In our own words

healthwatch
Lancashire

Interviews with members of the Windrush health group. Appendix to **Our Experience**.

Contents.

Introduction.

This report is based on speaking to first, second and third generation Afro-Caribbean men, aged 29-66 years, who meet up as part of the Windrush Group in Preston.

The original plan had been to conduct a focus group discussion, but with COVID restrictions this was not possible.

We therefore conducted nine interviews (supported and led by the group lead, Ahmed James) as individual case studies.

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Theo

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There were different influences as we grew up – for me there was the church-orientated community with its very strict rules and structure and then the Rastafarian cultural influence too. Both were important but for very different reasons. The community base of the church is important for some people, but they had very strict rules which I didn't like. There was also hypocrisy with the way people behaved. However, the Bible has given me some structure and some moral rules to work within which have been important for me. The Rastafarian influence was more relaxed, more grounded.

In the 1980s the Caribbean community was more together – it's more split now – particularly between the Jamaican people and all the people whose families came from the other islands in the West Indies. People have been 'falling out' much more since. This divide between [those from] the smaller islands and the Jamaicans is deeper than any divisions with the white community.

The experiences of our families coming to England were very different from people now – our families went through a much rougher time, but there was a mentality from this generation that they had a real opportunity here, so they were willing to put up with much more. Some island communities were treated very differently. For instance, the Barbadians were invited over by Enoch Powell to work in the health sector – they were treated very differently compared with other migrants from the West Indies."

Mental health concerns:

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Mental health is a big concern for our community. As I grew up, I saw a lot of black men getting arrested. Many never got out of this cycle. Unfortunately, many got sectioned and the medication they are now on is huge. Black men are seen as aggressive and are much more likely to be sectioned than treated in the community.

We are loud and expressive when we are out together, and this can be misinterpreted. A friend – very smart, who was studying medicine – got stopped by the police when he was out with friends. They weren't doing anything but talking but ended up getting arrested. That mashed with his head and he dropped out of uni. He's now doing taxis.

My Dad dying through suicide was really hard. I struggled for 15 years after this. I always seem to be a happy person. People say, 'how come you're so happy?', but behind closed doors this wasn't the case – I was really struggling.

My father went through a terrible split-up with his partner and he was isolated. My Dad never got any help. He was very fit and the happiest man on the outside, but depression can catch anyone. To get over it, I had to go step by step through what he did and to understand this. Music was also important in getting through these tough times. It's really important to help with depression. Now I celebrate my Dad's life by writing songs – I don't get down about this now.

Many people don't access mental health services. My family in Manchester suffer from depression. I have two aunties (my Dad's sisters) and both suffer from depression. They rarely go out these days.

Some parents were very strict – we used to get beatings and all. Back in the West Indies – parents used to whip your feet … this was something that was done by slave masters during the time of slavery and had stayed within the community as a punishment passed down from generation to generation. People say, get over it but it is still harmful. As we grew up there were big major incidents happening in our lives. I experienced a lot trauma in my youth – many friends going to jail. It became normal as it was happening so often. I have seen a lot of stuff and it mounts up. I had a lot of stress and pressure, but I never accessed any help from health services.

I decided I needed to help others and started working in the care sector in children's homes. This helped me take my mind off my own problems so that I didn't worry about myself so much. But it was difficult work as many of the young people we were trying to help were getting drawn into negative things – many were being groomed through external influences. I also realised that I wasn't facing up to my own problems. I had to take myself away from the negativity around me. I feel so much better now. I go to the gym and listen to music – both positive things.

Theo

People need to speak to someone not connected with their life to get help (like the NHS mental health services), but black men won't speak to outsiders. They put their troubles on their partners and when this becomes too much, they end up splitting up and jumping from relationship to relationship. People need to face up to it and black men in particular need to not be so macho. There's a hyper-masculinity among black men – we put on an extra layer and we adopt personas to become respected. But we're all vulnerable and if you don't deal with it, then it will give you depression. People just hold it all in.

Our community can be brutal and unforgiving. We have had to have such tough skin and accept tough love: because of this some things don't trouble us in the same way. This has shaped us and how we behave when we are out in the white community."

What support could make a difference?

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We could have support groups like this coming together more often to share. I could get others to come along – we can help each other. There are some good examples of self-help groups working well across the country in London and Birmingham. [one example shared was called Black Thrive].

However, there is still a lack of trust among many people and these people really need the support of outside services, but their experiences of mental health services are not good, so will they access them? Having trust is really important and I now don't mix with some of my old friends for this reason; we're not on the same frequencies. I need to be with people who I can trust. Similarly, they know that they can trust me – I won't share their stories – unfortunately not everyone is like this.

More training would help to support people with mental health concerns – training members of the community to support others with their mental health needs would be a good option. There is also training needed for mainstream services – so they understand more about our needs."

Errol

Is there adequate support for mental health within the community?

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I don't know where I would go, or where I would get support, as many of our concerns are extremely deep rooted – they date back from our school days. Now if we have concerns the attitude is 'get over it', and if this is challenged we are regarded as having a chip on our shoulder. As a result of this we now bury our problems and as a result have a lot of anger."

So, if there was support, what would work? Should it be external or from within the community?

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External would be better – but someone local would good. Going back, the elders were good for talking, but now there is too much animosity within the community for this to work. However, if they are external then they would need to have clout, with professional background and status. Anyone involved needs to understand the whole context of our experiences: to understand our journey and our history. They must not have stereotypical viewpoints and treat this work with us with ultimate care. We need that emotional hug, and their understanding that this will be a very slow process of repair: people won't easily come forward. However, there are like-minded people within the community who want to see and support this change and it would be good to train these people to support others too."

Errol

What has been your experience?

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It's been important for me to have 'get up and go' and positive attitude. This is essential for the community as a whole. Too many others are stuck in a cycle of negativity that is extremely deep rooted and rather than this just being experienced by ourselves this is being passed on to our children too – so we are getting further and further away from where we want to be."

Reference is made to tackling structured and institutional racism.

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Our experience is you have to conform, or you're seen as a troublemaker. This has been my experience within many different companies. You are caught in a difficult situation, where you will never get on – however good you are. I am an experienced engineer and I have trained up three different men, who have ended up being my manager at different points, but when I have gone for the management role, I am told I don't have the experience. So, what do you do? I don't want to work here – but I don't want to start again, it's very frustrating. In my last role, I had similar experiences and ended up getting paid off. I don't want to be in this position. I have professional pride and want to have the opportunity to excel within my role. It's very frustrating."

"My upbringing has been really important for me. I have not been brought up to harm others or to rise to anger, I'm not going to allow that to happen. I have a resilience which means I don't get angry –I have avoided difficult situations that might have had a real impact on me. It's not a problem for me but I am concerned about my sons, they are still learning.

However, there is a lot of anger within the community and it's hard for others not to snap. The onus is on the community to not let this happen. Our experiences in youth have shaped us [reference is made to growing up with beatings with the lash]. Some said this did us good, others said it went too far. What our children need now is a loving home, with both parents there or if they are not together, that they are at least putting the child first. Black fathers unfortunately aren't taking responsibility. They might deal with difficult situations but they're not supporting education needs or showing their children right from wrong. It's a hard challenge in the current context, as my son had a loving home but at school became regarded as 'teacher's pet' and reacted to this. Black men love to ridicule – which stops people opening up.

Many people have massive hang-ups but are doing nothing, because this is seen as a sign of weakness. I have a couple of friends who have been struggling and have spoken to them to offer support, but if you were to see them on Facebook you wouldn't think that they had a problem in the world.
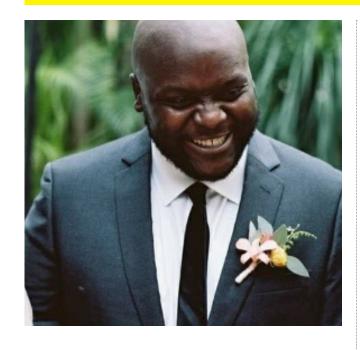
There are a significant number of historical studies that show that black men are being continually let down or ignored by the system in terms of their mental health. This gets me down. There are so many levels of challenges – I want services to help us with this. When you look at education we are not doing well. When you look at business we are not doing well. There is high unemployment across the community."

What else do we need?

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We need to be treated differently; we need a different process in place. We need to acknowledge that our problems date back a long time – from our youth. Many people don't believe that this is important, but it still has an impact on us and this needs to be addressed. It's not as straightforward as an angry black man; it's a frustrated black man. On TV it's all about stereotypes – hip hop, sprinters etc – it limits and defines what we are. In my company all the photos of black people show them as security men or cleaners and white men as managers. I'm an engineer and responsible for staff and services across the north of England. They say I'm just a token black guy and it's not down to my skills and abilities. So, there are challenges for us within wider society, but there are also challenges within our own community. The norm here is to be negative, and if you successful you are seen as selling out from your own community. Having said that there are a growing number of like-minded people within the community who are professionals, even in Preston, and this is encouraging and something to build upon."

