

Interview recorded with Susan McGinlay on 11th May 2016 at her home

Susan had been an active member of her community organising play schemes for children. She got involved in the community business movement in the mid-1980s, setting up an industrial cleaning company Kleencare with 4 other women in 1985, which became one of the longest running businesses within Possil Community Business Ltd. In 1987 to become the first commercial manager of Possil Community Business Ltd, and remains an active board member of the Allander Group.

Here we go. Right. So Susan, could you just tell me a bit about how you first got involved with community business?

My friends and I had done quite a lot in the local community. We ran play schemes. My husband was involved. We were always fairly active within it and one of the ladies who worked for social work who were developing things in the area, because Milton at that time was seen as an area of social deprivation. She had done a bit of work with us and had heard about the community business taking off in Possilpark. When she came to us with an idea about why don't you think about it because we were always moaning on about, [being] women you are only seen as this, that and the other. She went why you don't go down to one of the meetings and see if it interests you and we will introduce you to Colin Roxburgh¹ who was a [community] worker at the time. So Colin came to see us first and spoke about the ethos of creating employment in your area or running your own business for the benefit of people in the area. For the profits to be dispersed to people in the area, rather than companies taking a it and it really appealed to us. So Phyllis, my friend and I, we went down to the meeting. There was Gerry Scott who was a housing manager at Possilpark who had the same kind of ethos as Colin. He was keen to see something develop in the area because they felt there was an awfully lot of negativity, but nothing positive seem to come out of it. So we spoke about it and they were saying do you have any ideas and we said well not really at the moment. The things that we are skilled at is looking after children and cleaning; talking ourselves down, as women are inclined to do sometimes. We discussed it with Colin and he was saying that there could be an opportunity here because we would be willing to help you with starting up a business within the community business there. It was Strathclyde Community Business at the time and John Pearce obviously was the head of the community business at the time. So he said is what we will do is we will sit and we will talk and we will look at what skills you have and we will see what we can develop. Gerry Scott was interested in starting a security [company] within the area; calling it wardens rather than security and it was just to look after the people in the area in a none-police fashion, for local people to do it, so that that people in the area knew that it was what it was. He also

¹ An oral history interview was also recorded with Colin Roxburgh as part of the CommonHealth history project.

had an idea for a painting and decorating scheme. A lot of houses would get emptied, people would get, and this is a damning statement, but they used to get a cheque to decorate it, but the cheque didn't always go that way. It was used for other needs or requirements. So his idea in conjunction with Colin was to set up a painting and decorating group who would redo the houses and do that. So that is where it started. So we sat and we were speaking to Colin about it and we were saying probably cleaning and knowing it was quite a fierce market we thought did we want to try something for us a bit different and we thought there are a lot of new houses getting built in the area in Maryhill at that time and we thought about maybe doing builders cleaning, not realising how hard it was going to be, not thinking it through totally, but Colin said, well lets investigate it. So we looked around. We got into contact with quite a few people in the area and said to them would you be willing to use a new company. So we had positive vibes coming back and what we had done then was we had to go to quite a lot of training. We had to get our business plan sorted out because you have got to understand the concept of it when you are going into it. At that time there was a thing and I can't remember the name of it but you got £40 a week to enable you to start up, so you had some sort of salary because obviously you are working, you are billing and you don't earn money right away. Colin via Strathclyde Community Business took us through all these steps and we had quite a few interviews with different people within Strathclyde Community Business to see if it was a viable idea and it wasn't just a wee notional thing that we had done and we managed to meet the criteria. They felt we were quite committed in going in with Possil Community Business. It seemed logical for the north of the city and that's how we started. So we did our training. We did training at the college. We went and got some skills, some additional skills. Practical, sensible, help. You think I will go and clean a house, but there is certain criteria that has got to be met and that was a really great turning point for us. I think we also, we started to get a real sense of worth. You felt this is actually going to happen. They are going to get somewhere with this. All we need to do is get working now. Once we had done the courses. So as I say, there was an awful lot of work going off in Maryhill and we thought well why don't we go up there and just ask. Just be bold and go in and say to them, we are a community business. There was myself, Phyllis and we had two other girls that we had employed with us. So we went up and it was Lawrence Construction who was doing a lot of the work and we just went into the site office and said to them we could offer you a really good rate here. We didn't have a clue what a really good rate could have been. We weren't stupid, but we weren't maybe the sharpest we should have been and the fellow was quite impressed I think. I think with commitment more than our knowledge maybe got them and he said well I will get you a batch and we will see how you go and we will take it from there, and that's where we started, and that is what we have done and it was a steep learning curve, I will tell you. You don't realise. I mean you are working without water sometimes. What we did find was that the guys themselves, I think they looked at us and thought these poor old dears [Laughter]

