Dick: It was no hardship up in Wigan because digs were pretty reasonable… £2.50 a week.

Muriel: Queen’s Drive was in Finsbury Park and at the time Finsbury Park did not have such a nice reputation. But...the house was nice.

Mojtaba: One of person from my country..he find me and he said to me don’t worry. Somebody, when I arrived in this country..they helped me and I will help you and tomorrow please help another people.

Presenter: Voices of immigrants sharing their stories about housing in England.

Our first speaker, Dick Goan, arrived in the 1950s when he was 16 years old. He came to England from Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland is one of the four countries which make up the United Kingdom. Dick was recruited by a large telecommunications company and went to Lancashire, in North West England. He arrived during a very cold winter and soon found some ‘digs’ – somewhere
inexpensive to live. Was his a difficult experience?

Insert 1

I came over to England in 1954 to a place called Wigan in Lancashire. And, it was no hardship up in Wigan (be)cause digs were pretty reasonable… £2.50 a week. I was living with an old dear - an old woman - who was about 76 and she put 4 men up in two rooms. Fed us breakfast, lunch, tea and entertained us. And she had more life than I had, and I was only a youngster in them days. She could jump up on the table and she was 76 - I couldn’t believe it, And she was a great one for sewing tapestries. She had a massive one on the wall which ruined her eyesight, but it was a marvellous thing. I don’t know what ever happened to that tapestry because she must have died over the years now. She probably is. She’s long dead.

Presenter: Dick said, ‘there was no hardship’ – because although he had to share a room, his rent was only £2.50 a week. For that amount of money, Dick’s landlady – whom he fondly refers to as ‘an old dear’, provided him and the other young men in the house, with all their meals. They got breakfast, lunch and what he calls ‘tea’, which in this case, is more than a drink – it’s supper or dinner and is, of course, often served with cups of tea! So Dick was pleased with his ‘digs’ and his landlady was entertaining and friendly.

Rajinder Dulai arrived from India in 1997. He didn’t have to look for somewhere to live because he’d already made plans to stay with his sister in the Midlands. And were the houses in England what Rajinder expected?
First impression of houses where that they were very small. I came to my sister’s house first and they were sort of relatively medium-sized house… looking at it now (right). But the first time I felt it was very small compared to our house in India. This is very small rooms and you can hear in one room what’s happening in the other room…so it wasn’t that really great. We got used to it. And also the image we had of England - actually England was not really same as the image we had in our mind.

Presenter: So when Rajinder arrived, he already had an ‘image’ – a picture of England in his mind. But the image didn’t match what he saw, and at the time, he thought the houses were very small and noisy. However, Rajinder soon realised that his sister’s house was ‘relatively medium-sized’ – compared with other houses, it wasn’t so small after all.

Muriel Hunte, from Guyana, arrived in 1953 - the year when people were celebrating Queen Elizabeth’s coronation. Before Muriel saw her new home, she was quite impressed when she read the address – the name of the street.

According to the address my husband said I was coming to. I mean, he didn’t define where Queen’s Drive was. But, I was sure it was near to the Queen. But it wasn’t near to the Queen at all. No where near Buckingham Palace. But, I adapted. Queen’s Drive was in Finsbury Park and at the time Finsbury Park did not have such a nice reputation. But...the house was nice.
Presenter: So Muriel was slightly disappointed that Queen’s Drive wasn’t near Buckingham Palace - the Queen’s official residence! She soon realised that the area she’d moved to had a bad ‘reputation’ – it was generally thought of as unpleasant. However, Muriel liked her new house.

Our next speaker, Maya Yoshida came from Tokyo in Japan in 1996, Like Muriel, when she first arrived, Maya lived in an area of London with a bad reputation. But was there anything she liked about living there?