Shawn

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I'm from Jamaica – I was born there and came to England to live in Preston in 1986. Mum and grandma had to deal with racism then. As a family we went to the Seventh-Day Adventists which was a multicultural church back then and still is now. They were a very strong community, with lots of events for all ages – very inclusive. Religion was important, but it was also supported by a very strict regime at home (there was no messing about!). Looking back all of this was a good foundation for me although I realised that, as I was growing up, I was in a bubble. We didn't go to cinemas or nightclubs, we didn't drink, and we didn't eat pork. We also didn't partake in activities on the Sabbath, but there was a real sense of belonging and support. We weren't getting into trouble; we weren't failing in school – it was quite the opposite. So, we were in a bit of a bubble. I did have incidents of racism at school but got through that and went to college and university and I now have a partner and family of my own.

Much of my adult shaping of views has come from playing sport and my working life. In terms of employment, I worked in security and call centres, but my main career has been working in mental health – including dementia with the elderly, working with adolescents (down at the Platform) and working in care too. I have worked all over Lancashire in terms of mental health services and care.

Yes, we had a strict regime at home, and I had a few beatings, but alongside this came an attitude from our elders at the time that you have to be three times as good as your white friends to get what they're going to get. That attitude and its implications have certainly had an impact on our mental health as a community and it was a sort of oppression. On one level it gave us something to work towards, but a lot of people resented that they had to do this. Most of my friends growing up were white and my Grandma said, 'You need to be careful'.

I honestly don't know how we can transfer this bubble and this discipline to the rest of the community who aren't in church – and shouldn't have to be forced to go into church. It's about not accepting mediocrity – which happens a lot in Caribbean and African homes. We shouldn't accept mediocrity, it's not acceptable."

Shawn

How much of a concern is mental health for the black community?

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It's a massive concern. There is so much baggage and so many layers to it. I read an article that in the United States of America 90% of white Americans feel that black people have a greater capacity to cope with suffering compared with their white counterparts. This is very worrying, but it's really good that they are doing studies like these. We need to be looking at this in the UK too. Racism is so institutionalised and embedded but often quite hidden. As an example, as a care manager, I recently went to do an assessment for a family for a future resident. I was only doing the assessment, but the family made the point that they would only be accepting white care for their family member.

We aren't doing anything with regards to racism at the moment. There is an endless amount of support for many disadvantaged groups, but the black community are left to just cope with racism – we're expected to just 'brush it off'. The main problem with racism is that it is often so subtle that it's difficult to prove the intent - leaving the victim stranded - particularly from the point of view of incidents in the workplace setting. There's an expectation that black people will just take it, put up with it. This leads to a build-up of anger, leading to self-hate and self-loathing and any mental health implications that we experience are not taken seriously.

As a community we now expect to have to overcome these hurdles, or we won't make it. If we fail in any way, there is no encouragement from the wider community, as it's expected that we will fail. I feel that the main concerns are around workplaces, as in schools there is a support network and parental involvement to keep things in line. It's less of a problem there, but much more of a problem when a black man is trying to make his way in the world. If a black man has a job a lot of the time he is looked at as 'why have you got that job, when my cousin could have that job, or my brother or whoever?' It's almost as if to say he's not supposed to have a position. That's why when black guys get into a position of even just relative mediocrity, they are surprised or even overly proud of their achievements, as they have achieved this in a context of prejudice. Which surely

should be maddening in itself - it's just crazy. This has started to be addressed in the US with sports through the Rooney Rule and legislation to protect black people, but there is [very little] like this here – it needs to happen.

I am not sure how we address mental health and that's why this group is so important and [why there is] the need for a support network. I have the utmost respect for doctors but, when I went to visit my GP practice about mental health, I ended up seeing an Asian lady GP (I don't have a regular GP) and there was no time to discuss my concerns – she was just rushing me out of the room. I had really wanted to talk to someone, and it had taken a huge effort just to get me to the doctors to speak to someone. When I spoke to her about my issues, she said we could give you some drugs, but I wasn't interested in anti-depressants. For me this medication hasn't been developed with our needs in mind. I just wanted to speak to someone with a professional background who looked like me and understood or could relate to my experience. That would have been a lot better for me.

I know that there are black people walking around with 'baggage', with mental health issues and they don't get this addressed. You have to be in a really bad way before any action is taken. They just endure these issues. They won't say they need help, so don't get it. It gives a false narrative of us not suffering from mental health concerns.

There is an under-representation of black people using mental health services. If you go to the medium and high secure units. This research is saying that there is over 30% representation from black communities in these places, but I haven't even seen 3%. From my perspective the minute the crisis team are told that there is a black man involved then there is extra vigilance taken ... to put it mildly. The same is the case on the wards too. There is an instant apprehension if people are black, even with more elderly residents. The level of fear around black people, compared with other service users, I found a little startling."

How do we tackle this racism?

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We're tougher on ourselves. There are fundamental questions to be answered here like 'Do we hold ourselves to higher standards than we hold other people?' 'Do other people hold us to higher standards or lower standards than they do themselves?' There is so much to question for other people, and even from the world's leading psychologists there doesn't seem to be much willingness to discuss these issues. To discuss how generation after generation we still have to experience this instinctive racism. I find it mindboggling, but I understand that there is hypersensitivity around this too. I heard about a study on Radio 4 that white people in this country were more comfortable talking with their parents about the issue of sex, than they were talking about racism with their black friends. Of course, there are implications for white people who have genuinely taken on the issue of racism for humanitarian reasons. It has cost them.

Shawn

I just want to live myself as a man, not as a black man, but what do we have to do to create this environment. This racism exists because of a system and a dehumanisation of a set of people, and we don't know now if this is epigenetic or conditioning as a result of the society that we live in. Why aren't the academics looking at this? What sort of studies could we do? Most of the studies we have so far have been pointless in tackling racism. It is a particular concern today, as these discussions aren't happening. They were taking place in the 1950s through to the '90s but then they just stopped. Now people say that 'racism is going away, surely its better?' but I feel that it is getting worse. Academics aren't talking about this. We have a real dumbing down of society and leaders that aren't brought into question for their attitudes. It makes the solving of this very difficult.

For black people in this country today, none of them are thinking about coronavirus or anything else going on, they are just trying to solve this issue of racism. That is it - they just don't want it in their lives. We can't be bothered with it.

In terms of destroying this racist dynamic, I just don't think enough is being done on a government and official level. A lot of young people are talking about this now, which is why they are taking things into their own hands. Structurally we have laws in place to stop racism in theory, but the attitudes still do not change. It is one thing changing laws, but another minds. People still have racist views, but these are just not said. It is why we need training that is much more thorough and can bring out these views and challenge them. It needs to be impactful; it needs people to come out with all those racist views so that we can discuss them.

We need to get people to open up and discuss it properly. Not just a tick box online training exercise. I have mentioned it in my workplace, but it is hard to do it there at the moment. We are already doing some training, in particular in schools, to get young people to discuss these issues – this is really important – especially post-Brexit. It would be great if more teachers and schools were interested in supporting this. Racism, of course, isn't just limited to the white community and

this is the danger of just lumping people together as the BAME community, as there is also racism between the communities too. Each community has its own unique problems – it's disrespectful and far too convenient for one faction to throw us all into the same category. It is okay to come together sometimes but overall, we have enough going on in our own community alone and we need to focus on that as our main priority."

Wesley

> I'm 29 years old and come from a big family in Preston with a strong community and sporting background. My mum was born and raised in Preston; she comes from a Bajan background. She was an exceptional netball player during her school years and has been a Liverpool Football Club fan from a young age. My Dad was born in Dominica and moved to Preston when he was 15 years old. He was a fearsome cricket bowler and supports the West Indies cricket team."

What's your been your experience of yourself and friends growing up in Preston?

> "I've known a couple of people who have struggled, because of that stereotype that black people are anything negative that you can think of. As a result, I don't think they have been able to progress in their lives, both from a work perspective and on a personal level, in the way that I think they should have done. Of course, I have had my struggles too with school and friendships. What I didn't want to be though is part of that stereotype. I have tried to push myself as far as I can and to help as many people as I can from my community as well. It's unfortunate, yes, that at the moment we are going to be seen as a typical stereotype, but it's up to us to change that stereotype.

> It's going to take more than just myself and this group. We have to work together collectively to change that mentality. It's not just within our community but also in the wider white community which perceives us in a certain way. That can stem from what they have been told about us. From an educational standpoint we need to do something about this to ensure that when they see us as black people – as a community – that we are not as scary as they perceive."

Does that change the way we interact with people?

