

## **Eddie Lamon talks about her community, its needs, and her advocacy....**

Yeah, but what I'm saying to you, it wouldn't take no rocket scientist to know that that's the lowest and most needy area. It is. And I always said that the County – all my life that I've been dealing with federal and state funds, the people with the most need are the people with the lowest income. And I used to go to the RCLC meetings and say, "My Area is the step-child of the County." And I'd say, "You never do – your budget looks like you're doing something over there. However, you can't hire people because [many are turned] away from coming to our area. [So] you have some money left over and that money should not go back in the pot. It should be spent in my Area." I fought them on that. Then one time, they were trying to change the law where the County didn't have to put in the 15% [matching funds] and I used to go to the [Mental Health] Commission meetings and I wasn't on the Commission. But I'd go there and speak out, and I said, "You shouldn't let that law pass, I know the County is for it, but no, the County should still have to put in 15%." And [the Board of Supervisors] sent a letter [to the RCLC members] saying, if you serve on the Committee, you can't take a stand until you know where the County stands. I said, "Well, when I was at that [Commission] meeting, I wasn't on the RCLC. I was citizen Eddie Lamon, and I can say whatever I feel like saying." [She laughs].

But that's just the way I am and everybody that knows me knows that I'm that kind of person. So my service is not direct services. Every Committee that I would get on, when I first got started – I got on the Housing Committee and they were going to make plans for housing for people with mental illness and I looked around and I said, "How many of us in here are people with mental illness?" Nobody answered, and so I said, "Then we don't know what we're talking about. We need to go out there and ask the people [who are] mentally ill." And I'd tell them how to do it too. "You don't go to no board and care home and having them people ask, because those people are not going to say anything, because they got to live with those people [that run the home]. You're going to have to have somebody that's one of them, a peer, to ask them questions in a different setting, and you'll get the truth." I said, "But I wouldn't complain about my board and care and meals, if I had to still stay there." [she laughs]. [They would say] "I like staying here," when they might not even like being there. But they'd rather have something else, but they wouldn't tell you that, and you don't blame them, because they don't trust people anyway.

**READ THE FULL TRANSCRIPT BELOW.**

**INTERVIEWEE: EDDIE LAMON**

**INTERVIEWER: MARCIA MELDRUM**

**DATE: November 12, 2009**

**I. Early Life and Education; Volunteering in the South Central LA Community**

MM: OK, it's November the 12<sup>th</sup> and we're talking with Eddie Lamon. I'm the interviewer, my name is Marcia Meldrum. I'd like you to start at the beginning, you know, tell me where you were born and grew up and what your family was like.

EL: Oh my. Well, I was born in 1931 in Oklahoma in a rural area of a town called Wetumka, Oklahoma.

MM: Wetumka, I like that.

EL: Do you want me to spell it?

MM: Yeah, that would probably be helpful.

EL: W-E-T-U-M-K-A, Oklahoma.

MM: Wetumka, pretty.

EL: Yes, and I'm an only child. My mother and father separated when I was three years old. And I was born in '31, so that's the Depression. So my mother was more able to find some kind of work anyway than my father and then she met this young man, my stepfather, and they married. But it still was hard to find jobs during that time so my mother would find jobs, so I'd stay with my dad sometimes. I would stay with – she had several sisters and brothers, because my grandfather was married three times and he had children by different wives, but she had only one sister that had the same mother and father. But I'd stay with her [my aunt] sometimes while my mother would go find a job; then she'd come get me, and that was in Oklahoma. I even had an aunt in Kansas. I'd go stay in Kansas. When I started kindergarten, I was in Humboldt, Kansas. But see, I was going somewhere all the time. At the age of nine, I moved to [live with] an uncle that lived in Berkeley, California. I mean she [my mother] moved there the year before I did, that was '39, I think that was.

MM: I think you were seven.

EL: Yeah, and then at age nine, I moved to Berkeley, that's [in] 1940, just before the War. She sent and got my stepfather too, before she sent and got me, but then he found work there in Oakland mainly, I think. And then we lived there and back then, it was real hard to find places to live. But my uncle owned his own house, so we used every space for a bedroom, the living room, the dining room, all of it. Some of the family would come and we all stayed there together until it got better. But then we moved to Sacramento and we'd be back and forth. I'm telling you, my first few years of my life, I was like moving all the time somewhere. So I went to the third, fourth, fifth, [and] the sixth grades, in Berkeley. Oh, I even went to seventh grade, because that was junior high. But I also

had moved to Sacramento and part of that time [was] going from one school back to the other. One time we even moved to Oakland for about six months. My uncle's wife got sick and he moved to the Imperial Valley and couldn't find a babysitter. I was about 14 then, and in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, so I moved down there for about 6 months [she laughs], and [got partly behind at school].

So we went back to Sacramento when I was 15 years old and that's where I went to high school, the only school I stayed all through [she laughs] – high school. So then my mother and my stepfather separated and her sister was in LA and I have a cousin, her nephew, [who] lived out here too, so she decided to move to LA. I was still in Sacramento because I have lots of relatives in Sacramento. I'm the only child. My mother just insisted I must come down later [she laughs]. So she literally packed me up and brought me to LA [she laughs].

MM: And how old were you then?

EL: I was eighteen [and a high school graduate]. So anyway I've been in Los Angeles – Well, I went to Watts first, in that area, and then I moved to Compton in 1951. It's not Compton, it's Willowbrook, the community of Willowbrook [an unincorporated community in South Central Los Angeles]. That's where Martin Luther King Hospital [King-Drew Medical Center] is.

MM: I know where that is.

EL: And I've been there [ever since]. I said, "Oh, when I get grown up I'm going to get me a house and I'm going to stay in it until it falls in on me." I shouldn't have said that because that's almost what I've done. I should have said, "I'm going to grow it into a mansion [she laughs]." I am in the middle of remodeling some of it now [she laughs] but it almost did fall in. But I had nine children myself.

MM: Wow.

EL: Plus my three step-children made me a whole dozen.

MM: 12 kids, that's a lot.

EL: For an only child, it's really a lot [she laughs]. So I've been right there in that same house since 1951. And when my oldest son was old enough to go to kindergarten – well, I was the person in the neighborhood that walked all the neighborhood kids to school. The school was down Wilmington [Avenue], you know where Wilmington is? That's the one Martin Luther King [Medical Center] is on. It's kind of busy, Wilmington and next to El Segundo [Boulevard], and you know how kids are, they'll tag each other, run out in the streets, so I didn't want mine going out there by themselves. It was only a few blocks because I live on 131<sup>st</sup> and on 126<sup>th</sup> was the school. It used to be Willowbrook Elementary and they changed names. It was John Kennedy one time. Now it's Cesar Chavez [Continuation High School], it's for the pregnant teens and the other kids that need to continue.

Now, but they built the school right down the street from me. I was there while they built it, where it's right in the neighborhood so the kids could just walk. But first I was the one that took all the kids to school, all the kids in the neighborhood, as a matter of fact. I'm

walking with mine, so all the neighborhood kids joined with me, so I'm like down the street with –

MM: Yeah, like a parade. That's great.

EL: And so I always believed that parents should be involved with their kids' education. Well, when I was growing up, they didn't stress that that much. But they did have the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] at the school; so they were asking us to go and I'd join the PTA and go to PTA meetings so that was about, what? 1954?