because they were all young guys, but they were really good to us and they would help us and they would get us water and they were really generous to us. We had done well and we put in, we definitely put in we're shifts and we struggled through it and we did our first batch. I think we did ten, and they were very pleased with the standard of work, so it moved from that and that was us started. So we started with that and then we got thinking we can do this. We managed to get a van, because we were using my car at the time which wasn't ideal for carrying all sorts of mops and pales and when we finally managed to get a scrubbing machine, which was mental. We used that and we done in all sorts of skirting boards trying to use it. It looked so simple when they were showing us it in the office when we tried it. That made a big difference, so that really did make a difference to the professional finish that you were getting. So from that, we then started going to other building sites on the back of what we had done for Lawrence. He was very good. He recommended us to quite a few other Lawrence people. So we started with that. Then we got into housing association, because we thought we are on a similar vein here. We are working within the community, running it ourselves and we got quite a lot of work from them doing houses. When people were leaving and maybe leaving the house in great disrepair and we would go in and clean them. So we moved on to that. We did quite a lot of work. We did big factories. We got into them. Again, you are looking at it and you are pricing it and that maybe was, looking back, we maybe should have been a wee bit higher pricing, because I think we under-priced ourselves on some of them. We never ever made great money with the bigger jobs, which we maybe should have, but that was experience and we learnt quickly from it. But we have done factories. We have done Ibrox when they had it refurbished. Again via recommendations. That was a great job. That was a really good job. Everybody was asking us to bring out parts of the carpet because it had the insignia on it and I said we can't do things like that. [Laughter] It was really, to see it blossom and we were creating employment and the rest of the community business was doing the same. The wardens initially, it was seen as kind of who do you think you are, but then people started to realise the positives. These guys were awfully good at helping people and that helped establish it. They were then starting to get seen as a friend rather than a foe. The painting and decorating took off big time and it did feel like a team, although we were all in our wee nucleus, our own companies. We also had a screen printing company. We had a hairdresser, a mobile hair dresser. People are looking for opportunities, but couldn't get them and via the community business, they did. They weren't all totally successful, but it got people established and again, it was down to funding. When we got funding, it helped because we had started all of these businesses with virtually no cash reserve. I mean that was it in a nutshell, but a lot of it, I felt it was great and that it gave people opportunities. It is hard to remember all the things we have done. As the years went on, and we did start to get the benefits. The security did, was it Glastonbury I remember. I am talking years and years ago and that was a learning curve because it was a whole different concept from what they had done but what a prestigious event

to get and it paid well. Okay, there were overheads like taking the guys down and all of that, but it was a great thing and the guy, Mike Walker, who has now passed away. He went down, put on his suit and went in his security outfit and that was the thing about it. I think everybody mucked in. It wasn't a hierarchy of managers that weren't prepared to help and that makes such a difference. We moved on and I got made manager of the company, the Kleencare Company and then we got a laundry. We started a laundry in Possilpark. We did quite a lot of research for that, people were saying. Again, I am going back. How old am I? I am going back a good number of years. People didn't have finances in those days to get big washing machines. A lot of families, the ones in deprived areas where there hadn't been a lot of investment, so we felt that maybe this is something everybody will use, but we will still make something from it. That ran for years, the laundry. We are doing a laundry and ironing service as well. I am trying to remember. There was quite a lot. We weren't afraid to try things. As I say, not everything was successful, but here we are 30 odd years on still going strong. Twice a year people write in for donations. Again, usually within the north area. So money gets disbursed to different organisations and group and things like that and that is good as well because you are putting back in that way, financially as well as creating employment. In security, we now have Edinburgh, Allander Edinburgh. We have Allander in Glasgow. We have work up in Perth. We are doing a lot of keyholding for different companies. Security has definitely been the jewel in the crown because they are faced, to my mind, they faced an awful lot of adversity because they were competing against really big companies that have done it. They have done the Commonwealth Games. They have done some of the work for that. Cleaning, I had to leave. I had a brain tumour and I had to leave. At that time there was no way I could have come back. It took me quite a long time to recover. I found Phyllis who had started the business with me. She took over, but found it difficult with the business side of it. She was great at organising the staff and things, but the actual financials and invoicing and things, that was a bit of a challenge for her and it sounds dreadful, but not long after I had my brain tumour she had a heart attack. So the cleaning kind of fell into really Steven, Colin and people like that were sustaining it. Steven who is the accountant around there was very, very good at ensuring work still went in. The supervisors that we had were doing what they did, but he did the business side. We did get a lot of support. Thinking back we did get a lot of support from Colin and Strathclyde Business and John. At one time we, again in the earlier days we hit a bit of a dip and we were breaking even, we weren't making money but we were breaking even and some members of the board, I was on the board as a non-voting director. A representative from each of the companies was, but then obviously anything pertaining to this side of the business we had to walk and there were some proposals being put forward by certain members of the board that they stop Kleencare. My husband was on the board at the time and he said I have to abstain from this obviously because it is a conflict of interest. God knows what would have happened to him if he came home with a no vote! Again, as I say, thinking back, Colin and Gerry

