



THE BLACK CARE EXPERIENCE NETWORK NEWSLETTER

Our Bi-Monthly Newsletter

WELCOME TO THE BLACK CARE EXPERIENCE NETWORK 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, we're focusing on the Building Blocks of Cultural Competency. You'll also hear The Voice of a Care Experienced Black Care Leaver, and there are a few things on our Notice Board that may be of interest to you.

Once read, if you have any comments, thoughts or suggestions, please feel free to email 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.

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THE BUILDING
BLOCKS OF
CULTURAL
COMPETENCY

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Cultural Competence is defined as...

A skill of understanding cultural knowledge and practices to undertake ethical and good practice with culturally diverse individuals, families, and communities.

Barn and Das (2016) define culture, as a central notion defined as the sum of life patterns passed on throughout generations which includes language, religious ideals, habits of thinking, artistic expression, and patterns of social and interpersonal relationships.

Cultural competence is seen as critical to work with marginalized groups and communities and is inherently consistent with anti-oppressive practice and social work values.

An analysis into how different racially minoritised communities experience power imbalances, inequalities and discrimination regarding access to resources and opportunities means that a more flexible and anti-oppressive approach is needed when working with racially minoritised communities, such as through cultural competence.

There is extensive research to highlight that social workers can lack cultural competence to be able to work with racially minoritised people, families and communities effectively (Laird, 2008; Bhatti-Sinclair & Price, 2016; Bernard, 2019).

Irizarry et al. (2016) explore social work's history of working with people impacted by institutional structures that promote injustice, discriminate, and humiliate people on personal, cultural, and structural levels. Social justice, therefore, is a critical component in removing barriers that people face as a result of social categorisation thereby promoting equality for all.

The importance of having the skills, knowledge, and competences to be able to work effectively with people from a variety of social categories, intersectional identities, and complex experiences of race and ethnicity, ultimately enables social workers to be better prepared to commit to the core values of social justice, equality, and human rights (Laird, 2008).

Cultural competence can take form in cultural consultancy where social workers and professionals consult other cultural brokers and organisations for further knowledge around their culture, which in turn enables professional to reflect the ethos and cultural

expectations of the people they are working with. This includes initiatives such as steering groups that involve racially minoritised communities, meeting with religious organisations and institutions, and involving, engaging and empowering community groups to share their culture.

This takes partnership working with other organisations for more nuanced understandings of the community and requires groundwork in creating meaningful relationships with community-based organisations.

This experience of cultural consultancy and community engagement to achieve enhanced cultural competence, provided benefits for racially minoritised families, young people and children, as they are better able to have their cultural expectations and ethos reflected in their services as well as a promotion of their cultural identity.

However, Barn & Das (2016) highlights the lack of time for professionals involved to undertake outreach and collaborative work, the hesitance and resistance community organisations will have in engaging with statutory organisations, and the likelihood of tokenism of community organisations due to a lack of understanding of respectful steps towards cultural competence.

“ REFLECT THE ETHOS AND CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS OF THE PEOPLE



With that said, the aim of this Newsletter is to promote cultural competence as a significant driver in improving the outcomes for Black care experienced children and young people, as when professionals and the care system understands what it means to be Black and takes time, effort and care into learning and promoting Black culture, then Black children and young people will feel more listened to, seen and represented in holding onto their cultural identity.

Omar Mohamed

Black Care Experience Network Steering Team

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OUR STORIES

Hi, my name is Sabrina Daniel and I have recently completed my first year of University at the London School of Economics, reading Law.



Currently, I am completing a few internships over the summer and working on a start-up. I am Eritrean and was born there before coming to the UK when I was around the age of 4. Since being in the UK, I have lived in Manchester, but I am now based in London after having moved for University.

I was placed into foster care when I reached Year 1 in Primary School, along with my younger brother. My first foster carers were both white and I stayed with them for around 18 months. I really did like my foster carers, and this was the first time I felt like I was in a normal and safe household. However, they clearly struggled with the fact my brother and I were of a completely different background, race and culture. They were curious to know about my life in Eritrea but not curious enough to do research of their own or help me remain connected with my culture.

Eventually, I forgot how to speak my language which made it nearly impossible for me to contact any of my family back home. Reflecting on my childhood there, there were also other things that I now, as a young adult would question such as the cutting of my hair.

My hair was cut very short into a small afro which I completely looked after by myself. Consequently, it would get matted and that again would result in my hair being cut short. This led to me not only not properly learning how to take care of my hair until I was much older, but it knocked my confidence and image as a black girl. I had a similar experience with my next foster care who took my hair to a white salon to be 'thinned' as it was too thick for her to manage. I only realised the impact of this much later on and it took many years to overcome.

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I BEGAN TO BE ASHAMED OF THE FACT I WAS DIFFERENT

I began to be ashamed of the fact I was different as it was made out to be problematic and an inconvenience for my white foster carers.

Finally, I was put into foster care with a black Caribbean family. It was only here that I saw a stark contrast between the differences in upbringing I had between my white and black carers and I realised I was really let down by my previous foster carers. Not only was I pushed to do better in school, taught about black history and integrated into the family, but my foster carer would also wake up early every morning to help me do my hair, something which I greatly appreciate now.

They also encouraged me to learn about my own culture, taking me to an Eritrean restaurant for my birthday and reading around my country.

I know that it is not always possible for Children's Social Care to match black children in care with foster carers from the same background, however, they need to try their best to do this or at least provide a black social worker, and there must also be some type of training for white foster carers. Otherwise, black foster children lose their culture and identity and are often neglected.

If you are a Black Care Experienced Care Leaver and 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.