MM: OK.

EL: And that's how I got started to doing, and one thing leads to another. And, as I said, I had all those children. I volunteered in the classroom, I did the PTA and whatever else they needed, fundraisers and I could kind of creatively decorate the bulletin boards.

MM: Yeah, that's great.

EL: And I'd do those kinds of things and if they had plays, a friend of mine, she was better at sewing. She and I joined together and we would make costumes, that's how we got started. And then in Willowbrook, we don't have a city, so we had what we called the Willowbrook Coordinating Council. So I was on the Willowbrook Coordinating Council and different things led to us getting things that we needed in Willowbrook, in the area. And at the time our schools were separate. We had the Willowbrook Elementary, Enterprise Elementary, and Compton Elementary. The high schools and the junior highs were together, and that was Compton Union High School. But in the 70s, they unified [the separate school districts].

MM: Brought them together.

EL: Yes, so and then came the federal funds. I was involved in Head Start [the Federally funded program begun in 1965 to provide preschool education for low-income children] and –

MM: Did you like organize the programs or – ?

EL: I was on the Advisory Committee.

MM: The Advisory Committee, yes.

EL: Yes, and I was always wanting it to be equal and fair. I've always been that kind of person. When the funds first came in, they wanted to form an [Advisory] Committee. Well, it's a core of people, usually; [the same] few will always be at meetings.

MM: Right, right.

EL: So we went over to the [School] District office. There were only five schools and they wanted to set up the Advisory Committee. I said, "Wait a minute, we don't have anybody representing Mona [Elementary School and Willowbrook]," which they changed to Martin Luther King [Elementary School in Compton], and we don't have – It was two schools

[that were] not represented. I said, "We shouldn't form an Advisory Committee until we inform or find somebody from those areas to come and be a part."

MM: Sure. Good for you.

EL: [She laughs] And so we formed that Committee. There's so much I can tell you. I brought to all kinds of things. They always said low income people don't volunteer much and do things, so they used to have – do you remember the Greater Los Angeles Volunteer Bureau?

MM: Vaguely, yes.

EL: Yeah, well, we got a branch and put it out there right in our neighborhood on 118<sup>th</sup> Street and I was on that Advisory Board [of Directors].

MM: Oh, good for you.

EL: And then we got to Big Brothers [mentoring organization for young boys], and I was on their [Board].

MM: Wow.

EL: When my son got involved in the Cub Scouts, I didn't want to be a den mother. So I did – I can't remember the title they gave us, [for] what I was doing. I would go to the [central] meetings [for all the den mothers] and get the information. And then my daughters, when they got old enough, they went to the Campfire Girls. Remember it used to be, but it's not Campfire Girls anymore, it's incorporated. [Campfire Girls expanded to include boys in 1975.] They call it Campfire Incorporated, so the boys and girls are together. At first I got on the [Advisory] Committee, but then I didn't go and I didn't attend. I had all these [children].

MM: Yeah, I don't know how you did these things, with all these kids.

EL: Yeah, the first five kids were stair steps [she laughs]. But when they all got in school, it was like I had a gap for five years [she laughs], and I'd be at the school most of the time. I spent most of my time at the school and I became the president of the PTA and part of the Compton Union Council. See, I was one that didn't mind attending meetings and I had this friend. She and I would exchange watching each other's kids. She had a bunch, too, so if one did something, then the other one would just keep the kids. If we couldn't take the kids, one would stay home and keep the kids, the other one would go and do it. She was almost like an only child. She had a sister way younger than she, so we were almost like sisters. Some people thought we were.

MM: Yeah, that's great.

EL: And so we just did whatever we did, whatever we needed to do, with the children and every committee they had, Head Start and Follow Through [the follow-up program to improve early elementary education for low-income children 1968-95], PTA –

MM: Wow, so you were really busy.

EL: Yeah, and I still am.

MM: Yeah, I can see that too. OK.

EL: Then the Model Neighborhoods came along [a program started under Supervisor Kenneth Hahn in the 1970s to revitalize communities, promote neighborhood watch, and intervene with at-risk youth] and I was on that. And I was on the Citizen Participation Corporation. And the County [DMH] had made – At first maybe they just had the [Mental Health] Commission and then they decided that each of the [Service] Areas should have an Advisory Committee. They called it the \*Regional Community Liaison Committee” [RCLC] and so they were looking for people. So they came to the Citizen’s Corporation Director and told him we need somebody to be on this committee. So I volunteered to be on the Committee [she laughs] and I went there.

At first, I said, “I’ve been going to things and under the Model Neighborhoods program, we went to classes like for training.” We learned leadership, we had a class they called “Law and the Layman,” and then we also had classes where you evaluate federal programs. So I was always one for learning and knowing what I’m doing. And, when I was in the PTA, they were doing a lot of mistakes at the schools that the PTA didn’t allow. So I told them, “If I’m going to be president, I want to know what I’m supposed to be doing.”

MM: Good for you.

EL: So we had a six weeks’ course at the school in the summer and anybody could come and you know that the adult school, if you have at least 15 people, they’ll send you a teacher. So someone that was very knowledgeable [about] PTA came and trained us, told us all the laws.

MM: Cool, that’s great.

EL: So a lot of my education, that’s all it is. I did go to school. I went to Compton College, but I dropped out [she laughs]. But you can imagine, with all those children, [I was busy] and I have this thing that I don’t like getting “C”s. [she laughs]

MM: You only want to get “A”s.

EL: Yeah, a “B” I’ll accept, but a “C” was not very good and with all those kids and having to send them to school and I also started working at the school. I worked in another program, too, before then. Just before we unified, they called [it] More Opportunities Via Education [Project MOVE]. A man from the County had got an innovative funds [grant] from the Federal Government to do something. [It was] Fred Wolf, and he said, “People are sitting in an ivory tower, planning for people and we need to plan *with* people, and we need to find out what the people want before we go out there and give it to them. That’s why they don’t participate.”

So he came out, Fred Wolf, and he said he wanted to find the person that was very active and known in the community to be a community worker, in each one of the areas. He went to the Compton City School and the Enterprise School and Willowbrook. Well, Compton had the most [schools and people], but he had [four or five] of us from Willowbrook. And we would go to the schools and just go around near the schools and

knock on doors and ask the parent if they would let us meet in their house, because we were having a hard time getting people to come to some things. When we had PTA, I used to have a packed house, but it was getting harder.

One of the things [he said was], "People are not going to be real honest with you, but if you meet in their house, they'll be more relaxed and they'll tell you more." And he said, "If it's somebody they trust, somebody they know in the community, they will be more apt to do so; and you ask them, can I invite your neighbors?" So that's the way the program was; and the question was, "What can we do to help you help your child achieve, outside of what the school is already doing?" and we let them complain about everybody, the city, [she laughs] the school district, and everything else. Oh, I got to back up. He said, "I know that they're not going to ask [me or] answer *my* question, me, a white man in a monkey suit with a briefcase. They're not going to tell me a darn thing [she laughs]. So that's why I want the people from the community to form the committee, then I come in afterwards [she laughs]."

MM: That's great.