Scott and people like that, they were saying but it is still creating employment which was the major issue. Okay, it is not making money, but it's not taking money. They are breaking even, they have got 40 odd people working for them. This is an achievement. Don't be so business minded in that respect that things aren't not going so well. So we did get a bit of a reprieve from that and that made such a difference because we knew, I mean, I really felt ownership, but that that would be it. You felt that if it was to go I would have been heartbroken and we had put a lot of time and a lot of effort and an awful lot else. I mean, we used to work, my husband would come and help us, and people would help us who really shouldn't have been out working. My husband had back injuries at the time but you had to get a job done for a certain time and they would come out and do what they could do, because of their commitment to the community business and that was the motivating factor. It was quite amazing how many people wanted it to succeed. So as I say, when it kind of fell into, for me heartbroken having to leave it. My husband was still on the board. I was still a board member. I would go to the meetings, but at that time, as I say, I was recovering for having chemo etcetera. I would be sitting there and understanding some of it. Fortunately everything was written down in minutes and all the reports, so you could get the gist of it, but it worried me. We had brought a Caledonian lock and safe company, a big keyholding company who are in the Pollokshaws area. They are a big company and we bought them over and they came in and that was a good bit of work, but the fellow who had sold it found it hard to leave the control of it to the board, he found it very difficult, but we went a long for a few years with him and he just found it hard and he asked if he could buy it back. [Laughter] He just found it too hard to work in that sort of situation, so they had quite a bit of discussion about that, but they ended up selling it back to him at a profit. There has been a lot over the years. There has been times when it has been difficult for every company. The painting and decorating, the funding for that that sort of refitting stopped. I don't know. Just the council. Things are suitable for three years and then somewhere else. So they faced a bit of a dilemma, but they also got into doing house painting for private customers and they kept going for a good number of years, but it kind of died a natural death actually just because of the source and it was getting the money and getting paid. You did great jobs, but if you didn't get your money in 30 days or 60 days which was the norm it could be difficult for them. So they fell away and it ended up, it was still Kleencare and Allander Security that were the successful survivors would you say. Having said that, a lot of the people that worked with us went on to do their own things, so you enabled a lot of people. I thought that's good as well. It is not just you that is benefitting, it's not just your employers. They are going on to create employment again in their own ventures. To my mind it was such a great idea. It was such a proud moment when you look back and you think my god all the work that we have created in this area. It rejuvenated quite a lot of the people, it really did. It was a turning point for very many of them, who started to see what they could do and what they were worth, rather than being told oh you come from Possil or Milton and you are scum and

you are this and you are that. The commitment was amazing. As I say, the work that you were asking people to do sometimes, even the security. I mean these guys were working, well obviously 24/7. It has just been a great experience and it is sad that it is not in the same vein nowadays. It is a wee bit harder for, I hate to use the word ordinary people, but sometimes if you have not got an education to the higher levels or you have not got those skills in your vocabulary to pass over your ideas, whereas where Strathclyde Community Business, and I think from John Pearce down, John had a core commitment to create employment, to enable people to do it for themselves and I think that struck true where a lot of the community businesses started at that time. It was a great feeling, the sense of ownership. You just bought for £1 and local people were buying it because they felt like they were investing in themselves. That was the thing. They weren't investing in a big company. They were getting it back into their own community and I think that is the thing that stays with me still. I am still involved. My husband was a chair person, Michael passed away three years ago and the board elected myself, so I still feel I have got the same commitment that I had 30 odd years ago. I still feel I have got my fingers on the pulse with it. I have got any information that I might require whenever I request it. If I feel at meetings, everything is there and open and on the table, there is a great sense of trust. I think that might be the other thing within the group. If there are any kinds of issues at all, if they need any information from me, they know I am on the phone and happy to pop round whenever. I don't need to be there every day, but I am in tap with it. The ironic things is my son, Michael was looking for work and the job that I used to do, they decided, because Steven was finding it a bit difficult doing everything, they decided to re-advertise it, so he thought he would apply and I felt not too sure about this because it is one of these family members kind of things, but now that my husband and I were on the panel that interviewed them we had people come out with our community business. We had, I don't know if you know Helen MacNeil who works for GCVS [Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector]. Helen at that time was like myself a younger person and I don't think she was GCVS then, but she was on the interview panel. I think, oh god what was his name? Duncan. I can't remember Duncan's second name. He worked for Strathclyde Community Business and people like that. They were interviewing him and Michael actually met the criteria. So here we are. My son is running the company. He doesn't talk to me much about it because he knows I will give him advice that mothers give rather than a professional person. Obviously at the meetings we discuss it but we have decided it's not for in the house. It is a great feeling to know that he has the same commitment and I think it is a great thing that your views, your feelings and when I say you're I mean my husband and I both have been passed on to him and he sees the sense. He has worked in bigger companies and he says that the sense that you get through it is ours. It is not anybody else's and that's it. It's a fantastic achievement. Quite a lot of them have fell by the waysides over the years with mismanagement and things just don't pan out. It is just the nature of the beast. But I do think that the initial group who were there, who are still involved have