"Of course, it does. I can only speak from my personal experiences but I always seem to have to be treading on eggshells not just around certain people outside but also inside of work as I know I am a target regardless of whatever happens. As a result sometimes I'm not as true to myself as I should be but I know that if I do say something then I'm just going to be perceived as just that angry black man who everyone expects. So in the past I have let things slide. However, I think it is important to have these conversations because if we don't people will believe that they are correct with their views, when they are not. This whole protest at the moment [Black Lives Matter Movement] shows that things are not okay, things need to be addressed. Now that this is out in the open then this could be a catalyst to take things forward collectively."

How do the protests (around George Floyd's murder) affect things?

"People are angry. They are fed up with the system and with the stereotypes and with the belief that we are never going to get that level playing field. Everything stems from years and years of suffering to this point now ... and enough is enough. People just wanted to voice their opinions and it wasn't just black people – people from the white community and Asian community also came out, as everyone knows what is happening and what has happened. It's time that we did something about it. If things do go forward – and we take action – then things will get better for the mental health of the black community – for young and old alike. If the murder hadn't happened, we might not have seen of this now, but this was a catalyst."

Is there a danger that this protest won't bring the change we want?

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I do think black people are politically inclined but because we have been let down so many times, I think there is a case of people thinking what's the point, why bother voting? But we do need to encourage people to use their vote because every vote matters and we need the right people in the places of power. We need them as our role models and to set the tone."

What has helped you to overcome challenges?

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My motivation comes from the example that my parents have set. My Mum is the business brain. She's the glue that sticks the whole family together. She's the one from a young age who always encouraged me to aim high and to aim for the best. This was really important because around me I found that people didn't have this drive. She always encouraged me to be No.1, to be the best that I could be. My father was also really encouraging with a very high work ethic and a 'never give up' attitude. With the combination of both my Mum and my Dad this drove me to really go for every single thing I want to do. I also had the example of both my sisters who are extremely driven and intelligent. This has spurred me on with every single target that I have. As a result, I'm really driven and want to show the impact of my people too. Even jobs around the house – we have to give 100%. That's the mentality I have

been used too. It's been ingrained in me since I was a kid and I carry that with whatever I do.

I did have my challenges when I was younger, though. I was on the streets on Moor Lane when I was 14 with my friends – I didn't like school and I didn't take it seriously then. I remember I had a conversation with my Dad at the time and he said you have two choices – either you dictate what you want to do or it is dictated for you. That stuck with me at the time and I thought I don't want to have no opportunities. It made me think and it made me quite scared. I decided to stop hanging around on Moor Lane. I started taking my football seriously and trying even harder in my studies. I got written off by all my teachers at school and at college too. It took me till I got to university before I really got going and then realised that I could excel. That really changed my mindset and made realise that I can compete with others and do better. Keeping that determination and with the support my parents has kept me moving forward and to kept me achieving."

Wesley

What are your views on the black community – what are the issues?

"There is a notion that the black community isn't together and that there is friction, there is tension. I disagree – these protests that we have seen over the weekend show how close we are. There are differences though; we may have different views on how we get to where we want to go. So we need to ensure that we are all singing from the same hymn sheet. We need to make a plan and decide how we want to achieve this. We need leadership and there are things we still need to learn, but we can talk it out.

One thing that we need to tackle is this stereotypical view that you're not good enough. When you get told over and over and again that you're not good enough or that you're negative, you end up becoming that stereotype and you stop going for things, and you don't take risks because you start to believe that you are never going to get there. It's a mentality that we have to start changing and not just listening to what other people say – we need to listen to ourselves and what we want to achieve and try to get there. We are setting the bar to low – we need to aim higher. I'm on the board of the football association in Lancashire trying to get more young people from black and ethnic minority communities into coaching. There is a lot of scepticism in the community saying that when you look at professional and grassroots football there are very few black coaches, so what's the point? Yes, there are very few coaches at the moment but if we don't tackle this then nothing will ever change. Sometimes you have to lead the way."

What could the NHS do to improve their care of black people?

"We need to have more black doctors working in the NHS - as role models. If the NHS gave us more opportunities, then that could help. This does need to be on merit and only if we can show that we deserve the roles. But don't overlook us. Give us the opportunity to showcase what we can do, we'll do it."

Bradley

How was it for you growing up in Preston?

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Both my Mum and Dad were from Jamaica – my Dad from Kingston and my Mum from Saint Catherine's. They met on the boat over from Jamaica in 1960. Mum was pregnant at the time with my half-brother. When my parents first came here, they lived in Avenham and worked at Courtaulds. We then moved to Boule Street and then St Georges Road. Growing up was difficult in Preston as you got picked on for being black. White kids would always chase you and we would always get attacked. There were lots of gangs from across Preston that would come after us. We would go to church on Sunday in town and you would be lucky if you could get home without being chased and attacked by older boys. You usually had no option but to fight. If you had a fight it was you and the rest of the school on the other side. If you did beat them their white parents would come up, so you couldn't win either way - you only got into trouble.

At home we couldn't put a foot wrong, and we would get beatings from our parents if we were caught fighting. Our parents couldn't go to the police about us being attacked – it didn't work like that. You couldn't go to the police if you had problems. We knew they wouldn't do anything. You had to cope with it yourself.

The final straw for me was when I was 18 years old walking down St Georges Road and a gang from Ribbleton jumped me – I ended up in hospital with a scar on my head. After that I realised that this was never going to stop. By then I had moved to Avenham. You had to grow up quick in Avenham. You got chased by grown men there. They used to call me and my brother 'little nig' and big nig'. I was upset about what was going on and I remember thinking why is everyone after us, what have we done, why are they doing it? It made me angry at the time. I decided I would learn to kick box to protect myself and karate too, but it wasn't until I walked into that boxing ring that things properly changed. When I began with boxing, I started training hard and running half marathons. I didn't have problems after that. My brother was big too. So, we didn't stand for any messing. After that they didn't fight us, but they did get other black and mixed-race guys to fight us. We were at war all the time then. It's the first time I have really talked about it."

How has all this affected you mentally?

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Well, it affects you. I was the oldest in my family, so I had the hardest time. I was also looking out for my younger sisters and brothers to make sure they got home safely. I was carrying that responsibility the whole time as I had to make sure they got home safe. We were proper starving – even though both our parents worked. We couldn't go on trips. They used to call us paupers at school. We never got picked for teams. When we left for home, we had to leave school early or late and had to find different routes to avoid being attacked. So, I had a lot of anger at the time. I would pick a mad route over a high wall, through fields to avoid getting chased.

I also got constantly stopped and searched by the police. I have probably been stopped at least 150 times and have at least 60 tickets that I've kept in the loft documenting this.

On the tickets it would say accident, offence, check, or recorded delivery. They would keep you in the station for an hour or so but after a while I got a video camera and started recording it. They were always arresting us for something. You got arrested regularly. It shouldn't have been happening and nobody was listening to you. There was nobody you could speak to about this. There was no help or support then and there isn't now. Ten years ago I got a call to say my son was getting 'happy slapped' and being bullied at college, so I thought I am going to do things the right way and went down to the college. On arrival my son saw the people who had caused it and reacted. In the end it was my son that got charged with affray ... despite the fact that the police knew what had happened, as there was a video of my son getting 'happy slapped'. The college knew this too but didn't do anything about it. We went to court and won the case, but this hasn't changed anything."

What has been your experience of the NHS?

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We try and not go to the hospital, as we're worried you won't come out. I had a friend who went in just for a simple procedure and the next thing we heard was that he had died. I don't like hospitals and don't think you get the same level of care as a black man. My Mrs is white, but she says if she has to go into hospital, she doesn't want me there, as she doesn't think she will get the same level of care, being married to a black man. My sister is a nurse and she said to my brother-in-law (my other sister's husband) who had got coronavirus badly not to go into hospital unless it gets much worse – fortunately, he got better."

Bradley

What about mental health?

"I have a half-brother, going through the system now. He is a schizophrenic. He lived the early part of his life back in Jamaica until my family could bring him back over. When he came over to England, we got him a flat, but he got into drugs and was quite vulnerable. The dealer had his bank card. The police should have done more because it was the same group of guys exploiting him. After a spell in jail, he ended up in Barrow hospital for five years and then for his own safety he got moved to the Harbour in Blackpool and then Bamber Bridge."

What should the NHS do?

"Keeping fit is really important for me – you need to exercise and eat well. Black people also need to be aware about things such as vitamin D deficiency – that can be really important. The community doesn't listen to other black people, though which is a problem. I don't think black people don't want to know about mental health either. You need to put knowledge into schools and tell the kids – educate them. It's no good telling the parents – you won't make any difference there. Religion can be important, but I don't bother with it. I believe in science – it needs to be something official for me and based on research."
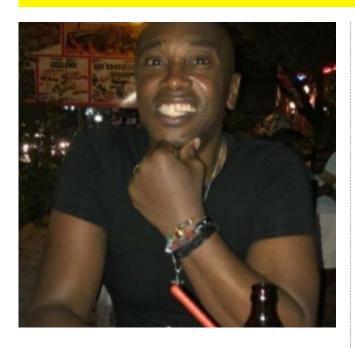
Bradley

Are things the same now?