EL: It was a great program and he did, he had them ask whatever they [wanted], make their complaints. One of them was, they didn't get a chance to talk to the teachers, so he formed another program called Family Teacher Exchange where the teacher had to come out to the parent's house and they wouldn't let the school pick the teachers. [Fred selected five teachers at random from each school.] They'd put the name in the hat and draw and they had to go to this meeting and [talk to] those parents in the community that were already meeting and telling these stories. But see, I'm jumping ahead. That's one of the programs that came out of interviewing the parents. And there's another program that came out of Project MOVE, because we met every Friday. We got a lot of training in that program too, and we met [to exchange information] every Friday. And he would not let us call him Mr. Wolf; everybody was on an equal basis in name. He says, "There's no big Is and little yous."

MM: Good for him.

## **II. Community Workers in Mental Health and the RCLC; the Meaning of "Advisory"**

EL: [She laughs] And so a lot of people were running into people that they – we're not psychiatrists, but we could clearly see something was wrong. So he said, "It seems like these people are not getting help [even though] they do have clinics. And so maybe we need to have people working in the community, community workers in mental health." And he wrote and got a grant to do that, to the National Institute of Mental Health [this federal agency funded many community mental health programs from the 1960s into the early 1990s]. They sent him \$400,000, and he hadn't even planned the program. [Fred Wolf later worked in Sacramento, where he and Maury Lindros developed a similar program for migrant workers; he retired to Palm Springs.]

And that's how Community Workers got in the County [the LA County Department of Mental Health]. Now, a lot of people don't know that, but I'm telling you, but I was there, so I know. I didn't get in that program. I didn't want to be, because it would have been confining me a little. I had too many children.

MM: Right, you had all those other things to do. I'm sorry, you found people – they found people who had these problems, these mental health problems. Were these parents, children?

EL: Some of them were parents.

MM: OK.

EL: That's what was bothering the people most – it was that some of the other workers was the ones that was running into them more. But we'd meet every Friday, so we'd talk about what we saw and what we [thought was] needed.

MM: I see.

EL: And that's the first year we got the plans [for the program]. The next year we started implementing whatever the people asked us for, and that's how I really got started to doing a little work, because he said, "With all your training, and as good as you are, you need to be working." Everybody else was asking him to get them a job. I said, "I don't need to get no job, I need to go stay with my children." [she laughs] And this [volunteer work] was part time, so I could do this, but I said, "I need to go home with my kids." But he went to the school himself and asked the teachers. The principal knew I was a very good volunteer. I was on the campus all the time, anyway, so he talked her into hiring me to work with getting parents involved in the school and that's how I got started. I worked part-time in getting parents involved, with my training. It was a real low income job, minimum wage, but she [the principal] said, "You might as well get a little something, you're here all the time, organizing parents, anyway."

MM: Yeah, so a little income is better than no income.

EL: Right. So it's a lot more, but I'm kind of running the truth to you who I am.

MM: I see, this is fascinating, go ahead.

EL: I learned a long time ago people would look at us; part of my early years was in Berkeley [she laughs]. So you sort of understand who I am.

MM: Yes I do understand, that's great. I'm glad.

EL: When I first started going to my mental health meetings, I remember Sylvia was the chairperson and we were meeting. Well, maybe you might want to hear how I got started doing this in the first place. When we first started going for the Title I [funds provided by the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965], meaning they wanted to form a District Advisory Council, so they asked each of the schools that had the programs to send someone, so I went and I knew – In those days, they didn't have people just working on federal funds in the schools. They just gave it to the Finance Department [who would be] handling the funds for Title I, and his name [the head of Finance] was Hugh [Walker]. I say, "Hugh, now you've known me for a while, and I know you didn't just decide you want me to come down here and give you some advice. [she laughs] Because you know me, I'm going to ask so many questions, you could have your [work] done [faster if I wasn't around]. But if you have me in there – somebody told me you had to do it, that's why you called us over here."



I said, "So I want to see that paper that told you that [you had to bring in people from the community]." See, they were just telling us, they formed us and they told us what we were about. I said, "I want to see the paper." He said, "OK, Ms. Lamon." They never turned me down when I asked. If you know what to ask for, you could get it, but the thing is, how do you know to ask?

MM: Often you don't, yeah.

EL: I'm just one of those that can think like that. I'll say, "Somebody told me to do it and they wrote it down, so give it to me," [she laughs] and I really don't get embarrassed if I'm not saying it like it should be, as long as you understand what I'm saying [she laughs].

MM: Good for you.

EL: So anyway, he gave it to me. I found out that the paper did say that you're supposed to give this to that Committee and you're supposed to tell them, I mean, let them find out their duties. Well, I jumped from that to tell you that's what happened when I went to the [Department of] Mental Health thing. And they were telling us that we were advisory, so I'd been through advisory. I said, "I know what advisory is, I looked it up in the dictionary, it's advising, and you can take it or leave it. But, if I'm on your committee and I'm supposed to be giving you some advice before you write all your stuff down, you're supposed to set me there and let me give you some advice. I know you can take it or leave it, but at least I should have the opportunity to advise!" [she laughs]

MM: The opportunity, right, exactly.

EL: That's the way I've always been, OK. And so anyway that's what I told [the Department of] Mental Health after a while, because they had us doing transcendental meditation [a form of Indian mantra meditation widely taught in the US since the 1960s]. I said, "But what is the Advisory Committee advising on?"

MM: Yeah, yeah.

EL: And I said, "It must be some kind of plans or some kind of something," and I said, "Anyway, who told you to form this Committee?" They told us it came from a policy from the [LA County] Board of Supervisors. I want[ed] to see the policy. A lot of people may get angry with you because they think, "Well you don't trust me." I said, "I don't know, I'm just one of those people that likes to see it myself." I'm not the best reader in the world, but my comprehension is really good [she laughs]. And I also tell people, "And if you're not a lawyer and I'm not a lawyer, then my interpretation is as good as yours." [she laughs]

MM: Yeah, no kidding.

EL: So that's the way I am and that's where I come from; and so I quit the Committee first, [because we weren't doing any advising]. I said, "Because you guys are not doing this right." And someone told them – when they found out what we were really supposed to do – "You really need to bring Ms. Lamon back, because she learns all along – I've had many parliamentary procedures – and she reads stuff and she knows what should be done, so you need to bring her in."

MM: Right, right, you were a valuable person.

EL: So what happened was they sent for me to come back to the Committee, because I said, "I wasn't interested in transcendental meditation. I'm supposed to be here advising folks." [she laughs]. So when I went back, it still almost was the same thing. Did you know we were out there in the park, on the cheese giveaway?

MM: On the cheese giveaway?

EL: Yeah, you know how they used to give cheese and butter [surplus dairy products to low-income people]?

MM: Oh that's right, my God, I'd forgotten that.

EL: Well, see, I was still with the Model Neighborhoods and then they changed [that program] to Community Development. The young lady that was over at the Center where I was, she knew me, and she would tell me to get some volunteers to come help her give away the cheese and so I did. So this guy that was our chairperson, that's what he was doing.

