

WELCOME TO THE BLACK CARE EXPERIENCE NEWSLETTER

If you've received this as part of being a member of our Network, or if you've taken the time to download it, we want to Thank You for being a part of our story and legacy.

As you read we hope that you will be inspired and challenged to help play your part in making sure that Black Children and Young People remain connected to their Culture, Identity and Heritage as they journey through the Care System.

WHAT TO EXPECT

In this Month's Newsletter, you'll hear Reflections from people who attended our 1st Black Care Experience Conference, The Voice of a Care Experienced Black Care Leaver, Our Chairs Response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and there maybe a few things on our Notice Board that will be of interest to you.

Once read, if you have any comments or thoughts, please feel free to share them with us, by emailing us at office@thetransformedyou.co.uk

Also feel free to let us know what is working well and where you may need some help, as together we join forces to continue to make a tangible and lasting difference in the lives of Black Children and Young People in Care.



www.theblackcareexperience.co.uk
Twitter: <u>@TheBlackCareExp</u>
Instagram: <u>@theblackcareexperience</u>



ON SATURDAY 12TH FEBRUARY 2022, WE HOSTED OUR FIRST BLACK CARE EXPERIENCE CONFERENCE. HEAR FROM A FEW OF OUR ATTENDEES

Attending the landmark event that was the Black Care Experience conference, was a privilege. It is the best conference I've attended within the children's sector. The conference's success and enduring impact on myself and others, is the product of Judith Denton and colleagues, passionate and authentic reflections on what it is like to be black and in care. These voices need to be heard, the narratives are powerful and incredibly emotional. For me listening to these narratives has been transformative and had an influential impact on the way I think and work.

The Black Care Experience conference highlighted to me that the identity needs of black children are frequently ignored or misunderstood. This leads to unacceptable consequences for our black care experienced population. It is an understatement to state that there is much work that needs to be done to remedy this for our black children and young people in care now and going forwards. The conference shared these uncomfortable truths and simultaneously re-energised a movement.

This was the second Black Care Experience conference, the first was in 1984. Disappointingly many of the issues remain relevant today. Two documents published this week Racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-childrens-social-care.pdf (independent-review.uk) and also Ethnicity and children's social care (publishing.service.gov.uk) highlight this.



Everyone within the children's sector need to hear these powerful voices. There is plenty of scope to improve the lived experiences of our black children. We are at a momentous juncture in the landscape of children's social care in England. We have a responsibility to listen carefully, reflect and then work collaboratively to bring about change.

An excellent starting place is to make sure you join the Black Care Experience Network to keep informed About — The Black Care Experience.

Emma Fincham Fostering Consultant, CORAMBAAF



Choosing to attend the Black Care Experience Conference was a choice of mixed feelings. At first, I thought this would be a great chance to learn more about the specific experiences of Black children and young people with experience of the care system. I hoped it would link in with work I have been doing on anti-racism within social work. The difficulty was this being one of the first in-person conferences in a long time and going alone. Nevertheless, the passion of wanting to learn more and be the difference in social work, linking in with my own negative lived experiences of social work, gave me the determination to attend.

I arrived minutes into Josh MacAlister's presentation about how the Independent Care Review into Children's Social Care linked in with this specific experience. It was good to hear about the inclusion of Black children and young people, professionals and foster carers included in the care review. The focus on cultural competence for improved practice to address racial and ethnic disparities was linking in with my interests. The ability to ask questions around diverse forms of knowledge in social work was a good opportunity, however it was clear that the care review had not picked up on this.



Moving on to Judith Denton, the Founder of this conference, and her informed and informative presentation around the Black Care Experience Report findings. Learning about the experiences in care for Black children and young people in terms of reasons for coming into care, outcomes, the importance of identity, the history of the network and relevant legislation provided great foundation for the more interactive part of the conference.

Workshops of professionals in the children's social care system and people with lived experience of the care system provided great discussion into different perspectives and experiences, and prompted

Insightful analyses into what's working well, what's not working well, and what can be improved. Presentations of this to share with the wider group enabled even more insights, and the feeling of a new network started to fruition.

THE FEELING OF A NEW NETWORK STARTED TO FRUITION

The conference then went into a diverse panel of different experiences of the care system, and empowered rich learning through emotional shock and empathy for both the horrific and enlightening lived experiences shared. The failures, missed opportunities, and harm that was caused by the system took me by hold. The learning I gained was difficult to process, however holding onto the missed opportunities to seeing the light towards opportunities going forward supported me to focus on what can be improved within the care system for Black children and young people.