passed that ethos that we got from John [Pearce] and Colin [Roxburgh] and Glen [Buchanan] and all of them at Strathclyde. I think that core value is still there and that's is why it is still there. So endth' the lesson. [Laughter] But it really is. I think it is a fantastic achievement. It is great to see all of the work that is getting done and it is great to see that the profits are still being dispersed within the community. That's a great thing.

Do you think that there is still that connection with the community? You mentioned that people used to put their pound in earlier...

I think it has changed slightly. We used to be based in Possilpark. I mean, we started off in a flat up a close and that was our offices. Obviously as the business grew we had to expand because we needed more space and we have moved further up into an industrial estate. I think that has taken a wee bit of that away. I would say that, because you would walk up and down the street and meet people, who would be saying, "How you doing." And whatever. That maybe has been lost a wee bit and the fact that the wardens aren't there anymore. That business unfortunately, again things changed. The whole ethos of doing that changed. The community, the council had taken over an idea similar to it, and in that sense obviously it is detached slightly, but people are still aware that they can write in and I mean they still know about it. Do you know what I mean? I wouldn't say in that respect that the local, not the local knowledge but you are slightly detached being in there. I think it is a pity that we couldn't have afforded something still in that area, but again, it's all down to cash. It is what you can afford.

That must have been quite an amazing journey, to start off with four people cleaning...

Aye.

...And moving up to 40.

Aye. I think I was out of my reach. [Laughter] It was panic sometimes. I mean really because you were having to go off to here, to there. You had to see clients, obviously. You have got to nurture your clients. You have got to look after them and that is an important part of it as well, keep the relationships. Checking that everything is alright. Don't presume that everything is alright because you are not hearing anything. I mean some days it was absolutely crazy and as I say, even though the elevation had been to managers [positions], sometimes you were still cleaning because you had to. Jobs had to be done and that was it. You just had to go out and do it, but sometimes it was hard, it was stressful. I mean it wasn't all lovely fairies prancing around. Sometimes it was harsh, but at the back of it was, and I feel I keep harping back to this commitment that

it's ours. So you put more into something and when you've got a belief in it, you do it and we were. Not everybody that worked for us was the same but the majority were because they knew it was us. Sometimes it was hard. I mean there were times, especially cash flow. Cash flow could be difficult when you were working with bigger companies, because they tended, and we were a small debt to them but to us it was a lot of money. So they were paying out all of the hundreds of thousands at the top of it but not paying us our £2000, £3000, £4000, £5000. We are always chasing. That was another thing I learned. I was a debt collector sometimes. You just had to go, but again if you went in and explained it to them I would say 95% would understand we needed it, because you have always got costs. There's transport and just material costs. Offices that you cleaned you had to fit and obviously there are standards that have to be met. You have got to keep to the criteria for health and safety. So it was a steep learning curve I can assure you. But you never stop learning in life, so it is not a bad thing. I don't think it is. I think it is good. If it had been easy it wouldn't have been the same because that was the lows and then you had the highs.

What were the highs?