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It's different now – less fighting, but more fear around. People don't go out as much and a lot of kids are carrying knives to protect themselves. It's very worrying. Now we have the problem of dealers hanging around schools and targeting the vulnerable. I used to pick my son up from school (this was around 2010) as I was worried about him being targeted by dealers. There were stories about dealers giving kids tattoos on their arms to get them involved. The other problem we have now is that parents are scared about letting their kids out and the kids are always on Xbox and eating more – they're putting on weight.

You could get more young people going to Jalgos' Caribbean Club – that would be good, but the club won't make any changes. They won't get Sky Sports or anything that younger people would like. Jalgos is very old school and not willing to change and we are split over whether we should get another club or not. Our community don't want to know. We could fix it up – I could do the roof and there are other guys who could do the plumbing and decorating – we would have done it for free, but they are not interested. We should be more like the Asian community and work together. Unfortunately, we look down on one another. It's such a shame as we used to look out for each other."

How have things worked out for you?

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It was tough growing up, and I had a difficult time but really since I have been with my Mrs, then things got better. We have been together for over 40 years. I have done okay despite struggling with my education. I have had my own business since 2006. I am a roofer, but I also have a side-line printing T-shirts. I had to stop working during lockdown as I couldn't get the supplies but I'm back now. I am a bit of a jack of all trades, I have been involved in building and construction, cable TV, bins lorries and at one point worked up and down the country wherever there were opportunities. I have taught myself different trades – learning from online courses. I have never really been unemployed. I've done okay – on the streets it was hard. They say boxing is hard, but life is even harder. I had to be fighter."

Colin

Colin is Jamaican / Black Caribbean and originally from Birmingham. He met his wife, Sue, in Warrington and they now live in Preston

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When I first came to Preston, I worked in housing advice and then moved to Salford to study a degree in housing. My role now is primarily in private sector housing and dealing with and managing properties in Salford. Salford had a really bad problem with empty properties. This had led to high levels of anti-social behaviour and drug dealing which in turn led to bringing down house prices and impacting on the community as a whole. So, working with the Council we were able to bring those properties back into use."

What was your experience of growing up?

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"It was both positive and negative. Yes, it was very strict, God fearing and very Victorian – we got severely chastised, for instance, if we were late in after playing out ('Do as I say and not as I do. Keep quiet. Don't talk back to me'). I don't think my experience was much different from others when compared with our friends in the playground (we would compare our experience of being beaten). Between the ages of seven and 12 years it felt like just a matter of survival because after that you were then learning about the world and beginning to rebel against this. The discipline in the Afro-Caribbean household was very strict – it wasn't just your parents – even your Uncle and Aunt would have a right to put you in your place, to chastise you. That was the kind of mindset we grew up in and it was an attempt to shield us from the outside experiences. Whatever we did outside the household, when you came back into the house you had rules and a framework of discipline to keep you in line. That was what our parents were trying to install within us with this discipline. When we went to formal events for a wedding, a christening or even just to church, we wouldn't be able to just turn up in jeans and trainers, our parents would go out of their way to get us an outfit – even at great cost – and to make sure we had a haircut and looked smart.

This was the late 1970s and early '80s and we rebelled against this at the time as it was too starched – it was too much and too restrictive for us. What people forget is that when you were born in the late '50s and '60s the Caribbean children had to deal with two cultures – the culture at home which was mainly Afro-Caribbean and the culture outside – what the school wanted

Colin

you to adhere too and society in general. We didn't have the difference of religion and language like the Asian community, but we equally didn't have a welcome, as such, from the wider community and this led to us rebelling – as we were caught in two places which were both challenging for us ... we were between a rock and hard place!

You wanted to be part of your culture, but you also wanted to assimilate and get on with everybody, but this was hard. I think that affected a lot of us as we were growing up and led to some of us going to the extreme and some becoming a roots Rasta whereas others tried to be mainstream and embrace British culture. We felt constantly pulled by different sides within the community – trying to straddle the two communities. For me this led to internal racism – never feeling good enough if you're black and wishing you were white, as it would be much easier to get on. Then this flips and you try to fit into your black culture but you don't quite fit in, because you have re-tooled yourself to fit into the host community. You feel like an outsider. So, we were constantly feeling between the two communities with one foot in each. I feel that this has had a mental

stress on the individual – particularly when you try to progress in society – if you go too far one way its negative, if you go too far the other way its negative – there's no positive line to take. That's what causes issues.

There's also a different class of being black. There's the underclass, then the working class and then the middle class. Then there's the entrepreneurs and the footballers and sports people who are completely out of our ballpark – you won't see them around because they're in a completely different income level. So, this all affects how we relate as a black community. Take the underclass – they feel completely left behind, because they see some of their peer groups advancing and educating in their job, but they're still hustling. I remember seeing people in the pub back in Birmingham when I was 19 and when I go back, I see the same people and their lives haven't changed – 50 years old and still hustling. That's because of their low self-esteem and the impact that this has had on them. This affects future generations too. For others, we have grown up with the message that if you work hard you get somewhere, but how hard do you have to work to climb up two ladders? People are packing in loads of hours so that their families don't have to do without and that's having an impact on them. They are quite

often working two jobs, having to ask others to take care of children and that's affecting families and children as they grow up.

I think the issues for black men and black women are different too, because the employment opportunities for men have changed so much. When I was growing up it was engineering or working in the car factory, but now there are fewer opportunities in these industries and the competition, for instance, in engineering is much harder ... because there are so few opportunities. Women have worked more in the service sector and this has been less affected (although is generally poorly paid). So overall we have found ourselves in short term jobs, long hours and low pay. Once you have covered your living expenses then there's not much left to put on the table to fund a child's education or to help them develop in such things as sporting activities. That's what creates pressure and that is what affected me when I first came to Preston.

The challenge we had was low aspiration. For instance, if I had said I wanted to become a doctor my family would have laughed me out of the house when I was growing up, because it just didn't seem obtainable at that time. Even in terms of education there was

a sense that you wouldn't get to grammar school or to university. That seed was already planted before the age of seven in the majority of families. It's really hard to get out of that, because it was reinforced all around you – you don't see anyone on TV or shops owned by the likes of you, you don't see any successful entrepreneurs as role models coming to your schools. So already you have low self-esteem and then it's reinforced by the likes of the police and certain authority figures. That's the start of the mental breakdown process for some individuals – they just then disconnect from mainstream society, because that don't feel that they belong or that they have something to offer.

Even when you do get into a place of employment you still don't feel equal because you have the feeling that you are only there because of positive discrimination – not on your own merit. Such programmes are great but only limited people get through and you feel like a token person. In addition, despite these programmes, such workplaces don't necessarily create environments of equality – the environment can often be quite hostile. You also have the added responsibility for leading the way for other black people which brings pressure in its

own right. You always have to prove yourself. Positive discrimination can't just be a token gesture – it needs to be part of wider change within the working environment.

You also need that support from the community too – someone to speak to, someone to edge you on. As a community we carry so much around with us. I can have a safe space to talk about concerns like discrimination if I'm with some of my mates and they will understand my issues. We can even have a joke about it or something like that. That helps and releases tension.

It was drummed into me at a young age that everyone should be treated equally and that we should not rise to verbal abuse. Even if we get angry, when someone calls us something derogatory, we need to remember that this is just ignorance on their part. The next person will be better than the last person. It takes a lot self-discipline to carry this off continuously – it's mentally draining. It's hard going – you need to have such mental resilience to deal with this. My way of dealing of this is to understand that this is how society is set up."

What do you draw upon to motivate you?

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You have got to remember that you are an individual. I am 'me' first and black second. I know I am an individual and I have learnt this over the years. If I had purely identified with any one grouping this would have held me back. If you want to be a doctor, athlete, nurse, lawyer or even a postman you have got to be the individual going for that role first. Everything else follows after that – positive discrimination and you making a good impression on behalf of your community. You as an individual have to pick up that baton and run with it first before you pass it on to somebody else. That was how I was taught. With a lot of my friends, we are homogenous as a group in being of Black Caribbean descent, but we are all individuals, we don't see ourselves as restricted by our colour. I went to college with one guy back in the 1980s and I recall him saying to us as a group of friends at the time that he wanted to be a

policeman and had been offered a place. At the time this was initially greeted with some disbelief but then we thought more, and said no, actually, good luck to him in this, we hope he can make a difference. He eventually went on to fulfil that role. Another friend joined the air force and similarly we again wished him well. We could have ended up dressing them down and saying that black men don't do these things, but we remembered that we are individuals first. When we have done well in our different roles, we have celebrated this as individuals and not 'oh you only achieved this due to positive discrimination' or whatever. Once you get that baggage you lose your momentum, and you lose belief – it's important to instil this first."