And this is how I got the real law of being in on the RCLC [Regional Community Liaison Committee]. One of the clients, she was a high functioning client, got to be friends with me and she says, "Here we are on this Committee, is this what we're supposed to be doing?" I said, "No, I think the Advisory Committee is supposed to be advising on somebody on something," [she laughs]. So she said, "I wonder, say, let's find out about this." I said, "OK." So I asked for the policy that the Board of Supervisors said that we should form these Committees and what our duties are supposed to be. So then we started to move into really giving advice to people. So I'm on committees at the school that were Advisory Committees too, but I'm also on one that's a decision maker. But, do you know, people are so used to being advisory that they're still treating it almost like [it's just advisory]?

MM: Yeah, yeah.

EL: I'm finally tired of them not treating the School Site Council as a decision making body, so I filed a complaint. [She laughs] But what else do you want to know?

MM: Well, let's talk a little bit about mental health. So Mr. Wolf helped bring in these community mental health workers –

EL: He trained some workers and then he talked to the County to hire them [she laughs]. So now you know in the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, there is a position called Community Workers, but you know what, I'd bet there isn't anybody in there that knows [how they started]

### **III. The Poorest Service Area**

MM: No, probably not, probably not. OK, so what was your involvement then with mental health services in the neighborhood?

EL: My involvement is mainly just the Advisory Committee.

MM: Just the Advisory Committee.

EL: And the advocacy and I would see things going on. I'd attend my Advisory Committee and my Service Area is the lowest income Service Area.

MM: Service Area 6?

EL: Yeah, well, when we were regional, we had had five regions and we were [Region] 5. But they had us [listed as] "relative need number 3." Now see, did that make sense to you?

MM: No, no, I wouldn't –

EL: And I'd tell them that. I said, "It doesn't take a rocket scientist; you could walk around and look at my community." And then it wasn't like Service Area 6, we didn't have the Westside then. We went from the Harbor Freeway east to Paramount. We had Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy, Huntington Park, Compton, and Lynwood.

MM: Big area.

EL: Yeah, but what I'm saying to you, it wouldn't take no rocket scientist to know that that's the lowest and most needy area. It is. And I always said that the County – all my life that I've been dealing with federal and state funds, the people with the most need are the people with the lowest income. And I used to go to the RCLC meetings and say, "My Area is the step-child of the County." And I'd say, "You never do – your budget looks like you're doing something over there. However, you can't hire people because people turn people away from coming to our area. [So] you have some money left over and that money should not go back in the pot. It should be spent in my Area." I fought them on that. Then one time, they were trying to change the law where the County didn't have to put in the 15% [matching funds] and I used to go to the [Mental Health] Commission meetings and I wasn't on the Commission. But I'd go there and speak out, and I said, "You shouldn't let that law pass, I know the County is for it, but no, the County should still have to put in 15%." And [the Board of Supervisors] sent a letter [to the RCLC members] saying, if you serve on the Committee, you can't take a stand until you know where the County stands. I said, "Well, when I was at that [Commission] meeting, I wasn't on the RCLC. I was citizen Eddie Lamon, and I can say whatever I feel like saying." [She laughs].

MM: Good for you, yay.

EL: But that's just the way I am and everybody that knows me knows that I'm that kind of person. So my service is not direct services. Every Committee that I would get on, when I first got started – I got on the Housing Committee and they were going to make plans for housing for people with mental illness and I looked around and I said, "How many of us in here are people with mental illness?" Nobody answered, and so I said, "Then we don't know what we're talking about. We need to go out there and ask the people [who are] mentally ill." And I'd tell them how to do it too. "You don't go to no board and care home and having them people ask, because those people are not going to say anything, because they got to live with those people [that run the home]. You're

going to have to have somebody that's one of them, a peer, to ask them questions in a different setting, and you'll get the truth." I said, "But I wouldn't complain about my board and care and meals, if I had to still stay there." [she laughs].

MM: Of course not. "Oh, everything is fine here."

EL: Yeah, and "I like staying here," when they might not even like being there. But they'd rather have something else, but they wouldn't tell you that, and you don't blame them, because they don't trust people anyway.

So it's all those kinds of things that I do and when I say these things, I don't do it myself and it doesn't seem like I had anything to do with it. But I'm telling you, when I first started with the RCLCs, there was a grand jury or something that had a complaint about the [County Department of] Mental Health, so they were changing [the regional divisions]. I found out about that too. They got a new Director [Roberto Quiroz, Director 1984-91]. And do you know, he was going to only divide the County into three parts, and I said, "No way! If I'm not getting services like I'm supposed to with five, what's going to happen with three?"

So I had this [contact] – Jerry Gumbleton was a [senior high school] psychologist at the schools – he [was the RCLC chair] over by USC, that area over there, I think it was [Region] 3, but he was against it too [the proposed new regional division]. And Don Poole, which was my vice chair person and we had what we called a legislative person and he was my legislative person. He worked for the [agency] for unemployment, but anyway, he finally retired and moved away. But Don grew up in Compton, but he was a Caucasian guy. But he and I didn't get anybody else from our Committee, but we'd go out to USC [to meet] with Jerry and his group and we fought that and we told – They brought in Roberto Quiroz [as Director]. See, first it was, was it Dr. Elpers?

MM: [J.R.] Elpers. Dr. Elpers [Director of LA County Department of Mental Health 1978-84].

EL: And then they brought in Quiroz. So we went to battle with him. We said, "No, we do not like that, we need to do better." So we pushed him so much he's just like all backed up and he said, "I don't care, it's going to change, the way it's operating," because in RCLC, they [the Department] was like a little thing of their own and it didn't really go up there. [The RCLCs were separate from DMH and their information often didn't reach the Director's Office.] So he said, "Everything is going to go to the top," and he said, "And I don't care how many areas they have, any number, but it's going to change." So I don't know who came up with the eight [current Regions]. But that's how we ended up with the eight, because I said, "You know, I'll get lost in the shuffle [if it's changed to only three Regions], if I'm [Region] 5 and can't get things."

MM: Right, right.

EL: And then I'd go to the meetings and say these kinds of things, "Even if our people had some money to go to a psychiatrist, to pay for their own, we don't even have one in my Service Area. We don't have a practicing psychiatrist in our Service Area, not one; you look in the phone book." That might be part of the reason they changed my boundaries. I've got the smallest Service Area in the County now, because they left me with Paramount and Lynwood [adjacent communities], but then we moved just into LA, down

to Washington, west to La Cienega and Compton [Boulevards]. So it's smaller, but it's still the most needy, poorest area

MM: They still need psychiatrists.

EL: Right, and we still don't have any [except in private practice].

MM: So where do people go for services? Do they have to leave the area?

EL: They go to the clinics and that's why I fought so hard. That's the other thing; I had to save those clinics. I lost two. Every year they'd start to close down stuff. When I was over in the Bell Gardens area, San Antonio, they closed it. [Bell Gardens, a small incorporated city to the east of Willowbrook, was founded around the San Antonio ranch and mission.] I tried to fight to keep it open. Hubert Humphrey [the Southeast Comprehensive Health Center in Inglewood, a satellite of King-Drew Medical Center] is a comprehensive [health center] and it had a mental health [unit] in there. But see, I think it all has to do with the staff, too. I don't think they cared if [the Humphrey Mental Health Center was closed] anyway. But Compton [Mental Health Center] I knew they could not close down.

MM: Yeah, they had to keep that open.

