Ugandan Asian exiles tell their story

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The expulsion of thousands of Asians from Uganda by dictator Idi Amin will be recalled 40 years after the event by community members living in London. A year-long project, run by the Haringey-based Council of Asian People, has received a grant of £86,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

In summer 1972, Amin who had seized power in the East African state the previous year, gave the country's 55,000 Asian population just 90 days to leave. Some 27,000 who held British passports came to the UK, settling in both London and Leicester.

The project Exiles: The Ugandan Asian Story will span generations giving younger descendents of the refugees the chance to record interviews with parents and grandparents about their arrival and subsequent lives in London.

It will preserve the stories of those forced to rebuild their lives and businesses afresh and trace the contribution they have made to UK life in the four decades that have elapsed, looking at literature, commerce and cooking among other topics.

The project, centred on the Asian Centre Wood Green, will recruit 40 volunteers to gather 40 testimonies from those who were exiled; 40 community events in the form of workshops, learning days and community suppers and lunches will be held to gather information, and 40 learning packs will be created to help schools, students and academics with future research.

Late October will witness a commemoration event as part of the South Asian Literature Festival at The India Institute at Kings College London. Then, next summer, the project will culminate in the launch of the 40 personal stories and a supporting exhibition during a half-day conference at the Royal Geographical Society. Following this the exhibition will tour local schools, colleges and community venues in Haringey and neighbouring boroughs. The material collected during the project will be stored for future reference at the London Metropolitan Archive.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "Young volunteers will be trained in researching their heritage and interviewing their elders to create an enduring record of an event that was making headlines 40 years ago. The project will enhance general understanding of the contribution that Uganda's displaced Asian community has made to life in London."

J P Agrawal, Chair of the Council of Asian People, said: "'The Exiles: Ugandan Asian Story' will address the lack of recognition of Ugandan Asian narrative in London's heritage. It will achieve this through an intergenerational project that will work with the youngest generation to record and present the stories of their parents' and grandparents' resettlement in the UK and the heritage of their families in East Africa before expulsion. I am extremely grateful to Heritage Lottery Fund for supporting this project. It will enable the memories of thousands of people to live through the future."

Further information

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