The highs were getting the good jobs and sometimes, I will tell you and it sounds kind of, but sometimes the highs were somebody saying to you "excellent bit of work you have done there". As simple as that. Again, you feel we have done what we set out to do; we have done a good job and people are happy, and clients coming back to you was a high as well or recommending you onto different organisations or groups. You can't beat word of mouth recommendations, you can't buy that. Again for me, and another one of the highs was creating the employment because at the time that we started it was dire, it really was and it is not everybody's aims and aspirations to be a cleaner, but we offered something a wee bit extra sometimes and we made sure we spoke to everybody. We spoke to all of our workers. We made sure we had a connection. You knew a name. I don't remember them now unfortunately, but at the time you knew people. It wasn't just "her that works, wherever, at St Rolliks", or wherever it would be. You knew people. So you had your own relationship with your employees, which is important. Treat them the way you would like to be treated yourself. It is quite an important part of it. We used to, when you think back, we did Lennox Castle Hospital when it was the hospital. We were out there and they had got a refurb and some of the patients, they just wandered about, aimlessly just wandered about some of them god love them, and this wee man used to come in every morning and he would be waiting for us, waiting for our van to arrive. This was obviously in the early days. "Can I help you?" We would say, "Aye, certainly. Come on in. Come on in." And so we would give him a brush and whatever. Whether we were doing, and it would be like. What's the word they say? What's the word they call it now? Mentoring. That's the word they use. It was just what we were doing it and he loved it, and at the end of the week we had spoken to the staff and said to them is it okay. He

is coming in. I mean we are okay with it but are you, and they said as long as he is alright, you are alright, we are alright and we said we were going to give him some money is that okay. "Aye, aye. How much?" Just something to acknowledge that he is doing and the joy on that man's face was amazing because it was something he hadn't experienced. So it is wee things like that you remember. It is very small and insignificant to some people but not to me. I felt it was, he was coming to work, and that was what he started saying. "I am coming to work. I will be here tomorrow." "So are we. Don't worry about it." We were there for weeks and he loved it and I think he enjoyed the conversation as well. I mean everybody would listen to his wee stories, god love him. But they are the highs as well I think actually when you think about. It is all about the people in it at the end of the day. I am getting teary here. This is dreadful thinking back, but aye. I have had some really good times and as I say, I think it was such an opportunity and we were very lucky when we got the link in that we did and we were lucky that there was Colin [Roxburgh] and Gerry [Scott] and we were lucky with John [Pearce], who could see something in us that maybe we couldn't see ourselves, which is a nice thing.

I am also thinking about all of the business skills that you must have had to learn along the way.

Oh aye.

Was that something that you did formally or was it learning on the job?

I had worked in shops. I was always quite good with numbers. I was always good at counting. I was always good at talking, which was a skill in itself, but we did have to learn quite a lot. I mean we really did have to, as I say, going into price work because we hadn't had experience of doing it sometime you underestimated it, but you learnt quickly. It is literally learning on the job, so that was alright. Invoicing and keeping, I only kept a basic account because we did have an accountant there and Steven was very good. He would keep you up to par. Invoicing and things weren't a problem to me. I didn't find that difficult once I got into it. I found it, and I would just keep a record of everything. I am a great writer down of things so that was a good thing to be. But initially, it was daunting, because we hadn't done it before and although we had £40 income we knew we had to earn. As I said, that first batch that we done for Lawrence he probably got them at a song but we soon upped it and we soon realised the amount of work and the thing that they do called snagging where workers would go in and have to redo things and then we would have to go in and re-clean and initially we were doing that and I thought no we need to price everything, so we learned quite quickly with that. Again, if you had any difficulties, it goes back to the team thing. You could approach people like Steven and like Colin and say look, we are not sure about this. Is there anybody that you know and they would maybe link

you in with another community business who were working, possibly not the same but having very similar problems, so that was good. I mean we used to know the people in Govan obviously and the girl, I cannot remember her name. She did a knitting, a community business and they were doing knitting and exporting it, but we were all facing the same problems. Cash flows, pricing. So you could sit and talk and it was like, not alcoholics anonymous, but a support group because you were speaking to people facing the same problems which was good because you were thinking then it is not just us. As we are growing up we are learning these things and people were generous in that respect. Again, I feel like I am harping back to John and Colin, but I think they were so committed to the ideology of it, that the people who came from that wee acorn that they planted were coming up with the same ideas most of the time. I think the concept was such a, at the end of the day when you think about it what it is all about. It is about working together for the benefit of everybody, not just for the few and that was what community business was and is still in my mind.

I am also thinking that as well as learning all these new things about running a business and keeping a company going, how did you juggle that with your family life?