EL: So they give me the credit for virtually keeping it open, or opening it up, because some of the people say they had actually closed it [and opened it up again]. That might have been because I also was seeing how raggedy the places were. Compton's carpet had holes in it. The curtains were rotting. People would break in the glass windows and they'd board them up, now who is going to [go to a rundown clinic], if you are mentally ill?

MM: Yeah, why would you go, yeah, that's awful.

EL: And the poor lady that was over there. See, I started when Rose Jenkins was [in charge of Compton Mental Health Center], but this [Director] was Pat Frasier and Don [Poole] believed in calling in the media. So he called for the media, but they didn't come on the day that Don and I set up to be there. So, when they did come, poor Pat she went and just told them she was the Director. Well, the Board of Supervisors' Deputy knew her and didn't like it. So I don't know if they gave her a lot of pressure, but she left the Department and went to work for somebody else.

MM: Too bad.

EL: But that's what happened. West Central was the worst looking place. See, I had been to a clinic in Hollywood and I had been to clinics in other places, in Pasadena, and I go and look at ours and I said, "Oh no, this can't happen, we've got to change this." But when we would find a place for those people in West Central, the staff didn't want to go there. They said it was a high crime area, and a gang-infested area and they didn't want to leave, but you should have seen how bad that building was.

Now it's very nice because they finally ended up [that] whoever owned it decided to remodel it. But our Committee didn't even have as much space as you'd have in here to meet. And we used to rotate [among the directly-operated and contract clinics]. For our

committee to get to know the whole community [and] what's happening, we would rotate and we'd have the staff come in and tell us what they'd do there and meet the people. So when we'd go over to West Central, I mean we had the table, maybe it was bigger than this, but it don't look like it was much bigger, but they had to squeeze around it.

And some of the outside plumbing was showing in some of the rooms, like it was really, really bad. But there was a lady over from that area, her name was Marge Ferrier, she has passed away. She used to kind of volunteer and she was on a Committee, I guess, over there at West Central. I had newly known West Central and someone told Marge to get in touch with me since I was pretty active over in our area and we did get it changed. It took us a while, but we got it remodeled and they had to move the Compton [Mental Health Center] into Augustus Hawkins [Mental Health Center at King-Drew Medical Center] for a while, but they still saved it.

MM: Kept it going.

EL: Uh huh. And then I said, "We really should have it farther over where it used to be, over more to the east side because Augustus Hawkins was already over on this side of Compton, that would be the west side of Compton." So anyway, they claimed they couldn't find anything [a site]. So for a while, we were still on the west side, but now they finally got the old telephone building, Pacific Bell, and they've got Children's Services and Mental Health in that building. We finally got it kind of farther over to the east.

But my job *is* advocacy. I serve on several committees – Well, let me back up and say to you also when we said, when they weren't getting enough money and they started cutting, I would go to the meetings and say things like, "You guys are always down there at the Board of Supervisors fussing about your funds and the Board of Supervisors only give you 15% of that money. 85% comes from the State. We should be on buses, going up there and rallying the State." Well, Dick Van Horn [Executive Director of Mental Health America, a non-profit advocacy and service organization] listened [she laughs] and he started organizing and getting buses and we carried whole busloads of clients up there [to lobby].

MM: Up to Sacramento. Oh, that's cool.

EL: Yeah, and have them going to these different people's offices and complaining about the funds. So that's how they come up with that Realignment [the California Realignment Act of 1991 transferred responsibility and funding for mental health programs to the Counties; funding provisions however proved to be inadequate]. That was Dick Van Horn and whoever group would be actually be meeting with the legislators. I wasn't really pleased with Realignment, because I'm saying, the reason why they are realigning is that they don't want us up there [in Sacramento] and they want to give it to the County, so we'd go down there and fuss with the County [she laughs].

MM: Yeah, don't bother us.

EL: Yeah, but it was better – it did get better than it was. And then it finally started, not really getting all the money you needed, but it was getting better. It got better but they still were cutting [mental health budgets] every year. Every year, they were cutting because they won't put enough money out there. Things are getting better with NAMI [the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, a family member-organized advocacy and lobbying

group]. I know I met one of the gentlemen; he has passed away, him and his wife that started that organization.

MM: Right, right, Don Richardson.

EL: Yeah, Don and his wife [Peggy]. I met Don when I was still in RCLC and he came and I said, "Well, how come we don't have one of those [NAMI groups] in my Service Area?" So Don said, "Well, we could start one," and so we got that started. But I'm one of those, some things I'll stay with and once you get it started, I'm moving onto something else. But I've gone back to them, because people don't know their history, and so I go back and kind of tell them how it got started. And that's mainly what I do.

I would ride with the clients up to Sacramento, because basically all the people on the bus, mostly, were clients. And sometimes they would have episodes and I said, "Why did they wait until they got out of the office, they should have had it then while they were in the [Assemblyman's] office?" [she laughs]. I said, "Now why didn't that happen to them why they were in those offices there and they'll see what we're talking about."

I'll tell you something else we used to organize too. I said, "You know what, you may believe those people down there on those committees and that's on the [State] Senate and the [State] Assembly, [the County] Board of Supervisors, do they really know what's going on? You need to have something to have speakers to let them really know what's going on?" And we used to have luncheons and invite our people that serve our area and tell them about the problems and they got more concerned. I think that's part of the reason they got better [with funding]. But you know what, I'm thinking right now they need to go back and do some more of that because the people that we did get to understand, they're gone especially when they made those term limits, and they got some new people in there so we need to train them too [she laughs]. Definitely.

Like the Police Department, that's the other thing that, when I got in there, I said, "The Police Department really needs some training; they are killing people." The reason I know they really needed some training is that I had a neighbor and she had diabetes; her mind started to going and she was out watering her lawn and she would shoot the water out in the street. So she shot it at the policemen and they jumped out of the car with their guns and she was standing in the yard. But her dog was beside her, so they were, "Get that dog, so and so and so and so!" And somebody came – she's two doors from us, "Mrs. Lamon, they're out there with Ms. Ellis, you need to go over there!" So I ran over there and I got the dog and I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, just wait a minute, I'll get the dog." I got the dog and put the dog in the house. One of those policemen said something terrible to me, "It's good you came or I was about to blow his MF head off." And I said, "Oh my God, he can't see that there is something wrong with this lady, for her to be doing what she's doing." And he was going to shoot her dog because she won't [answer him]. And I started going to the mental health people when I got my Committee and gave them those kinds of ideas too. I said, "They need somebody working with the policemen, or somebody that could come [in an emergency]."

MM: Yes, somebody that could educate them.

EL: And so then they started that PET Team [Psychiatric Emergency Team]. And that was started before then, that was before this lady acted up. It was before something else I

told them about. They did really start this PET Team and I knew about the team, so I called the office for the PET Team to come out and see about her. I told her husband she needs those people to come see about her and they came. And of all the things, one of the ladies that came to see her had on a red jumpsuit and she was against folks in red. She said her aunt said, "Don't trust nobody that's in red." [she laughs]. But I would just tell little stories I hear when I go to these meetings and I think some of them did influence [other people]. I was talking everywhere I go. I'm always like that, I'll tell anybody, everybody, maybe someone will hear what I'm saying and make the things happen; and so a lot of the things did happen.