Insert 4

It was really different from that area which I wanted to live in. But New Cross is really (a) good place for me. I really like it and I still live in South London in Brixton. And it is true that Brixton is a bit infamous as a rough area, but I like living in Brixton because I can see vitality of the people. The people in Brixton is (are) mainly immigrant from West Indies or Africa. So, it’s a bit different from other British communities.

Presenter: Maya still lives in Brixton, South London – which she describes as ‘infamous’ and ‘a rough area’. But she likes it because she can see the ‘vitality of the people’ who live there - they’re lively. And Maya feels comfortable in Brixton where the community is mixed - there are a lot of immigrants from the West Indies and Africa, for example.
Our last speaker today, Mojtaba Amini, came to England in 1998 as a refugee from Iran.

Insert 5
When I arrived in Heathrow. That day I think was a Sunday. Yes, Sunday. And immigration officer said to me and some people from Afghanistan and some people from different countries. They said to us: We haven’t any room or something and you have to sleep in Terminal 2 in the airport. And he said, you have to go there and you can sleep, same passenger in chairs. And I sleep about four nights in Heathrow Airport without shower, without shave, without nothing.

Presenter: After several days, Mojtaba was taken to an organisation for asylum seekers. There, he was given some useful legal information, but for the next three weeks, he was homeless. Mojtaba went to see a solicitor – a legal adviser. And the solicitor told him to go to ‘the council’ - a group of people responsible for running local services, such as housing. He was given a very long list of organisations which help to arrange accommodation. Mojtaba still has that list.

Insert 6
I took my bag and somebody show me Barnet Council. I went there and they said to me, you have to go in housing benefit. I went there. They said to me you have to go Barnet House. I went there, and do you know about 5, 6 hours I was walking on the street and I find one lady. She was speaking with her daughter my language. I said: “Sorry. I’m Iranian. I’m homeless. What can I do?” And she said to me: “I don’t know really.” I said: “Do you know somewhere? Some agency? Somebody can help me?” She said to me: “I have just one number for one organisation. Maybe they can help you.” And she gave to me. I rang them,
rang them and I didn’t find anybody. And I come back in housing benefit and they gave to me about 10 pages for list for agency and they said to me you can go there and find. I have now here that list. And I went everywhere - nothing.

**Presenter:** After walking for about five or six hours in the cold, Mojtaba bought himself a cake and some milk. And he felt fortunate when he found a warm ‘laundry’ to sit in. A laundry, or laundrette - is a place where people can go to wash their clothes.

Insert 7

(The) weather was cold and I was hungry. I bought one cake and one milk. I went inside one laundry because I find there warm, I wanted (to) eat there. One man and one lady they were keep looking to my face and that man said to me: “What are you doing here?” I said: “Nothing. I came here because here (is) warm.” And I saw that man, he was playing with his mobile and he left laundry and police come up and said to me: ”What are you doing here?” I said: “This is my document. I’m a refugee here and homeless and outside was cold. That’s why I came here. Can you help me?” And he said to me: “Somebody rang us and we came here.” I said: “I know that person. He was next to me.” And he said to me: “You better leave this laundry and you go out.”

**Presenter:** So one of the customers in the laundry had a mobile phone and Mojtaba believes that this man had telephoned the police. And although Mojtaba asked the police for help, he was forced to go back out into the cold. Outside the laundry, Mojtaba saw the man with the mobile phone again, and went to talk to him about his situation. The man decided to help Mojtaba by taking him to a
shelter for the homeless. By then, it was one o’clock in the morning.

Insert 8
When we arrive there, Reception said to us:” We haven’t any room. You have to sleep on the chair in TV room. One guy come up to me and said: “Be careful. There is some thief-people and middle of the night, maybe they come and take all your stuff.” I said I haven’t anything. Really, it was very, very bad for me and I stayed there about a week in that homeless house.

Presenter: Then, an Iranian refugee who had also been homeless, helped Mojtaba. He paid a £100 deposit for a room for Mojtaba in the building where he lived. But in return, Mojtaba had to agree to help other refugees if he could.