The conference coming to an end with performances of rap and poetry from the lived experience was a beautiful ending to a moving experience. The inclusion of lived experience was done carefully, yet confidently, and the learning I will take will improve my understanding of cultural competence as a future social worker. This experience will be integral to my future practice.

Omar Mohamed, Social Work Student, Twitter: @OmarMohamedSW

I am a white middle aged, middle class, professional women, at least that's my label these days. I started my life as a child with many given labels, a couple of these included being a child in the care of the Local Authority and then a young parent. Whilst I have felt oppression and discrimination, I have always been moved by others who have also felt this. I have always felt a need to understand how others manage oppression, overcome barriers and in this I want to acknowledge the strength shown in the face of adversity and provide support where I can. I found myself embarking on a new journey to inform my understanding of others care experiences which led me to attend 'The Black Care Experience Conference', I was apprehensive as I knew I would be meeting people of colour, who have had damaging experiences in care and not only that but also the additional impact on their cultural identity because of their care experience.



I found myself embarking on a new journey to inform my understanding of others care experiences which led me to attend 'The Black Care Experience Conference', I was apprehensive as I knew I would be meeting people of colour, who have had damaging experiences in care and not only that but also the additional impact on their cultural identity because of their care experience. Their care has predominantly been provided by white carers and professionals which is now part of my professional identity. Whilst I have the cliché of having friends and family of colour, I have never really had a deep conversation about the impact of racism and how this adds another layer of discrimination and oppression in relation to the care experience.

When I arrived everyone was extremely welcoming and I was aware that this was a safe space with likeminded people who are motivated to make changes for the benefit of others, including the next generation of care experienced young people of which sadly there are many. There were young people present who were articulate and spoke with passion and clarity to ensure the messages shared were received in a way that ensured understanding and empathy to all including professionals.

I was initially disappointed that there were not more white professionals in attendance (This was not due to the organisers) I feel as someone working within Childrens Services it is important to have representation from the white community to hear the challenges faced by our young people in care and especially those from ethnic minority groups, however those white workers that were in attendance are committed to making positive changes and they participated in the group activities which helped to highlight the experiences and needs of looked after children & Young People.

The most moving part of the conference was when the guest speakers spoke about their care experience's, I was moved to tears, to see the bravery and success of the speakers despite the challenges they have faced and continue to face in relation to cultural insensitivity and racism. I am aware that this piece may sound a bit negative in parts, but there are lots of positives on the horizon the changes are beginning, we had Josh McCallister talk about the Social Care Review 2022 and there are active Experts by Experience who are now fully involved in supporting positive changes for families, children and young people and will now have a framework to reference.

66 I WAS MOVED TO TEARS

This Conference is the beginning of a new chapter for me, personally and professionally and it is a little scary as I have acknowledged my own avoidance and placed myself in the heart of difficult conversations, but the bravery of others has inspired me to join the national conversation and keep moving forward.

Thank you to Judith Denton for organising this event and those that attended 'The Black Care Experience Conference' for giving me new insight and I will continue to learn and grow, developing new relationships, with new people, who will give me new understanding of their experience which is unique and different to my own.

I suppose the big question is are you brave enough to join the conversations and what will you do to support Social Care Changes for children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds moving forward?

The next 'Black Care Experience Conference' will be February 2023 maybe a date for the diary?

Anita Beckett, Qualified Youth Worker Learning and Development Consultant for Norfolk County Council



I am Charmaine Orchard of Jamaican Heritage and I am Care Experienced.

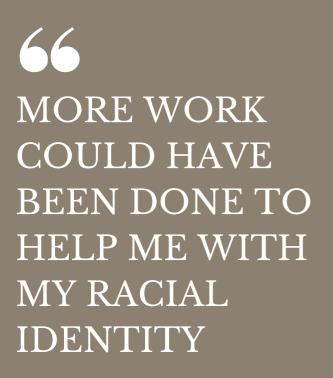


I currently run an online children's jigsaw store called <u>Planet Jigsaws</u> that specialises in telling the great stories of people of African and Caribbean descent and I am working on my Community Interest Company developing interactive resources and activities based on positive black history for Black and Mixed race children in Foster Care across England and Wales. I'm also working toward going back to University in order to retrain as a Psychotherapist. Once qualified, I hope to work with black children in foster care as a specialized area; to ideally be the therapist I could have done with when I was in care.

