but we succeeded and we will continue to succeed because we set aside whatever differences we had, we worked together and we did something that not many people can say they have done in life, we made a difference. We affected people's lives in a positive way and in doing so we enhanced our own lives.

When it comes to the business of today you will no doubt ask yourselves "why should I back the Mark Scott Foundation, what's in it for me?" I'd like, with respect, to suggest that by empowering young people to help their community, you help yourself. Call it karma, call it social responsibility, call it whatever you want, but whatever you can do to help will allow an organisation which is in its infancy to grow and prosper. As it grows, its message of good citizenship, respect and accommodation will reach more people, challenging them on how they live their lives and how they wish their community, our community to be perceived worldwide.

You can play your part in the process of positive change and I would urge you to do so... you'll be glad you did.