[Laughter] It was interesting. As I say, at that time Michael had had a very serious accident in his work, really bad back injuries, so he in essence was a househusband, but he also was involved in the community business as director, so he understood it. We did, I mean my two older sons, they would have been, let me have a think. What age they would have been? They would have been 15 and 16. Kenny would be six or seven and he was at school, but Michael, where we stayed then our school was 200 yards up the road and Michael would collect them and bring them back. That was never a problem in that respect. But it was times when they were ill and things like that and you felt I need to be here, but again, with support within it that I could take that time, because I had done it if they needed it; I had done it and vice versa and that's the way we worked, but it could be hard. I have got to be honest and say the last thing I felt like doing when I came in at night was cleaning and cooking I can assure you and I was very fortunate in that my husband Michael cooked tea. It didn't bother him. He enjoyed cooking. I used to think there is something strange about you. I hated it. I had done it for years and I hated it, but Michael was very, it was a creative thing and he did it and so that maybe was the bones that I had. A husband that who was very understanding about it and I think he enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed seeing the community business grow. Do you know what I mean? I think that made a difference, but sometimes aye it could be hard. Summer holidays could be difficult, but again, having three sons and a football mad husband he would take them up the park and they would kick about. He was a man that always enjoyed children. Our kids were the joy of his life. We enjoyed our holidays obviously, but aye it could be hard. It's like any working woman isn't it? You are juggling all of the balls that you have got,

but you get, I think what I did find quite quickly was to get a system that worked for me. Where I had done things like washing and ironing and you had got a structure. That was what you had done and there was always a wee blip because that is life in general, but it was never, I don't ever remember it being a major problem in all honesty, in that if I could not get into work because one of my children had been ill or whatever, it was always covered and it was accepted, that there was an understanding of why. You never abused it. Things happen as a mother and as running a house. Some nights I couldn't sleep. You'd be up to high dough pricing this job. You are going to bed thinking about it. "I will get his stuff for school and then I will need to price that and how many people will we need for that." It was sometimes very difficult to cut it off, but you learn that as well. I think that comes. What's the old saying? With age comes wisdom. It took me a while, but it did and you had to learn that you shut that door and this house is your family and don't be too much going on about the work, although he would, Michael would always ask how was it today. That was good in that way because if it was a bad day you could go "Whoa." So you got an emotional release, which you sometimes need. But I genuinely don't remember any time that I felt I am walking from this. It was never that bad, even at the worst times when, as I say, we were tight for cash and things. I would just say we need to find. It was the time of the dip. Everybody was suffering, it wasn't just us. But aye, we are still here, and we are still going on, which is good.

What about other women in the area? Was the cleaning jobs their only source of income? [telephone call] So we were just talking about your own experience and being a working mum in the company and I was just wondering about other women's experiences and what that cleaning job meant to them?

For a lot of them it was an absolute lifeline because we could work flexible hours, we were office cleaning and we did try to accommodate people. Having being in the position yourself you understood it very clearly. The laundry, we had employed 3 people in the laundry because initially it was really busy and that was good because we worked a sort of shift roll for them for that. A lot of them it was part-time work. Nevertheless, it was work and that money made such a huge difference to the household. The cleaning, the high powered, not higher powered, the longer jobs, we had a core group that did them and that was fine, but again, I think an awful lot of them felt really, good at getting into work, and again it was a local company, and again it was coming back into the community and I think a lot of people understood that. We did, although when we started getting things like the housing associations where we were having to work further out, we would recruit in the areas because getting people, we couldn't afford that amount of time transporting people with our van that we had at the time or my car. So in that respect, sometimes the jobs went outwith, but nevertheless we still went into the community. But within Possilpark and Milton there was an awful lot of jobs created, not just by us, not just within the

cleaning company, the security and all that, everything, but the thing was, as I say, just getting that bit extra money made such a difference and sometimes it enabled them to claim other benefits, like you know, you had to have so many hours work to get. So it made a difference to a lot of people's standard of living than just getting by as they say and just managing and getting a wee bit extra money. Some of the jobs were good. Some of the office cleaning jobs were fine and again, we tended to try and fit the right people to the right places and most of them, I am not saying everybody stayed with us forever but we had really quite a strong group of people that worked with for a long, long, long time which was good and it was good just to give them the opportunity and people again, when we were based there you would be coming up the street and people were saying are you looking for anybody and that was good and you would take, genuinely take them. Not just going right give me your number and bin it, you would keep them. Keep them in reserve and speak to them and if they were right, well and good. That was a thing I found hard. Interviewing people was difficult if you had to say no and then you had to learn that because you can't say yes to everybody. Not everyone is appropriate for certain jobs but I didn't always find that easy because some of them you could see, it would have made such a difference, but you can't be too emotional about it. You have got to be a wee bit realistic but where we could, we did.

What kind of criteria were you looking for in your interviews?