Once we got to be a Service Area and we were at first [Area] 5 and that's when I told you, we had all those other Areas. But they changed the whole boundaries for all of them and they made mine [Area] 6. So I tell people, if you see something in the early days talking about what 5 did, it was our Service Area [she laughs]. In the early days, that was our Service Area, but then they changed it to 6. And you know what I've always said, "People can't mess with you too much when you don't work for them, so I can say whatever I want to say." I said, "But they find ways to kind of mess with me." I tell them, I get paranoid every once in a while, "I think you are messing with me," and they did.

Because it's really funny, remember I told you I [would] tell them that we were the step child of the County and you didn't need a rocket scientist to figure out we were the most needy [Service Area]. Right after then, the Federal Government put out something about the lowest median income [census tracts] in the US. Guess what? Five of them were in our Service Area 5. I said, "See!" They assured me of what I was saying, that's why I say, "You don't need a rocket scientist to see it, though." I do know you have to have research. People want you to say you researched it, but it's like plain as day, common sense to me.

MM: Yeah, it would seem to make sense.

EL: So as far as actually working with clients I don't do that. I volunteer with clients, have clients – our committee is supposed to have clients so we have clients on our Committee.

MM: So you've known a lot of clients?

EL: Oh, yeah.

#### **IV. Perspectives on Clients; Allies; Thoughts on Stigma**

MM: So has your perspective changed? I mean, sometimes we think of the mentally ill as people who should just stay home and –

EL: No, my perspective always was that they were people that needed help that they can recover, and they could do the same thing as anybody else who has [a physical illness]. It's just like you got a – I got arthritis, people have diabetes, it's not cured but it can be controlled and you have different ailments. So you got a brain ailment, and some of them, if you do the right thing, you can control whatever that is. What is better though is when Dr. [Areta] Crowell [Director of LAC-DMH 1992-98] came in, and I was saying, you



remember I told you about me saying you should be asking the client, she started to see that clients were in everything.

MM: Oh, good for her.

EL: Yeah, clients would be able to be there and they started more about programs for Recovery and Wellness Centers and community living. Out at Augustus Hawkins, we had one of the case managers, [Stephanie Alexander]. She had put together a program for community living for the [clients]. Every six weeks they'd graduate, and they'd go through learning budgeting and [everything they needed] to get them back living in the community. When we had Oasis House, that was another thing I told people, too. So, since mental health has a stigma, why don't you have a place in the community that's not a mental health clinic for clients to go to and not be in their room?

MM: Right, right.

EL: And you put something there for them to do things they like to do, and that's what they did. We had this place called Oasis House [established by MHA to provide work training and employment services], but when the budget kept getting cut, people started saying, we have to have something in here that would generate money from SSI [Social Security] or Medicare. And so they somewhat changed what [they were doing] and I don't know why Dick did this, but Dick Van Horn turned our Oasis House over to [Jack] Barbour and [Reta] Floyd, which are two doctors from my neighborhood. [MHA, as a predominantly non-African American agency, was criticized for running Oasis House in the African-American community, so turned it over to local physician leaders who had formed an organization called SCHARP, South Central Health and Rehabilitation Program.] You know them?

MM: I remember he told me that, that he had to do that and that he was sorry that he had to do that.

EL: And they never told me why. See, they keep things from me a lot of times, so they can get it done or I'll stop it, you know what I'm saying? [She laughs] And so they did feel like they had to come to my house and tell me before I had a meeting. They didn't want me to find out about it in the meeting [she laughs]. So Dick turned it over to [Barbour and Floyd], they kept giving him pressure though, that they had to have some kind of programs in there that would be generating funds because they didn't have funds. Everybody was getting cutbacks on stuff, but I told them – I fought them all along. Dr. Barbour went to school with my son, he graduated with my son from Yale, but it doesn't matter.

I didn't like – I told them that the building they were in, it's like the floor [is] down here and up there was like a balcony and you go up the stairs and that's where the offices were, up there. Well, those people that were there were not doctors that were running that program. They were a director and some other workers. Then they started hiring some of the clients to do some of the work; and they used to put on plays. There was one guy; he used to be a construction worker, so he built a whole little village.

MM: Oh that's cool.

EL: Yeah, and I'd say that's what they need to do and that's because my friend, [Mary Joyce], who was mentally ill, I told him that she was asking, what are we really supposed to be doing? She said, "I thought that's what was our job, to give away cheese." But anyway, she was saying, "See, they need to give us something to let us practice what they tell us we can do." And she could sing, and so they put together a musical group

MM: Oh, that's lovely.

EL: Yeah and she doesn't live here anymore, she moved to Arizona. But the people was there if they need to learn, to finish school, the high school thing [GED] and they had somebody come down to [teach them]. [They had job training.] They went on all kinds of field trips. They went on more field trips than I go. They would go all over the place. They would go up in the mountains. One particular friend, she's passed away too. Pearl Johnson, did you know about Pearl?

MM: I've heard about her, yes.

EL: Yeah, that Pearl Johnson, she'd tell them about how much money she made the County spend for her, when she slept out in the [streets]. But she got started by going to – the park where she was sleeping in was right down near Oasis House and they talked her into coming there and that's how she recovered and started [becoming an advocate]. They started taking her around when they go speaking in Japan and –

MM: Yeah, she traveled a lot.

EL: Yeah, because she could tell a good story and she was telling the truth, it wasn't a story story. it was a [true story]. They would take her to a lot of those places. She's a good speaker, and she would always say that, "This was the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it," when she started her speech. But anyway, she'd tell you all about how much money they spent on her in the County and now she's able to work and do [for] herself. I kind of got started with the housing because I had met her and it seemed like she was about to lose her apartment. So I went down to the [Department of] Mental Health and asked the housing people and I got on that Advisory [Committee].

You can't open your mouth too much; because I got on the Intensive Case Management [Advisory Committee] because Ken Miya had a program called Intensive Case Management. Somebody told me they didn't know what that was all about, so I found out what it was all about because I'm at – they know I'll ask any question. So Ken came to our meeting and he was telling them and I don't know who told them that they should form an Advisory Committee.

MM: And there you are.

EL: There I was and got elected as the chair person by the group. Nobody wouldn't take it, that's why I'm still where I am. [Another program has now replaced ICM. Ms. Lamon is still the chair of the Service Area 6 Advisory Committee.] Actually, in the law, you're supposed to change offices.

MM: But you're still there.

EL: They don't want me to change because I will say whatever, and I know the history and I know the struggle and I know what it's all about. And the low income areas always don't have enough people [to serve on committees] and it's because [for] a lot of them, their struggle is where they're going to get their next meal and where they are going to live or how they're going to pay their rent or mortgage. And then they're tired and they don't realize the importance of being involved in the schools and in mental health programs.

Ever since I've thought about it, I always wanted to help those people that don't have the knowledge to help themselves. That's my calling, that's what I tell people, that's what I'm supposed to do. That's why I still go to the meetings because you professional people get to talking and you think those other people there are understanding what you're saying and I can listen and see that they're not getting what you're talking about. So I say, "Hey, let me say it!" [she laughs], and then the clients will say, "Thank you, Ms. Lamon," because some people feel that they're embarrassed if they have to ask something; they think that you think that they're ignorant.