I went into foster care when I was 12 for what was supposed to be respite - I never did return to my family home and at 30, I find that I am doing a lot of reflecting. I

was initially placed with a mixed raced family and the placement broke down which meant I needed to move to another temporary arrangement. I Eventually, I was placed in a single parent family of Jamaican heritage and although this might have looked like the best placement, I do think there was just an assumption that this would be a good match. I grew up in a predominantly white area with, probably, a very unhealthy outlook toward the black community and a clear discomfort in my own skin. There was a lot of self hate and this was exacerbated by the racism I'd experienced in the area and at school. It was a big shock to move into a home, without my family or anyone familiar given the differences I'd grown

up around. Eventually, I settled and accepted those around me but still had the problem of not being accepted by the younger people I lived with and I felt my carer didn't understand me well, either. In this placement, I do not feel as though I was encouraged to learn about my culture and I actually felt like an outsider. Personally, I think more work could have been done to help me with my racial identity and to make me feel more confident, comfortable and included in my own culture. I've had to learn all of this as an adult - this is why I've set up my CIC, targeting black children - helping them



engage with this part of their heritage from a younger age. There's a gap in that some children who are placed outside of their community are not supported in this way - leaving them to grow up with a similar outlook. Although I left school with 1 GCSE, I went on to graduate with an undergraduate degree in psychology and a masters degree in occupational psychology. I have always been quite a reflective person, but I believe my knowledge in psychology has helped me to realize that having a greater sense of self and a positive internal voice regarding your own identity is so important in many factors including how you view yourself and those around you, what you believe you can achieve, your ambitions etc.

What would have improved my care experience? Having someone there, someone I could identify

with, someone who helped me find comfort in my own skin, someone who reminded me that I am worthy and can achieve anything that I want. This person came in the form of a white man when I was 16 years old and he's why I have prospered academically and generally managed to hold my life together. Of course, the ethnicity of the helpful person does not matter, but I mentioned earlier that having someone there that I could identify with would have been really useful and would have helped to reduce the feelings of self hate much earlier than I did.

I didn't really start to feel happy in my own skin until my mid to late 20s. I truly think that all black children in foster care who are placed within and outside of their community should have a mentor or go-to person that they can identify with & that they can confide in. This would have made a difference for me and I hope to keep working with organisations that aim to fill this gap.

If there are any Black Care Experienced Care Leavers who would like to have your Story featured in our Newsletter, please contact us at Office@thetransformedyou.co.uk

. We understand the sensitivity around sharing your Story and want to let you know that you have the option to share anonymously or with your name.

Thank you in advance for getting in Contact as together we can use or Voices and our Experience to make a difference for the next Black and In Care Generation



With the Independent Children's Social Care Review Report published and the Review drawing to a close to wait on Government to respond, I found it necessary to pause, sit still and process the journey that I have been on in relation to the areas of the Care System I believe requires much needed change.

Now whilst the Report contains some great recommendations that I hope to see become a reality, as the Founder and CEO of The Transformed You and The Black Care Experience, I consider what the Report and the information contained, means for the future of the children and young people we are able to support.

As a heads up, for those who didn't know, I was a member of the Experts by Experience Board for the Review, where as a collective we were able to share our stories, share our views, help with engagement and challenge the Reviews thinking and focus on the way forward for change. With this opportunity, we also knew that the Recommendations were not in our hands, yet remained hopeful that our voices were not only heard but listened to.



THE CARE EXPERIENCE

Established in 2013, The Transformed You Mentor Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers, from different racial and ethnic groups, who are identified as:

- Having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties affecting their holistic wellbeing hindering them from achieving in education and in life
- In Mainstream Education and at 'Risk of Exclusion'
- Placed at a Pupil Referral Unit
- Placed at an Alternative Provision
- Not in Employment, Education or Training

With that in mind, <u>Chapter 6</u> of the Report focuses on The Care Experience, with the Review setting out 5 Missions to improve the Care Journey.

Mission 2 is to 'Double the proportion of care leavers attending university, and particularly high tariff universities, by 2026'.