What do think the NHS could do better to help black people?

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The problem with the NHS is funding. When you go to see your GP – they only have eight minutes to sit down and talk with you. So, what can you achieve with eight minutes? How can you explain in that amount of time what is wrong? Depending how tuned in the GP might be, they might be able to decipher what you are saying and begin to help, but mostly they don't have the time or the understanding so can only listen and then end up writing a generalised prescription to deal your problem. That's what we are dealing with. Many GPs will look at you and say you have this general illness and will just write you a prescription and send you on your way. But they don't really get into the factors that have caused this health problem and what has caused this stress. They may attribute it to the challenges of everyday living, but they don't go deeper into understanding about the discrimination that might be causing it.

So, we can take the medication – whether for something like stress or blood pressure – but it doesn't really change anything because it doesn't change the environment that we are in. Surely someone in the NHS should be looking at this in more detail – and why black people, ethnic minorities in general or people from deprived communities have more of these health problems. Is any analysis done? Is there any understanding of how the experiences of black people's health might differ from the wider community? Is it too complicated to fund or research? I think it is a problem that is covered over, as it is too complicated to discuss and there isn't enough funding to do anything.

I'm afraid that if you haven't got a mainstream illness then you not going to get the full treatment you need. It would be good to know how much funding does go into looking at health concerns for black people locally – for more specific health concerns such as sickle cell anaemia but then also what amount of specific resource might be set aside to look

Colin

at the mental health of black people as part of mainstream mental health services. Is the type of counselling and treatment currently available appropriate for black people? There is evidence to show that black people are even more at risk in terms of their mental health than the wider community. Is funding dedicated to the BAME community being spent appropriately and most effectively?

There seems to be a big stigma around getting tested for certain health conditions too among black men – particularly around conditions such as prostate cancer. Rates are much higher in the black community and yet men aren't getting tested. I include myself in that grouping. My brother has had prostrate problems and I was reluctant to go for a check as it's quite an intrusive procedure, but my wife insisted, and I went. I was subsequently out with a couple of friends and one said he had prostate cancer, I said I had had a test, but our friend laughed it off – his attitude was very 'he-man'. We pulled him to one side and said we are in the high risk for this condition so get yourself checked. The next time I saw him was at my other friend's funeral – he had had the

check by then but was still embarrassed to talk about it. We need to find a way of getting black men to attend these tests and not put it off – we need to have a way of talking to them in a safe space so that they understand the importance of this. The doctor doesn't have to be Black Caribbean, but just needs to approach us and our concerns in the right way - we just need to have a safe space to talk about these things. A bad experience will put people off going back again to the same place. The NHS needs to understand this and be more aware of our needs. It would be good to have targeted services for black men, but we also need to ensure the mainstream NHS services are understanding our needs too."
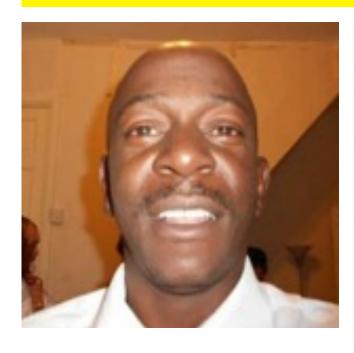
Colin

What about other support and opportunities to stay healthy?

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Our environment is really important. I think as a community we don't always appreciate what's beyond the city boundaries. Why should the countryside be alien to black communities? We are British born and we have a right to use and access these locations, we pay our taxes! As a group we should make an effort every now and again to meet up and go for a walk somewhere in the countryside. We need that freedom, that fresh air, that time out – we know it's good for the mind to see green trees, rivers and the countryside! If people are doing things like this we can change their dynamics – get them to think more about their health and what they need to be thinking about to stay well, as well as thinking about other things such as employment and education. We need to make these changes and start to look at things differently. We can't wait for these changes to happen to us.

We also need to work with other groups and networks outside of the black community. The black lives movement isn't a radical political organisation to take on the world – it is about acknowledging that we matter, and we need to work with others to achieve this. This includes how we work with health partners too – we do need support with this and in particular around training so that we can develop our own resources and competencies to support community members who may be struggling. People need to look at self-care management – this will need some resources to get it going and to raise awareness of key concerns in an appropriate way, and then we also need the support around this when concerns are highlighted to encourage people to take action. Getting together a group will help this. It doesn't have to be anything to formal. A simple thing such as a coffee morning or get together in a cafe, might work. This wouldn't require much in the way of resources. It's just having a safe space for people to talk."

Dave

Growing up:

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I grew up in a white and Asian community but had a strong link with the black community. We lived on Dodgson Road, but we originally lived in Avenham. My parents were both involved in the carnival and father was involved with a Caribbean club too. My parents kept ties with the black community and more specifically the Dominican community – where they were originally from. There were a lot of black community churches, but we never knew about them as we were brought up Catholic. So again, this was another reason why I didn't get to meet other black children when I was younger. Growing up I had very few black friends – only when I became a teenager. I was at St John Fisher Secondary school and this was mainly white children.

We had to deal with a lot of racism when we were growing up – we all just had to deal with it. We had it full on back then. I remember when I was in a pub in Chorley, and someone was saying 'we need to get these niggers out of here' but I was with a friend who was performing on stage, so couldn't leave. You had to be a good fighter back then and hold your ground ... if you weren't you had to be a good runner or you to go to the gym and workout – build up your muscles, so that people wouldn't pick on you. Football games were particularly bad. Racism was so blatant back then. It was a daily problem – particularly if you were out and about. You had to deal with nicknames all the time – being called 'chalky'. I didn't realise that a lot of it came from racism on television – people like Jim Davidson."

Dave

How did it affect you then?

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Well, you certainly didn't have much trust – you didn't trust white people at that time. When I was about 19, I ended up going to a Seventh-Day Adventist church – and it was completely different experience – people smiling – black and white, I just felt comfortable. The Caribbean Club was good back then too – you just felt comfortable. Sadly, this club has gone now. I would have kept it going if I could. I am working with the Dominican Association now to try and bring the community together."

How has it affected you now?

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It does affect you – you can't change those experiences, but I'm not really doing anything about it. At the moment, for instance, social media is a particular problem." He explained he is spending a lot of time on social media while on furlough, and this has been a good way of him keeping connected with friends and colleagues and not feeling isolated. However, there has been a downside to using these communication channels. "I've had recent issues of being called 'black Dad'. I couldn't deal with this appropriately as I didn't want to make enemies around this ... but it did upset me."

What could the NHS do about mental health?

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If we had black doctors, they would understand our needs better ... understand more about experiences. Having mentors from the community 'trained up' could also work to help people with mental health. Having a place to meet, like a centre, would be good too – an opportunity to talk."

Paul

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I was born and raised in Battersea, South London. My parents are both from the same village on St Vincent, a small island in the Caribbean and came over to England in the early 1960s. They both live in London still, and in the same home, where we grew up. I'm from a large family – a family of five (four brothers, one sister), although originally six, as my other sister sadly passed away. I am the middle of the five, age-wise. I grew up and went to school and college in London and lived there until early adulthood. So probably a slightly different mindset and way of life from living in Preston.

I grew up in a mixed community but quite a large proportion of Black and Asian people within this neighbourhood and the schools that I attended. In my teens I played a lot of amateur sport to a reasonable standard – playing cricket in this country and abroad, and football too to a lesser extent. From school, I went to college, then onto University where I studied Estate Management, and that's where my link to Preston is, as I met my partner (from Preston) during these studies."

Moving to Preston

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"We then moved up to Lancashire together. In terms of my work history, I started in Telewest working on a call line and customer care centre, onto working for window furniture company, then a wholesalers before getting a job working for social services in Salford for about 10 years (mainly working with the elderly). For the last six or seven years I have been working for a housing company.

My early experiences were probably very different to some people here in Preston because of where I grew up. In London I didn't experience much of what you would call 'in your face' racism. The odd time you might hear someone say a derogatory term, but it wasn't a very common thing for me growing up in a pre-dominantly black community. I came across a bit more racism when I started to get involved in sport around the ages of eight to 10 years old, but not much before then. You did hear about things when

you were younger, but it didn't impact me then. Where we grew up, we had our own battles and challenges – more about being poorer, but luckily, we didn't feel threatened or belittled within our community.