With the view that 'Representation Matters', please feel free to [Join Our Network](#) to help Black Children and Young People currently in Care, SEE that THEY ARE NOT ALONE.

Thank you in advance for getting in Contact and Joining Our Network, as together we use our Voices, Experience and Expertise to make a difference for the current and next Black and In Care Generation.



IDENTITY BELONGING & MENTAL HEALTH

As a Care Leaver myself, I think that it can be a challenge for Looked After Children to really experience a sense of Identity and Belonging.

We all come with our own different circumstances but some of our experiences around mental health and identity really are shared, the research demonstrates this. I believe that if there were to be more work with children in this respect, it may well help to reduce poor mental health outcomes for us as a whole. Having studied psychology, I am very interested in understanding the link between identity, sense of security and belonging, and mental health - particularly the latter for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. We are already aware that mental health support across the entire Care Experienced community is poor and needs improvement but when you dig deeper into the many communities that make us a group in society, you may realise that not all of the issues are solved by medication or talking therapies.

Why is a sense of Identity important?

A vast amount of social and psychological research suggests that a sense of identity is linked to a sense of belonging (Children's Society, 2022), and the two may impact our experiences around confidence and well-being. Our confidence is linked to our ability to get through life's common obstacles as well as face and tackle other challenges that may lead to greater opportunities across all aspects of life. If our confidence is affected by an unstable sense of identity and/or an unclear sense of belonging, this is bound to impact our mental health and general well-being.



Why is it an important factor to consider Looked After Children?

Baker (2017) reviewed the evidence in a publication called 'Care Leavers Views on Their Transition to Adulthood', as part of the CoramBAAF organisation. One of the points in the review highlighted that care leavers have shown that they strongly believe that the 'care system had not sufficiently equipped them with an understanding of their background and personal history'.

As a group in society, we tend to face issues around social identity and the stigma of being a Looked After Child or someone who's left the care system and this can be damaging - paired with a lack of understanding of self and our own history, this can really be detrimental to our mental health and personal development.

Those who experience the above tend to report feelings of loneliness, depressive and anxiety symptoms and in some cases, other mental health illnesses such as personality disorders. We know this because the research shows it not only in the care experienced community, but since this is for the Black Care Experience publication, it is worth including research that focuses on our experiences around securing a sense of identity from an African-Caribbean perspective.

Thomas (2003) explores the impact of our own history and European history on our sense of identity. A very valid point was made regarding our changing names over the decades which include, from the top down -

- West Indian Immigrants
- West African Immigrants
- Coloured People/Afro-Caribbean
- Black People
- Black British People

We were initially refused our own culture and identity, had it stripped from us and replaced with European names and culture. Look at the lasting impact that's had?



I do remember when I was in my late teens being asked to complete a questionnaire that asked for my nationality and ethnicity. I clearly remember not being sure which box to select. In large numbers, we truly struggle with our sense of identity and this may or may not be linked to the prevalence of mental health in our community.

How can we help Afro - Caribbean Looked After Children develop a stronger sense of Identity?

Allowing children to know their true heritage should just be a given. If you were to ask someone where they are from and they said that they didn't know, what sort of emotions would that bring up for you? Imagine what it does to the person who has had to voice the fact that they are not truly aware.

Lyndsey (2022) discusses the importance of building strong racial identities in black children. The author states that '*building a positive racial identity is critical to a child's development, particularly among Black children who face a society that amplifies anti-Blackness*'. The article also outlines that *from as young as 5 years old, children internalise societal messages about their race based on what they've been exposed to*.

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TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

This can only be controlled to a certain degree, we cannot control what children face when they are out in the world but what we can do is help them to build a positive internal voice about themselves and who they are.

Simply allowing children to have awareness and knowledge of their history and their culture will have an impact - not just the label of black British or 'person of colour'.

Allowing children the knowledge of traditions in their culture, great influencers and change makers, food often cooked by their people and more. It all counts.

Together We can make a Difference

Organisations set up by the Care Experienced for the Care Experienced, like [The Black Care Experience](#), [The Transformed You](#) and [Konnected CIC](#) aim to keep Looked After Children of African and Caribbean descent in touch with their Culture, Identity and Heritage. The simple fact that these services are needed, should raise awareness around the issues faced by black children in the care system and the changes that need to be made to improve their outcomes. Please feel free to take a read of their websites.

If you are working in Children's Social Care and are already making a difference for our Black Children and Young People in Care, please let us know, as we would like to share your best practice and results throughout the Sector, as together we play our part to make a difference.

Charmaine Orchard, Black Care Experience Network Steering Team

References

Baker, C. (2017) 'Care Leavers Views on Their Transition To Adulthood' A Rapid Review of the Evidence. University of Bristol & CoramBAAF Publication. Available at: [999-CV-Care-Leaver-Rapid-Review4.indd \(coramvoice.org.uk\)](#)

Lennox T (2003) [www.baatn.org.uk](#), [[securing a sense of identity - an African-Caribbean perspective](#) Lennox K Thomas.pdf (baatn.org.uk)], Access: 15th August 2022.

Wilson, L. (2022). Building Strong Racial Identities in Black Children. January, 2022. Available at: [Building Strong Racial Identities In Black Children - Successful Black Parenting Magazine](#).



NOTICE BOARD

JOIN OUR NETWORK

As part of our [Network](#), 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 current and next Black and in Care Generation.

Check out our [Black Care Directory](#). 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 [Training Courses](#) to Empower you with Knowledge & Insight into The Black Care Experience and provide [Bespoke Consultancy Packages](#) 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.

[The Black Care Experience Conference](#) is taking place on Saturday 11th February 2023 in London, UK

SAVE THE DATE

More details coming soon!