Here the Report goes on to state, 'Education is transformational. It is important that all children receive excellent schooling, and we should go even further to ensure this for children in the care of the state.



While this mission headlines on university, it will require much more ambition for children in care right through the education system', recognising that 'Children in care face challenges right through the education system' to then focus on addressing blockers to attainment in Schools.

With that in mind, I believe the Review failed to identify and address another blocker to attainment in Schools, called 'Exclusions'.

Working in The Transformed You, we have seen Children in Care become subject to Internal Exclusions within their Main Stream School or subject to an External Exclusions to a Pupil Referral Unit or Alternative Provisions, because they do not meet the Schools Behaviour Policy.

Externally Excluded, the Child or Young Person must achieve certain Behaviour and Engagement Targets before they are able to return to their Main Stream School, all whilst at the same time, they try their best to survive and fit in to an environment where Teachers often spend most of their time fire fighting the culture of the environment and not able to teach the Main Stream curriculum the Child or Young Person is accustomed to.

Another type of Exclusion to be noted, is one called 'Respite' where the Child or Young Person is sent to another Main Stream School for a period of time. Whilst this sounds good in theory, and prevents the Child or Young Person being in an unfavourable environment, in practice the Child or Young Person is placed in the 'Respite Schools' Internal Exclusion Department to engage independently, in paper based or online School work, sent over from their Main Stream School.



ANOTHER BLOCKER TO ATTAINMENT IN SCHOOLS IS EXCLUSIONS

Returning to their School after an Exclusion, it is often seen that Behaviour Points are again tallied, with the Child or Young Person sent for another period of Respite, or sent back to the PRU or AP, or with a work around of a Permanent Exclusion, subject to a Managed Move.

These Exclusions, see the Child or Young Person as unlikely to be considered or positioned through Education, for a place at University.

Now it is understood that the traumas of the Care Experience are often displayed in the Child or Young Person in Care's behaviour, which is acknowledged by some Designated Teachers who go above and

beyond to work hand in hand with the Virtual School to support the Child within the School, but are then overruled by a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Some Pastoral Leads have also told us they are not going to treat the Child in care any different to any other Child, and see Exclusion as the only way forward.

Where the Reviews Mission is to Double the proportion of Care Leavers attending University, the ambition to be adopted is for Schools to cease from Excluding Children in Care and engage in training on how to 'not focus' on the negative responses or reactions of the Child or Young Person in Care, learn how to Hear and Understand their 'Voice' and identify the emotion being expressed in their behaviour, in order to positively respond and help to remove the internal and external blocks to attainment in Education.

This Training would also benefit Foster Carers, Residential Children's Care Home Staff and Social Workers, to help the Child or Young Person see that they are supported and not misunderstood by all.

Please note, that to exclude a Child from School, causes them to feel rejected (again) and has an impact on their confidence and belief in their ability to achieve, which are additional layers of trauma and challenge that they have to overcome on their journey through the Care System. This is indeed a block to their attainment in School, an area I hoped the Review would have identified and addressed with a recommendation.

Under the heading of Independent and State Boarding Schools, the Review states that 'Virtual School Heads should be better equipped to identify children who are likely to thrive in these settings, and work with local authorities to consider how they can better leverage the opportunities that state and independent boarding schools offer'.

Whilst it is agreed that this will not be right for all children, the question to be asked is whether this option is right for any child in care? Would this not be seen as another 'type' of Residential Children's Home, with the Child or Young Person being moved away from their community and not raised within a loving family environment, adding to the separation and loss that is already felt by being placed in Care?

The Review goes on to state the desire to bring about a major change by tackling the stigma and discrimination many care leavers face in their day to day lives, for the UK to recognise the care experience as a legally Protected Characteristic in equalities legislation.

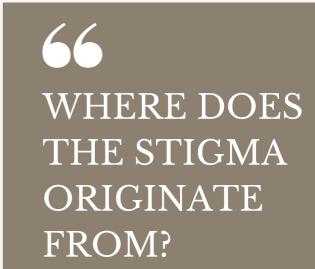
The question to be asked is, where does the stigma and discrimination originate from?