We were looking for somebody that you felt, well first of all that you could trust because you were giving them keys and again, speaking specifically about the office cleaning and things like that. You felt you wanted somebody who had the commitment, who had the enthusiasm. Who had quite, well I say social skills and that is not exactly it but someone that if this person came into your office you would feel comfortable with them. Training-wise, I mean, everybody would say I am a cleaner but we did have certain specifics that had to be met and we would do that, so that wasn't a problem, you felt that we can all learn, as I say, but I think that the trust, you had to feel that it was someone that could be trusted, that had a commitment to the company or to yourself and someone that could relate well to other people. It's quite important. The skills came. You would take people in and you would show them the way it was to be done and said if you do it like that you will have no problems. Simple as that. I mean some jobs were maybe hard sometimes, but generally speaking in the office, if we had gone and we had blitzed initially. Getting it to a good standard and saying just maintain that. Do blah, blah, blah and we would write out a rota of what was to be done and that was that. But, as say, we had people that worked with us for years who they were just, I keep saying committed. It sounds like it's an asylum, but you know what I mean. The ethos was coming through to them. They saw the positives of working for what in essence was a smaller company but they were treated better and that's important. That was really important.

You mentioned that there was a blip. Was that in the 1990s?

The 1990s it would have been about then, aye.

That was a hard time.

It was hard.

What were the pressures?

It was severe because you didn't want to have to pay anybody off, that was the first thing, but when you are not making money you have got to reevaluate and although we were going to clients and saying to them we might have to put prices up, they were having the same experience, so that was really difficult for us. I found that, again back to our team, you felt a personal responsibility. Unfortunately I think we did lose, we had to lose a couple of jobs because they just were not cost effective and we were taking on work that previously we might not have done. Things like close cleaning which is a vile, horrible job to do, but you were getting money there so you had to go where it was, but we started employing quite a few men for that and that was fine. We were telling them what to do! [Laughter] That's not right because there were always guys that worked with us. We had drivers and there were guys who did high cleaning and things like that, but it was hard. It was a real struggle for everybody at the time and it was the paying off. I used to think oh please god let us get something so we don't have to, but we got there. We rode it out. The other thing, what did happen was security if I remember. Again my memory is dreadful, probably Jim McMullan would know better. There were doing quite well, so that offset our costs a bit, because obviously we were paying variant amounts into the community business, so we were able to get, because they were doing alright we were able to ride it out a wee bit. Back to the team work, and it was never grudgingly given. It was never them saying "oh we're keeping you going", it never happened like that. But it was hard. Aye it was hard.

And did you ever, did the cleaning company ever get any government subsidies or was it purely on your own contracts that you broke even?

We more or less got it all ourselves. We tried repeatedly to try and get help from agencies but somehow we never seem to meet the criteria. Possibly, had we went into different types of cleaning going into, what is it they call it? I can't even remember the name of it. Going into offices where they have the computing stuff and things like that. Specialised cleaning and that. We have never done that. We never really got into that or maybe going into bigger value, we never went that way. We tended to stay

with what we knew. Looking back, that was maybe a mistake because we should have expanded our skill base as they say. But at the time, I think the funds weren't there and you weren't getting and because we were reasonably well-established community business in some respects had gone out of flavour, which happens. There are things that funders will fund for a while and then something new comes along, so it was difficult. It also changed from Strathclyde Community Business to Strathclyde Enterprise² and it had a different concept then, because they done what they should've done, which was change. They had to. But there were differences then and you didn't have the same. I think John, had John retired then? I don't think John was there then. It was a different kind of way of looking at it. It was more like jobs and businesses and things like that are now. There were more looking for individual entrepreneurial people rather than looking at us as a collective I felt, because I remember we did go down to speak to them and it wasn't very reassuring because we were just looking for advice and we didn't seem to get it, but actually I think I got back in touch with Colin and he said he was going to speak to blah, blah, so that was good. That followed on, but that was a personal favour that he did that. Aye, it was difficult because you would see organisations getting mega money and you think here we are. I am not just talking about the cleaning. I am talking about the whole group and sometimes it did struggle along and again it was all back to not having the base that you needed to start, because you were generating your income as you started. You didn't have any kind of cushion, which makes such a difference. I think we did get a wee start-up grant again from Strathclyde Community Business to enable us to buy equipment. We are not talking hundreds and thousands of pounds by any means and the security I think they also got a grant for uniforms and walkie talkies which were very basic. The painting and decorating were different because they had that funding that had been getting diverted, so it was more cost effective. They got their equipment and things like that.

So would you still describe the Allander Group as a community business rather than a social enterprise?

Aye. I always call it a Possil Community Business. It will never be the Allander Group to me. I mean I call it if I am speaking to other people in a business thing. But no, it has always been the community business to me and I cherish that ethos, that it is a community enterprise, community business but not a, in a way I suppose it is a social enterprise because it enabled people, but it just sounded better to me as the community business belonging to us benefitting everybody.

So you never wanted to change the company in any way to be a social enterprise?

Personally? No. I think other people might have but I, no.

² Strathclyde Community Business changed to Community Enterprise in Scotland in the 1990s.