MM: Right, they're shy.

EL: Yeah, but I tell you, there's no stupid questions. I say, what is stupid is to not know and don't ask someone. Now, that's one thing my mother told me, she said, "If you don't know, ask somebody [she laughs];" and I'm not embarrassed to ask. It's impossible for one person to know everything.

MM: Yes, that's absolutely true.

EL: [She laughs] so what else do you want me to say?

MM: Well, are there people at DMH that you could – I mean, you mentioned a couple of people, you mentioned Dr. Crowell, are there particular other people that you remember as being helpful or told you something that was good?

EL: [I could mention here a lot of people, including Jim Allen, Renee Woodruff, Cora Fullmore, Yvette Townsend, Ambrose Rodriguez, Anna Smith, Carlotta Seagle, Sandra Thomas, and Gladys Lee. I'm sure I left somebody out.] Oh yeah, well, Dr. [Marvin] Southard [Director of LAC-DMH 1998 - ], Dr. Southard is an awful helpful person. Just like the other day, we met. Well, the [Mental Health] Commission years ago had Alex Aloia as Chair, but he's in a rest home now, so Jerry Lubin is there [Lubin currently chairs the Commission]. So we talked about when we were RCLCs, we were like separate people, period. So [Aloia] started this group where the [RCLC] chair persons and the legislative person would meet with the Commission, because the Commission needed to know more and could exchange [information with each other]. But we were at the meeting on Tuesday, because they had dropped it for a while and we started it back and then Jerry took it up again. And that's what I keep telling them, the history of all of this stuff.

So they called Dr. Southard in, because we were talking about the things that were needed, and he said, "You could do anything that you want to if it doesn't cost money." [both laugh] So whatever we asked for, if you could get it without money, you can do it. But he's always been very – and a lot of people don't like leaders that do that. But I think those are the best leaders. And when you're planning, you really do need consultants and it costs money. But you really do need somebody that's [impartial] –

What is that guy that used to be with us? [John Ott, who helped facilitate the MHSA Stakeholder meetings.] He said, “I don’t have no dog in this hunt.” [she laughs]

So people don’t have their biases and things and I try not to, but when it gets down to the nitty-gritty [she laughs], then I have to fight for mine, but I try to be fair for everybody. But anyway, somehow people think because you don’t have a certain education, that you don’t know certain things, but I can read budgets [she laughs] because I learned math real well. I don’t know a thing about algebra and trigonometry and all that, but math, you can’t put it over on me. Regular math, general math, I know it real well.

MM: OK, good for you.

EL: But my whole family does [know math], my children too. But Dr. Southard you know; and Dick [Van Horn] was helpful with a lot of stuff. Dr. Crowell; Quiroz, he got to be pretty good himself, after our fight. I [nearly always] used to end up being friends with these people I would fight all the time [she laughs], because it’s not a personal thing. It’s about needs and priorities and putting things where they should be and that’s what I tell our people and our community. You think that they just sat down and said, “Oh, we’re going to take all this stuff and put it over here in Hollywood and Beverly Hills.” I say, “You know, those people happen a lot of times be living in those neighborhoods, they know their needs.” And there is a lot of selfishness and people are going to try to get all they can for theirs.

MM: For their area, sure.

EL: I say, but, if you don’t have anyone speaking up [for you] – on the Commission I got to tell you, Dr. Helen Wolff, she wasn’t even from our area. I used to have no one on that Commission fighting for my Service Area, but Helen Wolff always stood for our area, she always did. But now we got two people on the Commission from Service Area 6 [Hayward McNeill and Delores Huffman], but she’s always been the person that would stand up for our area. She’s fair and cares about the needy. She’s just – that’s just the way I see her.

MM: That’s great.

EL: And she told me her father used to be the medical director at USC. She used to be there when she was a kid, but you seem to know all these folks that I’m talking about.

MM: I’ve interviewed some of them, yeah.

EL: Oh, OK. Does it sound like I’m telling you the truth?

MM: Yes, it does. But this is really interesting; you told me some things I didn’t know.

EL: I don’t know what else I can – like I told them, I’ve always been a thinker and I read a lot and then I go to classes. I could have a degree now if I had wanted to, because all I had to do was – each one of those conference things that I go and you get those [continuing education] units and all that kind of stuff. I never was interested in a degree; I just wanted to know.

MM: Yeah, to find out stuff.

EL: I just go there to know and try to give it to other people, but people misunderstand me a lot. They think I'm showing off what I know, I think; and I don't think I am. I say, if I am, people [should] tell me, but I want to share it with other people and I want other people to learn and know the same thing I know. I don't want to be the only one that knows it, because I'm going to be gone one day and this will be gone with me.

MM: Right, you have to spread the knowledge around.

EL: Right.

MM: OK, so I have a couple more questions at least. So in your community, do you think there's – how do I say this? Stigma is a big issue for the mentally ill.

EL: Yes.

MM: Has that been true in your community, in terms of finding housing and I mean, you mentioned the police and that's always a big problem. But, in terms of neighbors and so forth, has it been hard to educate the community?

EL: It's not hard to educate them if you know, how do I say it? You can't get too many people out to things to educate them and if you go to them, you can let them know. The stigma has always been in the [community] – it's part of not just the low income, it's part of being African American, or a Hispanic, it's like a terrible thing for you to have a mental illness and nobody wants [to admit they know someone who is mentally ill]. I've always been around the clients. As a matter of fact, my dad became mentally ill later in life, so I brought him here and I kept him nine years without getting him services, because he was very difficult. He didn't even know he was in California because he swore he wasn't coming [here], and you should know the story of how I got him here. But anyway, back to talking about the clients.

MM: We were talking about stigma.

EL: Yeah, the stigma. I knew this client and I wanted her to go and be on the [Mental Health] Commission as a client, because they needed clients on the Commission and she wouldn't do it if I had to tell them that she was a client. She didn't want the rest of her peers in Compton to know. She was very [active] – she was on the Advisory Committee at our local [Mental Health Center]. We used to have Advisory Committees at each clinic and at Compton Clinic, she was part of that Advisory Committee. I wanted her to be on the Commission and she did not want to be on that, because that would tell all the people that she'd been involved with in Compton about her mental illness. She didn't want them to know and I find that anyway, people [are] like to quickly say, "Oh you're crazy." The stigma is still real. It's getting better and some of the clients are very willing to say that they are clients, but a lot of them still [are afraid to do that] and there are people that are not going to get services because of the stigma.

That is too bad. But I keep telling people, stop [telling people they're crazy]. It's like you need counseling, that's the word I use for them, you need counseling and everybody does at some time or another. Although my friend Mary Joyce said, I did more for her than the folks that she was going to and that have been trained [she laughs]. I helped her a lot better than those folks. So the stigma and I know it's in the Hispanic

[neighborhoods] and now my area is getting predominantly Hispanic and I know there's stigma. Because I go to the Latino Behavior Conference, I learned more about it, and they're very much - they don't want people to know.