I believe the stigma and discrimination originates from within The Care System. The Department of Educations research continually describing children in care as sometimes regarded as low achievers with low life chances on route to being a financial burden to the state, being a part of their own dysfunctional family, being homeless, having a lower take up of education, employment and training, poor mental and physical health outcomes in adulthood, have higher reoffending rates and placed at Her Majesty's Pleasure, hasn't helped with how we are viewed and referred to by some Social Workers, Foster Carers and any other people who work within the System. It is this narrative that is often run with by the Media.

With that in mind, if the System changed their perspective, mind set and language within their research and day to day support of Children and Young People in Care, would there be a need for a Protected Characteristic

If the System began to 'Love' the Care Experienced, in the way that the Review is asking, would there really be a need for a Protected Characteristic? And what does this 'Love' look like in practice?

Now should Care Experience become a Protected Characteristic, we must also consider the steps that a Care Experienced person must take, if they believe they have been unfairly discriminated against.



They'll need to either:

- complain directly to the person or organisation
- use someone else to help you sort it out (called 'mediation' or 'alternative dispute resolution')
- make a claim in a court or tribunal
- Contact the Equality Advisory Support Service for help and advice.

Considering the twists and turns and ups and downs, that present itself on the Care Journey, will a Care Experienced person want to go through more twists and turns and ups and downs in order for their voice to be heard again?

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES

From the Reviews outset, the statement was made that the Review is committed to identify, consider and attempt to better understand racial and ethnic disparities that exist in children's social care and consider what could be done to address them. The Review also stated that they will look to understand in more depth and consider what should be done to address why Black children and children from some other ethnic groups are significantly more likely to be in care.

The Reviews findings in this area, are not contained in the main Final Report, but is instead hidden in the Supporting Evidence section of the website, and is seen as a <u>Supporting Annex</u> to the main Final Report.

If Children's Social Care Workforce is to be reflective of the Children they serve and care for, should these findings not have been included in the main Final Report, and given as much attention as the other Chapters?

Within the Annex the Review states 'Children's social care reflects and at times magnifies inequalities and disparities that exist in society. For children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds this can mean a marked difference in response to need, the homes children might be placed in and whether they enter care'.

In considering this statement, 'inequalities and disparities that exist in society', I do believe it is fair to say that this refers to the racism and discrimination experienced by Black people, who are treated differently because of the colour of our skin.

TREATED
DIFFERENTLY
BECAUSE OF
THE COLOUR
OF OUR SKIN

Present day examples of this include the murder of George Floyd, the Windrush Scandal, the treatment of the England's Black Football Players, the backlash received by Diversity for their dance on BGT, the trolling received by Alesha Dixon for wearing a necklace with the letters BLM on BGT, the trolling on Social Media of the All-Black Loose Women Panel, the percentage of Black Boys being stopped and searched and excluded from School, along with the recent heart-breaking and horrific news of Child Q's ordeal.

In relation to how 'Children's social care reflects and at times magnifies' these inequalities and disparities, the Review have cited the findings of the What Works

for Children's Social Care 'Anti – Racism' March 2022 Survey Report. Here are a few quotes from the Report:

Black and Asian reported experiencing racism from colleagues (on five or more occasions) far more often than their White colleagues.

34% of Black respondents reported incidents of racism from service users/ families, compared with 5% of White social workers.

Social workers from ethnic minorities typically experience increased scrutiny and negative assumptions about their skills based on their ethnicity.

When race is specified in the answers, Black social workers are overwhelmingly the subjects of reported incidents. Several respondents reported that Black workers in particular were allocated higher caseloads or more complex cases. Additionally, one social worker discussed how this results in "Black co-workers being overloaded and then criticised for underperforming."

Black colleagues have been rejected for promotion when they appear to have as much or more experience than white colleagues who have been promoted.

Several respondents shared concerns regarding the organisations' current equality and diversity strategy.

"I think whilst we have an equality and diversity strategy, the issue of anti-racist practice is diluted within...and therefore the detail and unique needs for a strategy to address structural, direct and indirect racism (sic) lacking considerably."

The Review was also able to cite: The data is even starker amongst senior leaders, as only 6% of Directors of Children Services who shared information with ADCS identified as an ethnic minority (excluding White minorities) (ADCS, 2021).

With the inequalities and disparities in society evidenced as being reflected in



Children's Social Care, it is fair to say that the Review failed to courageously put the pieces of the puzzle together, and see the full picture of how Children's Social Care Practice has an impact on how Black Children and Young People are Cared as they journey through the System.