I did notice changes when I moved north as the demographic was very different and you did start to get more of a reaction – a double-take from other people – that you were different, but again even then I didn't feel it to be aggressive or sinister as such. Maybe I'm lucky – looking back, even when I came to Preston, I don't recollect any difficult time as such. I did notice the difference, though, living in Preston and particularly when I started playing sport again outside of Preston in places like Croston and Longridge where there are fewer people of colour. But again, I might only be there for an afternoon, I didn't have to live there so it wasn't a problem for me.

In terms of growing up in London, I had a good grounding in Battersea – we were always prepared for any battle. We were always told its you against the world, that's what being brought up in Battersea taught me - don't let anyone take advantage of you physically financially or anything like that. That helped me as I grew up.

My parents were very quiet people, quite placid. My Mum's a devout church goer. She taught me about being patient, compliant and avoiding confrontation in the face of adversity. My Dad was a very big guy. Again, he was also very compliant, but also emphasised that if I did have difficult situations you do have to stand up for yourself. I have probably been more like my Mum - more compliant. Where I could have avoided difficult situations, I have avoided them. That was how I dealt with these situations but if I had needed to stand up for myself then I would have done. In looking back, I didn't have many difficult situations – I was quite fortunate. I was quite different from my older brother – he had more challenges and perhaps difficult experiences."

Experiences of racism

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For me I have always had the mindset, that I know it's there [racism], but it's not affected me or held me back. While I wasn't affected by blatant racism, I was always aware of the potential damage and existence of covert or institutionalised racism, the racism you don't see. Even by my late teens, I understood that more blatant racism – people shouting terms like 'nigger' is not great, but it doesn't hurt you. I used to have it when playing sport but I knew that people were trying to put you off your game, so I developed a mechanism to not let it affect me – knowing it was just

words. However, I also realised that if those views were being held by people in power then that was more dangerous – for instance how it might affect me applying for a job, a loan or making progress in my working life. If I have done as well as my peers then I want to be treated in the same way, not to have to be better in order to reach the same level of acceptance. That's where it is wrong. I don't think people should have to better than their peers because of the colour of their skin. This is what really impacts your life, not so much the name calling – although I recognise this may not have been the same for everyone."

Impact of racism

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I recognise that it can be devastating for some, but for me I think it's partly down to the individual and how they handle it – some people will take the view from these bad experiences that they are not going to be beaten by this, rising above it and using it to spur them on. Whereas for others I understand that they will feel 'what is the point'. I think I'm somewhere between the two types and have experienced both sets of feelings at particular times. I have seen

the challenges for other people, though – how things have been blocked, how racism and its impact has affected them and held them back so much. Instead of taking themselves forward, they have lost energy and drive in trying to deal with things that they can't control. Their experiences have been so much for them that they have been consumed and overwhelmed and haven't been able to rise above the racism. This has then led to a more negative cycle and dumbed them down – denying them the opportunity of reaching their potential."

Paul

Mental wellbeing

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In terms of mental resilience, my own upbringing and Christian background has been really important and has given me good values such as togetherness and striving for better. I still lived at home into young adulthood and had a really stable and supportive family. My Mum in particular was very religious. During her life, she had six children and has had to deal with many adversities - including losing a child. I don't think my Mum could have coped without her religion and faith. My Mum is the loveliest person I have ever met, and an inspiration to me. While religion has been really important for me, I realise that some people may feel that religion is holding us back, by potentially making us being more patient, accepting and compliant with the status quo."
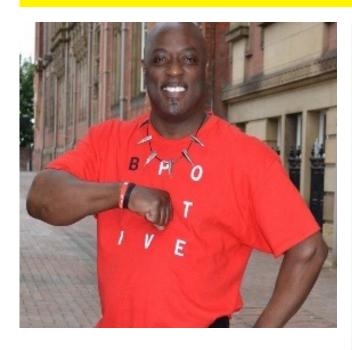
Having local support in place

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In general, I don't have any direct experience of mental health services, so I can't comment in particular with regards to improving these services. The people I have known with problems haven't been very open about their experiences. I do think, however, that groups like this (the Windrush Group) have an important role to play because they will be in a better position to understand the needs of the community whereas mainstream services won't have this experience of what people have been through - so how can these services understand this? Having said that I think we would need to make sure that a group like this has the resources in place, as well as the training and skills to support the community and that we could monitor the impact and value of this service. In addition, how would this be organised –

what kind of numbers of people could we support and benefit. Some people might only need support for one to two years, whereas others might need support for the rest of their lives. Obviously, this wouldn't replace clinical services, but could be an important complementary service. With that in mind it would be important that there was a long-term commitment (funding/resources where required) to supporting the Windrush Group.

I also think we need to do more work to support young people in their early teens (or even younger), right up to early adulthood, as this is the time that the community really needs support. We need these groups to give young people a unity grounding, building resilience and being part of something – this will alleviate and prevent a lot of the problems that people experience as they get older. For me, sport was very important in giving me that discipline, teamwork approach and ability to look after myself, but other approaches would be good too."

Ronald

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I was born and bred in Preston in the 1960s. My Mum and Dad were from Jamaica (Dad isn't with us anymore) and I grew up in Preston in a community that coalesced around the Seventh-Day Adventist church which is still going strong now. Workwise I am retired now but worked for the county for 40 years as a youth worker."

As a black man growing up in Preston, what have been the positive and negative experiences?

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The positives for me have been around where the black community has been able to come together or get together for social events. Those occasions have provided the opportunity for us to be of one mind. For black people growing up here, there is a duality of our consciousness where we are aware that we live in a white environment, very much living from day-to-day and having to adapt, and adopt our attitudes, thoughts and behaviours to fit accordingly with this because of the environment we live in. At these times we are not able to be ourselves. So, our only opportunity to be ourselves is when we come together as a community. At these times we don't have to be concerned about anything outside of this.

The negatives have been around the imposition of Eurocentric minds that impose a way of being – a way of having to follow the way that white people think and do things. We have had to negate ourselves culturally to fit in with this and we haven't had any representation within the agencies and institutions around us. This has meant we have had no profile and no relevance to these services."

How has this made you feel?

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The negatives are how this sends one out into the ocean – being cast adrift in a rowboat without any oars. We feel irrelevant just drifting with no value to anything or anybody. For instance, when I was working in the county council, the amount of time we would spend trying to justify our existence was extremely draining – there was no space for our thinking, our life experiences ... it was tiring.

When we come together as a community, it makes you feel connected, relevant and grounded. It makes you feel safe, in terms of being part of something bigger and relevant and part of something that everybody shares. It's non-judgemental. The fact that I have had an escape from the negativity with a strong grounded community has meant that I have been able to withdraw from the duality of existence and be myself ... not to have

to pretend and put up with crap. This has given the opportunity to recharge, refocus and regroup to face the wider challenges. But I realise that not everyone has had this opportunity. For other people, the challenges will have been significant, and I don't think the NHS would want to discover that 'rabbit hole'. It would open such a seismic chasm of fracture in our society that I really don't think the NHS or the government for that matter would be prepared to address. The domino effect for the system to deal with for this would be enormous – immeasurable even - which is why I don't think any authority, the NHS or anyone else for that matter, would want to take this on."

So, what could be done? Does religion, for instance, help?

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Religion can certainly help for some people, but it doesn't have to be religion, as this won't work for everybody. When I was growing up, I was part of a religious community and that helped me, but I also had connection with other black groups within Preston that served the same purpose. In Preston there was Jalgos and the Caribbean club – the former acting as a support to families from Jamaica and the latter to those from the other Caribbean islands. There were also other smaller groups, for example, the Montserrat Association and the Jamaican National as well as others around a sporting community and of course, Carnival. All of these provided a similar purpose for people to be connected, safe, relevant, respected and part of something. Over the decades many of these groups have gone, for one reason or another. I was fortunate in that my group / my church has continued going strongly – it has changed its demographic, but it's still there.

Ronald

When I was working for the county council as a youth worker, I was able to work with black young people and to provide them with another platform of support. So, the council, provided this but that was dependent on the skillset and politics of the county council being comfortable and able to support that at the time. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case – the county council doesn't have this service or motivation anymore ... and they will have their own reasons for this. Back in the day we had black youth groups for black young people ... it was very important as it was about creating safe space for those young people to be themselves. It recognised that while there were, for example, youth centres all over Preston for everyone, people will gravitate to the places that they feel comfortable. If they are not relevant, then people won't attend. That's why it was so important to have these particular centres for black young people (or centres for other particular needs) – a place and setting where those young people feel respected, appreciated, supported and enabled to be themselves."

[Traditional youth services and targeted youth services for black young people are no longer provided through Lancashire County Council]

Have you ever experienced direct racism and what has been the impact for you?

