

Karen Wilkinson

Welcome to Age Innovators. The series from the Healthy Ageing Challenge Community of Practice, in which we spotlight pioneering innovations in longevity. We asked leading researchers and innovators what inspired their work and how it has the potential to impact people's lives. I'm Karen Wilkinson from Innovate UK KTN and in this episode, Helen Crampin, Innovation and Technology Lead from the Innovate UK Healthy Ageing Challenge, talks to Alosh K Jose, co-founder and CEO of Cricket Cube. Cricket Cube are breaking down the barriers of ethnicity, age and gender to get more people involved in playing cricket.

Helen Crampin

Hi everyone. So I've been working with The Healthy Ageing Challenge for four years now and I'm very, very privileged to welcome one of our SBRI funded social enterprises, Cricket Cube. Alosh is the CEO and founder and I am actually going to let him introduce himself. And then if he could give us a flavour of what Cricket Cube is and its main aims for us, that would be great. Thanks Alosh.

Alosh K Jose

Yeah. Thank you so much Helen for having me. Yeah, My name is Alosh, I'm the co-founder and CEO of Cricket Cube, which we are based in Newcastle, and we deliver cricket sessions specifically for ethnic minorities and older adults. So that's our remit. We do have other sessions, but these are our main focus areas.

Helen Crampin

Brilliant. Thank you. So I mean, what I'd really like to understand, and I think it'd be really nice for the audience, is how you began this journey. So you know what inspired you to start this? You know, what were the main drivers behind it and how did you make that decision on which direction to go in?

Alosh K Jose

Well, I did a master's in sports management. I've been playing cricket since i was four or five years old, like everyone in India. And so I when I moved to the UK in 2018 and I didn't have that many opportunities to play cricket with the weather, you know, problems like that. And then in 2020 we decided that it might be a good option to start something to make sure that cricket is accessible for everyone, to make sure that it can be played regardless whether they have got access to a club system, whether they've got the hundreds of pounds you need to have to buy the cricket kit, etc. and we just decided to try if we can democratise cricket and here we are.

Helen Crampin

So well, just to understand a little bit more about what you hope the main outcomes from this programme will be, because we, you know, you know, obviously we've been working together for quite a long time now. I understand that quite well, that it would be good for our audience to kind of understand what you really hope this programme will have led to.

Alosh K Jose

Yeah, for the UKRI funding we were able to co-develop a specific programme for South Asian older adults we, we have found from market research and talking to so many older people within the, within the South Asian community that there are not many targeted programmes for them to be fit and healthy. It just doesn't, it just wasn't working on one of our programmes that was out there. They needed a more tailored approach that understands the cultural nuances, the religious sentiments and the community connections they have. And we decided that we could actually step in there because obviously cricket is the biggest game in South Asia, it's a religion. So it was we felt it's a perfect opportunity for, to develop Cricket Cube, but also help our community. I am also from the South Asian community, so I understand how people feel about these things. And we decided that we can develop, we can co-develop something with the community leaders, participants, etc., and then make cricket accessible for people so they can they can come inevitably play cricket and find new connections, make new friends, and then, you know, be happy and healthy.

Helen Crampin

Do you think your lived experience and your background has actually made you much, much better shall we say, person to lead this type of project because you do understand the challenges and the culture and what you know, what the issues are there.

Alosh K Jose

Yes, I would say that that has helped me quite a lot. I mean, I worked with all the people _ on a personal level and also the professional level of volunteering or, you know, even working with my own grandparents as, for example, my grand mum, she had dementia and then we just didn't know about that because it wasn't a big thing in India. We didn't we thought that was so natural and now when I've learned more about it and learned how we can actually change these things since even the perceptions within the community and the lack of access to information like this through a programme like this, it just made more sense for me to lead this understanding how how things were working in my community.

Helen Crampin

What do you think your biggest challenges have been and you know, which challenges have you overcome? And just, you know, tell us a little bit about the biggest challenge maybe that you've overcome and how you managed to do that,

Alosh K Jose

I think that's gonna take us a while

Helen Crampin

Just pick one

Alosh K Jose

I think, for example, to change perceptions within the community, that itself was a challenge. It is not an easy to change. Obviously with a theory of change and it takes a long time to change perceptions and change how people would work, how they would behave, the small behavioural changes that make the biggest impact that takes time.

