

An interview with Lucreta LaPierre MBE, the Society's most prolific fund-raising volunteer.

(Interview conducted by Iyamide Thomas, the Sickle Cell Society's Regional Care Advisor for South London).

IYAMIDE THOMAS: Welcome to the Interview Room Lucreta LaPierre MBE! Can you briefly tell us what you received your MBE for?

LUCRETA LAPIERRE: For simply being myself. I do mentoring for a Black Mental Health organisation, I read to patients via the Voluntary Care Centre, I work with the homeless and do lots more in the community. Of course, I also do a lot for sickle cell, which I have been in for some time now.

IT: How did you decide to make sickle cell and the Society the target of all your philanthropy?

LLP: I was doing a lot of voluntary work for the homeless and decided I wanted to do something for my own race. I raised some money from a charity run I did, and looking in the telephone directory came across the sickle cell project SCAR, which Garth Crookes was part of. I did some fundraising for them and a children's educational project and it was during this time that I met Sherlene Rudder, the Society's President at a Barbados Expo. I told her about my fundraising and wanting to help more people with sickle cell disorder and that is how I was introduced to the Sickle Cell Society.

IT: Your fund-raising has been out there in the community where you are always meeting people. What would you like to see done with the money you are constantly raising?

LLP: I come across people in the community with sickle cell and it is really sad in some cases, which is why I am going to stick with this project for the rest of my life. The money should really go to the most needy cause and I think the Society should address that.

IT: Single-handedly with the help of two buckets, you have raised a staggering £25,000 or more. How do you do it?

LLP: I got my MBE for community services in Lewisham, so I am well known in Lewisham. I even get people bowing to me which I find amusing! I know the management of Lewisham Theatre and when there are shows, particularly the Black shows, I get permission to go in with my buckets. I also contact the theatre

company for their permission too. I arrive about an hour before the show, smartly dressed with my Society badge and set up a stall with literature on sickle cell. I go into action when I see the crowd coming in but I let them into the theatre for a little while! I then go around with my bucket asking "would you like to make a donation to sickle cell?" I do this at the start of the show, at the intermission and at the end to get their loose change. Sometimes the



Lucreta, who with her two buckets has raised over £25,000 for the Society

company makes an announcement during the intermission and some people come and find me and my bucket.

IT: What sort of reactions do you get from people when you approach them for money?

LLP: The human race is very complex and you have to be careful how you tread. You have to have the personality to reach people. I find the younger generation more generous. The bad side is some people think you are dishonest and will take the money for yourself, but that is not what I am about and I even spend some of my own money each time.

IT: How have you dealt with individuals who have not been pleasant or forthcoming?

LLP: You have to weigh up the pros and cons. Some people with a devious mind generally assume others are crooked so I approach people very politely saying 'Sir' and 'Madam'. Some look at me and normally I have my MBE poster as well, as proof that I am real and it's usually ok then.

IT: What has your experience been at shows with mainly a White audience?

LLP: One such show was The Drifters, would you believe it. That was really tough and I didn't raise much money. I did not know how to approach the people because I heard a remark from a member of the audience which wasn't very forthcoming. It seems she didn't expect someone raising money for sickle cell to be there with a primarily White audience. But The Drifters are Black! I didn't get much interest unfortunately.

IT: In addition to shaking your bucket, you sometimes have a stall with Society literature. Do people show an interest in this and do you succeed in raising their awareness or knowledge of sickle cell?

LLP: Most definitely, especially when I target the young, who after all are the future. I normally give them the booklet and explain about sickle cell to the best of my knowledge. I have met people who have been really moved. Of course I have your number to pass on to them as you are the South London Regional Care Advisor (laugh)!

IT: How does fund-raising at health fairs or events in the park such as Lewisham People's Day differ from the theatre where you sometimes have an announcement made to the audience?

LLP: It's much harder work because it's just me and not the additional voice of the theatre. In general the amounts raised are the same but going around the park is harder. However, I thoroughly enjoy myself when it's a sunny day and I have my whistle!

IT: What would be your advice to potential fund-raising volunteers for the Society who unlike you do not have an MBE?!

LLP: I only got my MBE in 2004 and so have been doing this work for over 15 years without one. The MBE just makes it more powerful. You just have to stick in there and have total commitment. You have to give up a lot of your weekends. You need permission from the authorities to shake the bucket in the park or other public places. Perhaps in your vicinity you can build a relationship with your local theatre like I did. It's no joke, but don't give in!

IT: As a last word Lucreta, what is your hope for sickle cell?

LLP: I hope that in a year from now there will be a complete cure. It's rather touching when you meet people who have lost their loved ones to sickle cell. You meet mixed race families affected by sickle cell, so it is everyone's disease. I just hope there will be a cure one day.