I think if you can get them to – I often wonder, but that's why I said that Oasis House we had, because we asked the doctor to come by [to see the clients there]. [Oasis House was not a clinic.] Dr. Floyd used to be that doctor that Dick Van Horn gave that program to. So you need to have doctors and I think that a lot of people must be thinking the same thing, because now they're starting to talk about having the services in different places, like the schools and the medical centers and having more comprehensive [health centers] like Hubert Humphrey. See, and that's why I told them, "Duh!" They're saying that and I was trying to keep them from taking the Mental Health [Center] out of Hubert Humphrey, because nobody knows what you're going in there for and they won't feel bad to go in there.

MM: Yeah, exactly.

EL: And we need a lot of those, so now they are [including them] in our planning. That's some of the things they're saying, especially in the Innovative Program, is to use it [mental health services] in the regular health services, in the schools and places where people gather, churches, the faith-based stuff. And if a faith-based program can help the person, the client, with that kind of service – they usually go to the minister anyway, if they are a member of a church or organization, if they have a problem, that's who they would go to, anyway. So, if they had more of the services in those places where people gather and go, it would be –

MM: It would be easier, yeah.

EL: Um-hmm. Yeah, I think we're going to have to stop even putting "mental health" on whatever we have because the words "mental health" sound good to me, [but not to other people]. They want you to be mentally healthy, but that's not how it's registered with other people. They say, "So you think I'm –

MM: "Crazy."

## **V. Closing Thoughts; MHSA; Family**

EL: Yeah. So what else do you want to ask me?

MM: OK so what do you know about – I mean, you've been certainly a part of the MHSA [Mental Health Services Act of 2005], going to the stakeholders meeting and so forth. How do you see that working? Do you think it has been working well, not working so well?

EL: To me, because I haven't been involved in the actual implementation part of it, I don't know like a real evaluation of it. But to me, I think it's good – the ideas are good. I think it is working from what the people report to us, but the problem is the community and other people are not really understanding what the MHSA money is. Even people in positions will see you spending money over here and cutting over here, and it doesn't make sense to them. When I try to explain to them, I tell them, "You can't see the forest for the trees, that's what your problem is," [she laughs]. This money is categorical and I

see, I understand that very well, because I've been working since '65, I've been in the schools and if you don't earmark money, it will never get to certain places.

So what they're doing, to me, it seems to be working. I don't know for sure. I have been hoping some time ago to talk to people who are really receiving services and people that are working. That's why I told them, "Those are the people who you need to be talking to, the people in the trenches, the social workers and the case managers and the community workers and the people." But I do get to talk to some of them because I ride with some of them sometimes. But, to me, it's not just enough money. It's good, I think; and I think it takes something like the MESA categorical type stuff for you to begin to show what you need to change, because this is a statement I learned a long time ago. I said, "People like progress, but they don't like change." [both laugh].

MM: Yeah, yeah. I heard that.

EL: It has to be something to force them to change and sometimes that doesn't even work. But it's going towards what it needs to go. And another thing, it gives a more broader group of people to say what they see the needs are and I've always believed if you get a broader group, and they'll buy into it, it will work. That's the only way things work anyway. The people that's got to operate it's got to know and buy into it and I keep telling them at the Department, you can't just have the head honchos going to the meetings, because they're not really going back and sharing it with the staff.

MM: Yeah, the people on the line.

EL: Yeah, and those are the people that need to know. They are the ones that are actually working with the people, that need to know and understand what's going on and that you can't spend this money for something that they want over here because it's earmarked for this particular thing. And you know what's a real good example? The lottery money.

MM: [She laughs] Yes.

EL: You put it in the general budget, nobody knows what it goes for; and then they'll say, "Why do they need more money? I thought that the lottery's supposed to fix it." I said, "No, the lottery is not fixing it because the lottery goes in the general budget and every year people get raises, every year the materials they need go up, and so it stays at the same thing." And then if you don't let people win, people stop playing your lottery too, like me [she laughs]. I'm not going to keep giving you my money. See, at first I used to say, "Oh, well, I'm donating it to education." But after a while, that gets old, if forever, I don't win anything, I spend ten dollars and win one [she laughs].

MM: Yeah, not a good payoff.

EL: OK, what else do you want to ask me?

MM: Well, we're pretty much at the end of it, is there something else you'd like to tell me?

EL: I don't know right now, I've talked so much [she laughs].

MM: It's a wonderful story.

EL: You like it?

MM: Yeah.

EL: Well, that's good. That's good. I told you about my twelve children [she laughs].

MM: Are they all grown up now?

EL: Oh yeah, my baby was born in '65.

MM: Oh gosh.

EL: She just took me up to my conference. I had a conference in Modesto, it's the California Association for Compensatory Education; and there's no good way to fly to Modesto, so she drove me up.

MM: Do all your children live in this area?

EL: She lives in Camarillo. My blind son, who is an administrative law judge, lives in Lancaster. Right now his wife lives in New York, because she got a law degree from UCLA, but she took one exam and didn't pass and she never went back to take it. But she's got so many talents. She started writing. They write books, and so she started writing, she got in a program and went to Indiana State. They hired her to work there and it was a Master's in writing, because she was working in a community college in Lancaster, and so she got in. Then they sent – she came originally from New York and one of the colleges [there] wanted her, sent her an application and so she accepted. So she lives all the way in New York and her husband lives in Lancaster [she laughs]. But my grandchildren, well, his children, two [of them] live there in New York, and one is in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

MM: Oh, really!

EL: Yeah, because he was in [composer] Billy Joel's *Stepping Up* and he was also with [choreographer] Debbie Allen when she put on a dance one year here at UCLA. I don't know if she still does, but I know he has been in it. But they [the *Phantom* producers] saw him in *Stepping Up*. But he used to play in *Oklahoma* too, every summer, in *Oklahoma* and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. That's my blind son's children. [His twin sister] used to live in Marina Valley, but she moved back to Compton. Another [daughter] lives there in Compton, she and her husband.

Let me see, where are my other – oh, one son lives in Texas, the other one lived out there and now she lives in Norwalk. She was in Paramount, now she's in Norwalk and their children, they live basically round here, most of them, except my grandson's children, like I said. The baby girl [in New York] is finally going to college and she's going to Carnegie Mellon. I lost two of my children. One died from cancer, and one got killed, my baby son. But one of my twelve, which is my step-son, he lives in Apple Valley and [my oldest stepdaughter] lives in Inglewood. [My third stepdaughter lives on Brynhurst Avenue.]

MM: So they're pretty close, that's great.



EL: Yeah all of them are pretty close and I had stayed at home. [I wanted them] to go to college. [Most of my biological grandchildren have finished college. All of them that are the right age are in school now. One of my step-great-granddaughters graduated from Howard University, and another step-granddaughter got her PhD at UCLA.]

I got to tell you this one like a joke. I was involved in the school, so they said that the parents and the people should go [to meetings and workshops] and I got to be the community worker person to get parents involved. So I would go to the workshops and I'm sitting with all these educated people and I was in Compton College. And when one of the speakers would get to talking, they were asking him all kinds of questions. I said, "What is wrong with them, he already told you that?" And I don't say this in front of kids. I told them, "I think I need to drop out of school, my mind is together, and I want to keep it intact." [she laughs]. But I really am an advocate of higher education, I don't let any children hear me say that [she laughs]. Oh boy.

MM: OK, well, on that note, I guess then we'll say thank you very much.

EL: You're very welcome.

MM: So we'll conclude this interview now. Thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**