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That's an interesting question to ask. It assumes that we live in a neutral environment, and that within that we might then experience racism. The fact of the matter is that we live in a racist society, which impacts on people of colour ... additionally this society also has other inherent forms of prejudice – sexism, homophobia, discrimination towards people with disabilities and the list goes on. To then ask the question have we experienced racism (or other forms of prejudice) is an ignorant question. It's ignorant by virtue of the fact that this oppression exists all round us ... so why ask the question have you experienced it? Of course, I have experienced it in different ways and as time goes on it has evolved itself. So have I been called nigger?

Yes, I have been called nigger when I was younger but then because the way that this label is now seen as a bad word, we tend to not hear it used as much. However, just because we don't hear this more blatant racist language doesn't mean that racism no longer exists ... it has just evolved.

So, our children, for example, when we ask if they have to contend with being called nigger they say no because it is not used anymore, but to presume that they haven't experienced racism is ignorant. Racism has morphed over the years and changed its language – it's still here. I'm saddened for our youngsters because unfortunately they will be experiencing racism but will no longer be able to accurately identify it or understand what it is and why they are feeling so stressed. For instance, the young people at church will talk about how their teachers will speak to them about issues such as slavery, about discipline at home in their families and in cookery where they might be corrected about putting more spices in their recipes and told why would you do that? They are experiencing different kinds of interactions with white people that are clearly about challenging aspects of their cultural blackness and making them

uncomfortable but that they can't pick out as being out and out racism, as we might have originally known it. I had this very conversation recently with one group of young people who said that they have been trying to talk to teachers in school about their experiences of being black kids but haven't been able to get this across or be understood – the result being that they just withdraw because the teacher has the academic power over them to be able to make them feel inferior. So yes, it is still happening today, it's still happening everywhere, in schools, in work, in all our experiences."

What has been the impact of this?

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With the example, of children in schools, they will have to experience a curriculum that is discussing matters that can be very difficult for them and they have nowhere to go to make sense of this. The experiences of many of us going through schools has been pretty horrific in general, but then to still have a curriculum that doesn't take account of black people's experiences is really concerning. Young people have nowhere to process this information, nowhere to offload how they feel and no one they can discuss this with in the academic environment – they are then always made to feel less through their experience.

These experiences of young people have become particularly significant as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement ... they are seeing that these statues of slave owners have been attacked and have been pulled down. They have been exposed to all the media coverage of this. They can see that something is wrong, but they don't know what to do about it. They are feeling horrible in the current situation at school or wherever, as the media are talking about the African continent, about poverty and about slavery. So, imagine black children in school, in the classroom - having to process all this horrendous information. Then to make matters worse, there is the white reaction to statues being pulled down, and more recently the challenge to people singing 'land of hope and glory' with all its racist undertones."

What do you think would help young people navigate their experiences of racism?

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Teachers will need to play a massive role as they're the interface for young people. My concern, however, is that they are not skilled enough to do that. They are not aware enough to fulfil this role. Racism in British society has put paid to that, in that most white people don't have the capacity or critical faculty to accommodate working with black people and to support them in processing this whole experience. In schools there has to be wholesale change to the curriculum ... full stop. It has to change.

You have this nonsensical example given by our prime minister who – in my view – played politics and games with the BBC when he was interviewed about the Last Night of the Proms and the singing of Land of Hope and Glory ... and he used a phrase to describe 'the stupidity of not being able to sing that wonderful joyous song that makes us so proud'. That's where the problem is. I appreciate that there are people who believe that Britain has such an illustrious history and indeed it has in the contributions it has made in a positive way to the lives of millions of people across the planet but there is absolutely zero recognition that it also f**ked up ... and that needs to be acknowledged. It's about the extent to which we take responsibility for what we want to represent. At the moment there are a whole host of mechanisms that prevent the amending of an evil, oppressive, demoralising and judgemental history that people are not prepared to acknowledge. There is a responsibility for white people to accept that previous generations have much to answer for. I realise it will be very scary for a lot of white people to say 'yeh, my uncle really did f**k up and I don't support it. I love my uncle but he f**ked up, it was bad, it was wrong, it was amoral, it should never have happened .... but I still love my uncle, as he was my uncle. In respect of how we deal with this in schools there are those hurdles we have to overcome. You'll have the mindset that says, why do we have to get rid of these statues of these people from history (people who were supporting the slave trade or colonists on the African continent). There are still these fractures in British history that we are still saying have to be maintained and – we are still 'marinading' people in all of that and not holding our heads in shame for what we did all those centuries ago. It is a massive job to change this and a lot of systems that have to be changed ... to an extent, humbled, to address that. In terms of teachers, who will have the confidence to address this – particularly if this means exposing the evils of what past generations have done? Even though there are hundreds and thousands of teaching staff who are well meaning, intelligent, fair, honest and respectful, who will be comfortable challenging the status quo and exposing these past evils?"

Ronald

What do you think the NHS could do to improve the wellbeing of black people? Would training help?

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That's an interesting question. For a long time, I was a trainer for Lancashire County Council involved in developing anti-racist strategies within the authority. This involved running training sessions for magistrates, social workers, teachers and the police around adopting anti-racist strategies ... and I did that for many years (until the late 1980s). But there came a point when I decided to stop doing the training programmes because I didn't feel that they were being effective. I didn't feel they were addressing or changing racist behaviours/attitudes – all I felt we were doing was training white people to be better informed racists as we weren't getting to the root of the problem – we were just stopping the blatant racist behaviour. At that point we realised that there was a need for institutions to look at racism in a more structural way.

So, from the point of the view of the NHS they need to have the deliberate and determined mechanisms that clearly discourage any existence of racism within the institution. At the moment I don't think there is the appetite for that. I have a personal example of this. I was part of the B Positive Choir, who were set up to support the NHS Blood and Transplant service, raising awareness of the importance of donating blood – particularly with emphasis on sickle cell anaemia (common in people of African descent). We were very successful and made it to the finals of Britain's Got Talent in 2018. We discovered - during the time that we were going through the finals – that the NHS were not so positioned to help the choir to do everything it needed to do in order to get where it wanted to be. Despite being run by the NHS Blood and Transplant service, the NHS did not put into place all the mechanisms required for this choir to be as effective as it could be.

The case in point was that a number of years prior to our experience, the NHS had set up another choir called NHS Voices – a predominantly, if not all, white choir. The NHS put all its big guns and departments behind this choir, and it did well in the charts at the time. Unfortunately, when our choir got involved with Britain's Got Talent, the NHS machine never swung into action like it did for NHS Voices, and we couldn't understand why. We made it through the auditions, got through to the semi-finals and even to the finals and throughout this the NHS marketing machine never got involved and promoted us. This support would have been massive – this was despite the fact that our appearances significantly increased blood donations - they exceeded their donation targets by 500% as a result of our first appearance alone.

So, I have to question whether there is the political will to make change within the NHS. My question back is why aren't they asking this question of themselves? This is up to those who are responsible for the structures within the NHS – those responsible for the procedures, protocols, rules and regulations and guidance. It needs to be put to them. To now ask the question, would it be alright to have some 'harm reduction programme' that the NHS leads on then obviously this would be good, but it can't be developed in isolation without acknowledging the importance of structural changes too. My concern is that they will say, this is good idea, but we don't have the money to do that ... but we can fund a website and you can text your anxiety to this number. This problem seems to be perfectly balanced to be imbalanced!

Ronald

So even back to when I was working within the County Council Youth Service, I worked with many white colleagues within the youth service who understood that they were racist, and that racism was a systematically and genetically occurring component within white systems. They had the capacity to make that kind of analysis. As a group of black youth workers at the time we identified that we needed to have space to explore our dual consciousness that we were having to experience 24 hours a day – knowing on one level that we have to exist and operate in a way that white society wants us to operate and then another consciousness that is about our connection with ourselves and our communities – both of which are separate and diametrically opposed. We needed permission to develop support structures to enable us to remain sane in the first instance as black workers, but also for us to evolve our practices to ensure that black young people can get access to that safe space that they ordinarily don't have within the county council services.

We wanted senior management to enable us to do those two things: to give us space to deal with our own stress – the burden of this dual consciousness - but also to evolve county council services that we provided so that they could be more relevant for black young people. We never got that support from senior management across the council – this was despite the very progressive nature of the youth service at the time. So, even though we asked for this, it never came. That was about the youth service, but we are asking these questions across all these services continuously. The point here to ask is when are system leaders going to recognise that they need to make change, themselves? So, please stop asking black people what they want because we are fed-up of asking."

Ahmed

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I was born in 1973 in Fishwick, Preston. My parents came here from Dominica, an island in the West Indies. My father came over first and then my mother joined him soon after. My father had originally gone to London, but soon moved to Preston, as there was a community of Dominicans already living here. My family first lived on Tennyson Road off Acregate Lane in Fishwick. Preston suited the Dominican culture as it was a little more laid back, compared to living in a city like London. When my father first came over, he was looked after by a Methodist church – they looked out for him and found him a place to stay. He got himself a job working in Farrington Foundry as an overhead crane driver. Both my parents were working. My father was a very stern and firm man and didn't smile a lot. My brothers and sisters feared him, but we had a close relationship. My mother used to work in care homes. In terms of parenting, both my mother and father were always busy, and we had big family of five.