This impact, was well documented in <u>The Black Care Experience Report</u> and submitted to the Reviews Call for Evidence in March 2021.

Members of the Review Core Team were present at our Black Table Talks, to hear in real time, the voices of the lived black care experienced and the voices of the diverse children's social care workforce.

The Footage from <u>The Black Care Experience Conference</u> was also forwarded on to the Review Team, another way to help with engagement and further evidence inequalities and disparities for the Review.

The Review went on to host RoundTable Talks, and have said that they also engaged with Black Care Experienced Children and Young People and Families, but it is unclear as to how many were spoken to and what they were asked.

Despite the time and effort, where are our Voices and where are our Stories in the Main?

How you see us, impacts on how you care for us. How you see us, impacts on how we see ourselves.

As a reminder, in this area the Review set out to identify, consider and attempt to better understand racial and ethnic disparities that exist in children's social care and consider what could be done to address them AND understand in more depth and consider what should be done to address why Black children and children from some other ethnic groups are significantly more likely to be in care.

Did the Review achieve its objective?

The WWCSC Anti Racism Report, provides a strong indication for all to understand where the root cause of inequalities and disparities stem from within Children's Social Care, and we understand how this impacts on our Care Journey. However, this is not a better understanding of racial and ethnic disparities, it confirms what is already widely known.

To address the symptoms of the root cause, The Review is calling for:

 Cultural Competence Training for Social Workers as part of the Early Career Framework Package



I insert here that, Foster Carers, Residential Children's Home Staff and Social Workers, must also be called to engage in this training.

- Increase in the Diversity of Leadership within Children's Social Care
- Improvement on Data on Ethnic Disparities in Care
- Collection of Data to improve understanding of the Care Experiences of Black Children and Young People

All these are fair points to action and are not dissimilar to the way forward for change outlined in the Black Care Experience Report. However to achieve these points, co-production led by Black and Care Experienced, Black Families and Black Professionals who have lived experience of the Care System, is vital and necessary, to not only provide oversight and make sure process is undertaken with our best interests at heart, but to also make sure that 'our voices with solutions' are not blended and diluted within the struggles of other racial and ethnic minority groups, because as it is well known, our experiences are not the same.

The Review goes on to state 'Alongside our recommendations highlighted here which have the potential to begin to address disparities, there is more work to do to understand these disparities and address them...We include understanding racial and ethnic disparities in this list as a priority area for research'.

Question: Is there a need for more work/research to be done to understand and address racial and ethnic disparities?

In simple terms, the answer is No.

The Black and In Care Group began this journey in the 1980's and as a collective of the Black Care Experienced Community and our Network of Allies, we are surprised, disappointed and tired of hearing, more research is needed, as this can seem as though we are to be taken around another cycle of research that may end up as a tokenistic and tick box exercise, to avoid tackling the root cause.



With that said, what is needed, is more work to be done to up root the root cause of racism that gives life to the racial and ethnic disparities that exists within Children's Social Care.

I reiterate here, that co-production is vital and necessary, because as my Jamaican Foster Carer would say "He who feels it, knows it", and will add great value to the legacy of this System.

In closing, once up rooted, Children's Social Care will be able to actively and consistently demonstrate the foundations of love, stability and safety for Black Children and Young People who come into Care, because our Care Matters too.

Until then, Our Marathon Continues...

Judith AM Denton, Founder and Chair of The Black Care Experience Founder and CEO of <u>The Transformed You</u>



JOIN OUR NETWORK

As part of our <u>Network</u>, you'll be a member of a Diverse Community, willing and ready to learn from the Lived Black Care Experience and share best practice, to improve your systems and practice, to ultimately make a difference in the lives of the next Black and in Care Generation.

Check out our <u>Black Care Directory</u>. It's a Consortium of Black Owned Businesses with Products and Services to help us all care for the Black Children or Young People in our Care.

OUR DIRECTORY

TRAINING & CONSULTATION

We deliver <u>Training Courses</u> to Empower you with Knowledge & Insight into The Black Care Experience and provide <u>Bespoke</u> <u>Consultancy Packages</u> to help help your Service achieve its aims and objectives, of making a difference in the lives of black children and young people in your Care.

<u>The Black Care Experience Conference</u> is taking place on Saturday 11th February 2023 in London, UK

SAVE THE DATE

More details coming soon!