And so the project was really helpful in that sense because that kind of allowed us to, after the 4 to 6 weeks of trial sessions, to get to more people, speak to them. And I think that was one of the biggest challenges you make to, to ensure that someone who's living, let's say a mile away from a session centre to just come to there even though the session is not free for them to actually get there. The transportation. What are the things that leading them for example, be. We have Indian or South Asian snacks for them to come in and that is actually a big driver from just a sporting event. It becomes more of a community session. There's food, there's cricket, there's curry, you know, things like that. I think that some of the challenges we have overcome. Just a quick challenge would be another one that we're facing right now would be the financial challenges, because South Asians, especially Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, they have the lowest median income across any ethnic minority in the ethnic group in the UK. And for them to pay for the sessions is just impossible and physical activities are one of the first things that anyone cuts when there is a financial crunch and that's a challenge that you have to you have to deal with.

Helen Crampin

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And I, I do understand this obviously because, you know, we have worked together for a while but again, it would be good for the audience to understand where you see the innovation in this programme. I mean, I actually think it's quite obvious, but you know, if you could just put it in your own words because obviously, you know, we, we fund innovative projects. So, you know, where do you think the real innovation is in this particular project?

Alosh K Jose

I think the innovation itself lies in the work we do with the community. So everything we do is actually informed by what the community wants. Obviously, we have to understand that South Asian community is quite large. You have Indians, Pakistanis, but within those regions itself there would be subcategories. To understand how each of those subcategories perceive sports and perceive physical activity, that it's one of the innovations that we have been able to do through the project. So we have been able to see speak to Hindu temple leaders and Muslim mosque Imams, work with the Sikh community. So these things to give us an overall view of what each community, each sub communities within the South Asian community need and then tailor programmes with their needs. I think that has been one of the biggest innovations that we had. I think, again, I think this is where we are different from the mainstream options, where you have a gym and then you just ask people, there's a gym, go be

active. It just doesn't work like that. We need to understand the nuances. And I think that's the innovation of the project comes from.

Helen Crampin

We understand really well the behaviour change is one of the hardest things to actually initiate. So if you can look at the way we do it in a different way like you are, obviously, you know, it has, you know, really has that impact and benefit, doesn't it? Can you share, I would say your, the major success you've had over the past couple of years through this programme? What would you say has been the most amazing thing you've done over the past two years because of the funding or because of the project?

Alosh K Jose

Yeah, I think because of the funding that obviously gives us a really good platform to grow from. So when we started delivering the first cricket sessions, which was the end of 2021, you know, because of COVID, even though we launched in 2020, we couldn't do anything proper for the first first eighteen months. But once we delivered our first session in December 2021, now we've got more than 30 sessions a month. So from one session a week we've got six or eight sessions going every week, and which I think it's absolutely incredible. We work in ethnic minority groups. We have got people from Ghana, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan all playing cricket together. And I think that's just I think it just makes me so happy. And many of them having played cricket before and while the communities from India, Pakistan they have played cricket before. So there's actually a huge connect between, you know, generally we don't have too many instances where, for example, black or older adults or south asians older adults are working together. And this is one of the rare instances where someone from Pakistan say to someone in Nigeria, this is how you hold a bat. And I think I don't have to quantify the financial benefits of those interactions, but I think it's absolutely great for the British community that we can build these relationships. Yeah, I think from growing from 1 to 30, I think that's a that's a good growth and we need to grow more. I think that that's a good starting point. At least.

Helen Crampin

We've talked about this before, that that was one of the unexpected things that came from this project, that the fact that you were bringing these different types of communities together, you didn't actually anticipate that happening in such a successful way. And also, you know, we've talked before about the intergenerational aspect as well, where you've brought younger people into it to work with the older adults, which has been really successful. Can you just say something about that as well?

Alosh K Jose

Yeah, I think that's been that's been quite, quite good. So recently we had a session in Bristol, so we are based in the North-East, but we are slowly expanding our footprint to other regions. So we work with the University of the West of England. So we had a session with them, several of them in Bristol where our youngest kid was four years old and the oldest was 64 years old and from different families. So I think that the information and the happiness and the new things, each of them learn from each other. I think that's great. So we have heard there grandchildren helping older people to, their grandparents to book sessions online, to call up to the sessions to book for a new activity sessions and then the grandparents teaching the children, this is how you hold a bat, this is how you how you get the ball, collect the ball, throw the ball. Again, I think it is absolutely amazing in the in those respects. So we are now again another project with the support of Innovate UK Inclusive Innovation. So we are working with the University of West of England to create family backyard at cricket for South Asian and black minority families. And I think yep, so we want to go down in that innovation, inclusive innovation road and make sure that health is for everyone.

Helen Crampin

You're collecting a lot of evidence and data around this project. So what do you really hope comes of this? What do you hope happens with this evidence and data? Where do you where would you really like it to go? You know, what would you like the impact to be?