What do you think it would have meant if it had?

I think it would have tarnished. I think the sense of ownership would change if it went to that because you have to bring in different people who might not be singing from what we started out as. I know social enterprise are about creating employment. I mean I know things like that, but I felt, I think the community business ethos was people doing it for themselves with just a wee help along the way. I am saying a wee help, but it was a big help, but then you were made to feel that it was yours. It went the way that we envisaged it would go, that we hoped it would go and I think with social enterprise, I think they are answerable pricewise and number-wise and the personalisation gets lost a wee bit. You become number 2223456 whatever you might be and I might be demeaning them but that was just my concept. I know other people might have, over the years we had different managers with different aims and aspirations, but in the main, the group that were there and there is still a few there had this wee feeling about “it’s ours” and I don’t mean that in a “Its ours. Don’t touch it.” But there was a sense of ownership there, that it was what it was and it still is.

I am just thinking about the future now. Do you think the Allander Group will exist in another 30 years’ time?

Aye, I do. I think we have brought in and we have got someone in now, Jane, who is marketing and that was something that was always difficult because you were marketing, you were pricing, you were working. Having somebody to do that has benefitted them. I think that is how we got the Commonwealth Games, because she used, she had worked for Mitie or one of these companies but found the pressure having to meet the target which would accelerate at great. You know you achieved a target and it would be immediately another 100,000 or whatever. So I think coming into our environment was different for her and it was difficult for her at first because she was used to fast paced, hard, hard, hard and I don’t mean that it is lax, but there is not the same pressure in that respect, so she blossomed and she has done an amazing bit of work. I mean Jim McMullan still goes out and sells because he has got contacts and that is what you do. Michael still goes out and markets or sells, but she is also doing it and I think that has made a difference. So I could see that being the stepping stone that will carry us on. I mean, obviously people will move on, it’s the nature of the beast. We are all getting older, but you would hope that whoever comes into it comes in with an understanding of what it is. That it doesn’t change too much. I know it has to change, life is like that, it has got to change, but you would hope that this commitment to employing and reinvesting in people would stay with them.

Do you think the area still needs that?

Yes. There seems to be, the area has been tarnished a bit because you mention Possilpark and Milton and it's oh thugs, rogues and there are thugs and rogues, but there are thugs and rogues everywhere. What they don't see is the good people that are there who are trying hard to do it and there is a lot of people working within the community trying to do things. It is needing an investment in people. Again, back to the community business concept. It is needing people to come in again and maybe as I am talking to you, maybe we should be the people that are doing that. Maybe we should be going to groups and saying look, we have done it, why don't you try. You know, do it for yourself rather than wait for somebody, but again you are back to the funding. It is an area that's not had an awful lot of financial input to enhance it and sometimes when it has had it, it's been people who have come, and I say this from experience, who have come to consult, who listen to what you say, but already have decided what the solution is going to be. They don't necessarily take on board what the local people know, the problems. They know where the benefits could come from, but it doesn't always happen like that because that decision has already actually been made and this is councils or whoever it might be ticking the box to say we have consulted with the local people, and they don't really listen to them and who knows better than the person in the area where the investments should be. I feel sorry for the young people. I think there's a sense of apathy in some respects about getting employment and that's really quite sad. That is really quite sad, because they feel there is this postcode lottery that goes on. That you say you are from blah, blah and the presumption is made and there is so many people here with so many talents. I mean it is amazing what goes on, which is never, you never see that in the press. You always see the negatives. You don't always see the positives and there is a lot of positives as well. I think a lot of people are doing a lot of things individually and collectively to try and help, but then there should be some investment and training in enabling people to maybe achieve something. You don't have to always be a genius at school. I mean an awful lot of people have made a lot of money who never did well at school. Tom Farmer. I mean the man is dyslexic. He couldn't read or write and look what he has done, because he had a belief in himself and I think that is what is missing here, because they have been told they are rascals and toerags and they are not, but they are getting labelled it. I find that quite sad.

I don't have any more questions for you Susan, but do you think there is anything I have missed?

No. I think you have covered it well. I mean, as I say, to my mind, so much credit should go to John and people like him and I don't know who John got his inspiration from. This was a man who stayed true to his values, although he was elevated and venerated, he was still John and you can go and talk to him. You know, he still had a great commitment. I think that was it. He was a humanitarian and that's exactly what it's about, and I think Colin and the rest of them that worked with him took that on

board. He saw what people could do, not what they couldn't do and I think that's a great gift, if you have got that. To look at people and not be judgemental or negative, but to be positive about them and I think that is what the community business is about, investing in people. What else can you say? That's it.

Brilliant. If you are happy I will stop the recording now.