



Social Care: Past and Present

Carers from Minority Ethnic Groups

V/O:

The issues you've been hearing about are universal. They affect carers from all sorts of backgrounds and circumstances, but carers from minority ethnic groups sometimes have specific needs. Differences in language and culture may mean they additional barriers in accessing resources and the services offered to them may not always be appropriate.

Anna watson:

(Chinese saying) – four words - to rear your children to protect old age.

V/O:

That was Anna Watson, Director of the Chinese Welfare Association in Belfast, with a traditional Chinese saying. For Anna it's a reminder of how much things have changed within the 8,000 strong community she serves. It no longer rings entirely true. Though for the founder members the support of their children was very important as they often found themselves isolated from the rest of their community.

Woman:

The first Chinese family came to Northern Ireland in 1963, then Chinese people continued to come right through the last thirty years, although we believe there was a bit of a lull during the '70's at the height of the troubles. But in fact Chinese people have never stopped coming to Northern Ireland so they, in fact, sort out areas and towns and cities in Northern Ireland where there maybe hadn't been any restaurants and carry-outs before and then they went and they established restaurants, and quite often in rural areas they would be the only family in that area. Miles and miles without any Chinese families about them.

V/O:

Lily Braid, a Community Development worker with the Association, found one very common problem amongst older people when she conducted a survey of their health and social care needs.

Lily braid:

I think a lot of the problems are related to the language; because they cannot speak, everything is connected. A lot of the supports are done by the family; if have fallen ill then it's the family's responsibility to look after them because it's no point getting somebody who doesn't speak the language to go into your house to do the home help, to do, or to care for you.

V/O:

Surmounting the language barrier by providing translation services is one of the most important roles provided by the Chinese Welfare Association.

Lily:

There isn't a single social worker here who is Chinese, you know in all the social services in Northern Ireland, so if the person cannot speak the language, you know they feel that, one, people from the wider community wouldn't understand the culture; two, there wouldn't be the common language, you know to deal with it.

V/O:

To outsiders it may appear that the community's self sufficient but as Lily explains, this is not always the case.

Lily:

I think they have a stereotype in them like in perhaps, in the health services they would have thought, because this is the culture for the families to look after the elderly. They may must jump to the conclusion that the family would look after them, we don't have to worry too much about it, so that will limit their choice of what choices they can have.

V/O:

Changing times and social circumstances mean that the support of relatives can't always be taken for granted.

Lily:

When people all live together, we are on the same village street, it's much easier. You can live next door to each other or across the road from each other, and help is so much easier to get, that aunts and uncles and grannies all live in the same area. But in Northern Ireland it's not the same case, your average house is so small here, three bedroom, average house, you know maybe the elderly person is living with the eldest son which is quite often the tradition, then the daughter, the married daughter could be in Cookstown, say 50 miles away, you know so you don't have the same convenience of that family network.

V/O:

When Al and his wife began their new lives in Northern Ireland, they also brought Al's parents who are both in their late '70's; Al's mum is blind and his father has limited mobility.

Al:

Basically I translate everything for them and my father despite his age is quite keen on learning English but I do not expect him to learn a lot because of his age. At this moment my father can call for a taxi, he can order the coal, he can phone my office to ask for me. My mum, because of her quiet personality, she will be more unwilling to learn. But basically, they just cannot understand English at all.

V/O:

Although Al and his wife provide substantial and regular support for his parents, they wouldn't describe themselves as carers.

Al:

A carer would be somebody not from the relationship of our family, you know to do the care work, to look after the welfare of my parents, I will be in my opinion, those people will be the carers. At the very first beginning it was quite difficult for my wife because my parents are not her natural parents, and then because there's a huge age gap between my wife and my parents so she can look after my parents based on they're respectful of her age, and simply she just treats them as her grandparents, you know.

V/O:

Al says his wife looks after their baby son and provides intimate care for her mother-in-law. He does, however, share domestic chores with his wife.

Al:

I do feel because sometimes I do have some uncomfortable feeling when I do such a thing I just scare you know when I have been crossed by some man, they will be laughing at me, you know, and I'm trying to do a lady's job and yeah, basically that would be the situation, and the psychological difficulty. It does not create any half-feeling in me, it's just a natural thing, just say inside myself, oh, come on, you know, but it's quite easy to cope with you. I just feel sometimes, you know, if I'm tidying up with something that that time should be spent with my parents, I just feel a little bit of guilty, you know, why I was not there.

V/O:

In the future it may become more and more difficult to assume that those in the Chinese community will be able or willing to meet all of the needs of their aging relatives.

Woman:

Generation gap, that's always a problem. Maybe the youngsters, the grandchildren that are brought up here, their life, their way of thinking are just like any of you. So they may find a grandparent staying in the same house, perhaps occupy one of the rooms, which that room perhaps can be his, and that's the kind of conflicts there.

V/O:

Anna and her colleagues at the CWA are witnessing profound changes within their community. Campaigning for the recognition for the cultural needs of Chinese people has become a priority.

Anna:

We are actually fighting, or arguing, with the local authority about delivering food into the home of an elderly person who for the first time is entitled what we call chilled meals here, maybe different from England, used to be called meals on wheels, this is delivered food to the elderly home. This person, Chinese person, said all my life I have been eating Chinese food, I don't want potatoes and European food, I can't eat them, and the local authority said no, we cannot do this, we cannot make one meal for this Chinese person.

V/O:

Legislation against discrimination in Northern Ireland is relatively new; it's hoped the impact will soon be felt.

Anna:

We have the Race Relations Order which came very, very late to Northern Ireland while the rest of the UK has a Race Relation Act since 1976, Northern Ireland has this Act extended here only in 1997, twenty-one years behind, so in a way that is a reflection of how poor in fact local authorities have helped ethnic minorities. Now the equality agenda is very, very high in hopefully in local government now, and now there is the big Equality Commission which looks after disabilities, religion, gender and race discrimination, so there is a big establishment there to have a voice as well.

V/O:

Al's expectations of the next generation are markedly different from those of his parents. It's his needs as he ages and those of his Chinese contemporaries that will have to be anticipated by the health and social care workers of the future.

Al:

I think that time has changed and the way of sort of thing in the past has gone, and I do not expect, you know, my son to be my insurance. What I really want to see him is growing up healthy, doing the right things, being disciplined, treat me as his friend, respect me of course because I do respect my parents, economically independent, and has a good job, and most import that he has a very good family, and I will not see him as my insurance, you know.