Alosh K Jose

So we do not want to be the want to be an organisation that collects all the information and then just use it for ourselves. So we want to make sure that the rest of the providers like us have access to the data and then they can also create their own programmes to ensure ethnic minorities have what they want and what they are supposed to get. So we go generally going to conferences and we are working with the universities to publish some of the papers, working with Leeds Beckett university on a similar programme. So at an evening speaking to other innovators, you know, role modelling, things like that, so that some of the places where I mentioned this is to some, some kind of, some of the data that we have get, get in touch with us, let's collaborate, let's do new things together based on the data we have, let's have, let's hope, let's get the data that you have and then let's see if you can work with something like that. So I think that's one of the important bits to make sure that there is not much compartmentalisation of data. It is what we collect for the entire community in the UK so that it has to be propagated in such a way that other people would be able to use it, _ to make sure that the communities are healthier and happier.

Helen Crampin

How has working in that way helped you achieve your goals? And, you know, it's an obvious thing that you wouldn't really want to work in isolation, but how has collaboration as a partnership really helped you to achieve your goals?

Alosh K Jose

We worked with lots of organisations, academic and other academic, commercial and other non-profit organisations. So then from academics, we work with Northumbria University, West of England, Leeds Beckett National Innovation Centre for Ageing, for example. So these, so the academics, the researchers from those organisation give us the real cutting edge research and also the previously their own experiences with the communities and the other studies that they have done. So we get to have a cache of information of qualitative and quantitative information that they have done and then we can we can work on top of it. There's no point in, you know, doing the same thing over again after five years just because we didn't know there was something like that. That's a waste of time and money. So then those kind of collaborations _ has really helped us to, us to create new things based on longitudinal data, for example, and then other non-profit organisations. So we work with, for example, Active Families North East in St Vincent's in Newcastle. So these are all organisation with a history of helping groups similar to ourselves and then it's so easy to work with them because we all have the same goals. We just want to make sure that the community, communities have what they need to have to be to be where they want to be. So it's quite easy. I don't know. I think everyone should be able to do that, and I think most of the people actually do that, so.

Helen Crampin

So excellent answer. So what advice, I know this is a difficult one, but what main piece of advice would you give to entrepreneurs working in this area or starting to work in this area?

Alosh K Jose

Talk to people? I think yeah, I think that's a very obvious answer to answer to that, I know, but I think that's a that's the main thing to have those lines of communications open to the people you want to help. Without that is just, it's just not going to work in my experience. So even if you have the best foolproof plan and then some someone might ask, oh but I've got school that day.

So that's with that one question, you have to change everything. So I think you need to work continue, continue working with them and make sure that they are part of the experience and you are not designing something for them, you're actually designing something with them. And I think that would actually help, helping the community that you're going to, you want to support. And I think that also brings in the buy in. So if you just come up there that oh got this funding, we've created this, now let's all play cricket, they just would not feel involved because how would they know? If that's been, that's been developed by them in the way that they want. And so I think that's really key. I think the other thing I said, work with the universities, work with other organisations who has got a successful track record in the area and learn from their failures and also learn from your own failures, because I can guarantee that you'll have many.

Helen Crampin

And so what's next? What's next for you?

Alosh K Jose

Good question. So we are continuing to increase the number of sessions. So we are going into a number of care homes now. So then that's again, that's a part of community that's been wholly inadequately supplied for in terms of physical activity. So we are going for weekly sessions in a care home group in the north east. We want to continue doing that. We want to continue working with ethnic minorities. But on a digital level, everything everyone is going digital these days. So we are also developing a healthy ageing app again for people over the age of 50 to make sure that they will get personalised recommendations based on their data. For example, what they like, what kind of things they do during the day, what are their physical and mental conditions and ability for them to book nearby sessions, for example, such as ours or, you know, other providers. So that's another thing we are working on with the support of National Innovation Centre for Ageing at Northumbria University. So yeah, fingers crossed we, we have success on both counts.

Helen Crampin

It's been a real privilege to work with you over the past few years and I will be following your journey very, very closely, believe me. So yeah. Thanks Alesh, it's been really, really interesting.

Alesh K Jose

Yeah. Thank you so much Helen for having me and also supporting me over all these years with all this, I'm sure that you would not have been sitting here.

Helen Crampin

It's been brilliant. Thanks Alesh

Alesh K Jose

Thank you.

Karen Wilkinson

Thanks for joining Age Innovators and watch out for more episodes. This series is brought to you by the Healthy Ageing Challenge Community of Practice hosted by Innovate UK.