My Dad also had three children in the West Indies, and one joined us, when there were funds to afford her travel ... so then there were six children in the house. Growing up, we had the Caribbean club in Preston (not there now unfortunately) and I loved going there – a real community feeling. You felt safe as you had family and relatives in other rooms – it was just a nice place to come together.

I went to Ribbleton Hall School and most of the children came from the Moor Nook estate (white families). My experience in that school was hard as I had never seen the kind of deprived behaviour that those children displayed. We had grown up with very strong morals and principles and my Dad was very much about instilling these behaviours. We had to go to church on Sunday and wear the most impeccable suits and clothes to make a good impression. At Ribbleton Hall school things were very different and I experienced some terrible racism back then, worse than I have experienced since. I was shocked but at the same time I realised that I was very privileged: both my parents worked, I had to pay for my dinners, and I had quite clear parameters in terms of morals and principles. When I visited the homes of other children it was like another planet to me. As a result of the racism, I ended up getting picked on and getting into a few fights. I was able to hold my own, but the racism didn't stop. Even when going

Ahmed

out with girls it was a problem. I remember one saying, 'I can't go out with you because you're a nigger'. It was sad, I just felt sorry for her. I wasn't that hurt but just shocked at how these behaviours had been passed on to the children. I felt okay because I knew my family had instilled good principles and good behaviour, and just felt very privileged.

College was okay, it was very multicultural. University was fine too (it was in Lancaster), even though there weren't many black people there, as people were much more open-minded. It was at this time that I began to understand about more subtle racism. It was actually a white woman who made me more aware of this. Lancaster was a great experience for me, and I learnt a lot about race and racism during my time there. At that time I read a lot about Africa and significant individuals in black history – such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and began to look towards them as role models, people to emulate. I soon recognised that they had many different viewpoints that often clashed. Most were encouraging black empowerment, but some were very anti-white too and I struggled with these. These people achieved a lot but what I found was that most of their progress was 'tokenism' – there to make change

and being given the opportunity to make change but really ineffectual in terms of real outcomes. I only realised this as I got older.

Within my community growing up one thing that really bothered me was that we were under-represented in many areas. Whether it was in education, the police or other positions of influence, it was all white faces – no black role models. It really infuriated me that there wasn't enough representation there. This still hasn't really changed. On the other hand, what I did see was a lot of black guys with white women, but not always in a good way. These men were players and just had multiple relationships. I felt sad that this was their main objective. Similarly, I think that the white women involved were just interested in going out with black men. These relationships haven't lasted and what do they have to show for it? Obviously, there is no problem with mixed relationships, but the objective of many of the black men involved was to have a white partner as a measure of success – which seems really sad to me. Was that all they were good for? Was that a measure of success? It also seemed to me to be really negative towards black women. I remember the experience of one man at the time. He had been a really good dancer and won this dancing competition

on television. I remember he had many white girlfriends but one he went out with for a long time. Sadly, she broke up with him and it completely messed him up – he never recovered. He had invested so much in this relationship and its success.

In Preston, I had felt we had quite a good multicultural community. Growing up I was involved in a couple of breakdancing groups that were big at the time and they were all mixed - white and black together. We had special breakdancing nights at the Caribbean club, and everyone used to go to them. The same was true of my older brother who was really into funk, and again this was a very multicultural scene. But this now seems to have changed so much, particularly since Brexit. I can't believe it, it seems to have brought out the closet racists – particularly on social media and the way they talk about 'migrants'. It reminds me of growing up with the National Front – it's the same tone. Unless you have experienced it then you wouldn't know or understand. The fallout on social media has been really sad. The rhetoric towards Muslims has been really bad too – very similar to the abuse towards blacks. This was from people who previously may have been white friends. Now we have Black Lives Matter and there is another falling

Ahmed

out with comments around 'why are they pulling down our statues'? With social media there has been an opening up of hidden feelings and seeing people as they really are. There may be some really good reasons for having Brexit but among this has been this 'anti-migrant' attitude – it's very divisive.

As I grew up, I became very much more conscious of my identity and became aware and interested in Islam. I had been brought up as a Christian, but when I looked at the different religions I felt more of a connection with Islam and became a Muslim. At the time I was probably the only Black Muslim in Preston and I did feel quite lonely and isolated. My family and community didn't understand why I had become a Muslim, although I may have influenced others to consider this choice. I had some really good support from the Asian community at the time – particularly at the mosque in Frenchwood – many of the families would look after me and look out for me and support me. I have maintained these good links and it's been an important safety net for me and my family. At first, I wore all the clothing and everything, but as I became more aware, I understood that Islam could take many

forms and it's important not to lose your cultural identity within this. I married my wife who also became a Muslim and we have brought up our children as Muslims too.

In terms of my working life, I was trained as a youth worker and was first based in Lancaster working with black and ethnic minority young people. That was a good role; we were able to take the group to Northern Ireland to see the impact of growing up in communities where there were people have opposing views of religion. We took them to Brixton to understand what it's like living in a community that is renowned or has a history. We then did a project in Sedburgh – a very rural and white community – to explore what it would be like for a black person (and the local community) to live in such a town. We videoed interviews with local community residents and it was very enlightening for the students to see and hear the reactions. We did another project exploring rival tensions in Lancaster between travellers, the Asian community and some of the other local white working-class estates. This involved bringing young people from different communities together, unpicking some of the problems and planning joint events and activities. I then worked in Skelmersdale and the Fylde area on youth projects and these

were good experiences. I am now a Family Support Worker in Preston but currently looking at another role as a DWP Coach.

In terms of my involvement in the Windrush men's health group, this came together a few years back, when we were invited to be part of a residential event called 'Inspiring You'. The original plan behind the programme was that we would be trained as mentors to work with young people within the community, and to take referrals from agencies. This didn't take off as a programme, but the residential itself was a bit of an opening in the sense that we started talking as a group about our life experiences of growing up in Preston. This was the first time that some of the group had opened up about their experiences and the baggage that they had been carrying around all their lives. We were overwhelmed by this, as many of those who were there were significant individuals who were renowned in the community as strong characters, somebody to be feared and not to be messed with, and we saw them melt like that butter. It was the environment that allowed them to speak openly and get things off their chest. One of individuals just broke down in tears and just wouldn't stop crying for a good four hours. There was an opening there and it was hard to see this individual going

Ahmed

through this – and that then led to our men's health group and this sense that we had to address this together. Initially we started looking at more physical health and exercise programmes, but I was more interested in addressing the mental health concerns and the baggage that we had all been carrying. Against this was the rising number of teenage suicides in the community too. That's why we wanted to start to look at this project. While our challenges date back, many of us are still experiencing racism in our lives – in schools, in work and in the wider community. It doesn't matter how high you go; we are still experiencing this racism.

What's the solution? For me personally, it's about the community having someone that they know and that they can talk to would be a good thing. It doesn't have to be a 'mental health' session – it could be more of an informal thing where we agree to call one another just to see how people are doing. We also need to look at other ways of coming together informally to help this situation – maybe monthly meetings, going for walks, going camping, maybe cooking sessions – just opportunities to come together and chat. As a community, we need to be better prepared

around mental health and the impact of it, and how we deal with it as a community. How we also address the stigma of this too. We can't turn our back on this. We haven't dealt with this well in the past. At the same time, I do think we need professionals who can understand and address our specific mental health needs. We also need quick access to these services too ... not the current system we have. Even a mental health first aid training course could be a starting point for us.

This project is the start of trying to make a difference, although I have personally already been looking at courses and have undertaken a mental health practitioner course online through Warwick University. It gave me a good insight into the issues involved and I plan to encourage others to look at this course and other opportunities to skill us up. If the NHS is able to put something in place quite quickly in terms of getting more training, then that would be great. Training for community members, but also training for health care professionals so that they better understand the needs of black people. I know they will say that they treat all people equally, but the health statistics don't indicate that, so something isn't working.

In addition to this and on the back of the recent Black Lives Matter movement, I think we also need to look at a new group locally – a collaboration of local black groups in Preston – that will be a voice to speak on behalf of the community to stakeholders, like health services, the police, etc., to address issues of concern. There are differences within the black community – particularly between residents whose families originated from Jamaica and those from the other islands in the West Indies and it's important that we address these. It is encouraging that there is really positive action in Preston from our council – who have been standing in support with the community on recent events. A nice gesture and you don't get this from all councils, but we do have people who are listening to us and are prepared to listen to us. So, we may have an opportunity to create something here – we need to work together. First as a black community and then bring in the wider community and those who want to help us."

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