

# STARLIGHT

Starlight Black Child  
Mixed Heritage Group

December 2008

A newsletter for families, friends and professionals with a keen interest in issues related to black young people of mixed heritage.

## Editorial

### Welcome to the December issue of our newsletter.

What a lot can happen in three months! We have our first black US President and the first black FI World Champion! Exciting times and great role models for our children.

This issue is packed with interesting articles that we hope will spark some lively debates amongst our readers. Included in this issue is an article kindly written for us by Jane Lane, author of the book 'Young Children and Racial Justice' recently published by the National Children's Bureau. There is also an article summarising a speech made by Peter Harvey at the National Black Crown Prosecutors Association's (NBCPA) eighth annual conference held on 31 October. He discusses the way we might deal with knife and gun violence amongst our young people. Darcus Howe discusses the introduction of the term 'mixed race' and offers an interesting explanation. We also briefly touch on the common assumptions made about black people's ancestry.

We are particularly pleased and

proud to be celebrating the accomplishments of a group of young people who we are working with and their fantastic showcase evening in October at the Town Hall. Well done to everyone who took part!

Last, but not least, we are looking to become a part of the National Black Boys Can Association as one of their Excell3 Centres of Excellence, running their WISE project.

So it would seem things are moving in the right direction and we would like to take this opportunity of wishing all our readers a peaceful and happy time over the Christmas period and a **HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE!**

### THANK YOU!

We would like to say a very special thank you to Tracey Ruskin who has been on placement with us from Ruskin College. We are sorry she has to move on to another placement as she has been such an asset to us and we have thoroughly enjoyed working with her. We hope she will keep in touch and we wish her well in her studies. We will miss her.

### Get in touch

Remember, we are always pleased to hear from our readers. If anyone would like to write an article, particularly for the Personally Speaking item that we like to include in each issue, it would be fantastic. Any comments or feedback is also welcome so we hope to hear from you soon.

### Do you know who this is?



He lived between 1807-1867 and may well have been the first truly international black superstar. Do you know his name or what he achieved in his life? Turn to page 4 to find out.

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## Young Children and Racial Justice by Jane Lane



Racism is a scourge in our society. As readers of this newsletter will know only too well, it affects the lives of all of us, mixed heritage/mixed race, adults and children, black and white, alike.

But despite its strong influence, its damaging effects and its crippling consequences it is a

word that many people are fearful of using, let alone talking about and understanding. It is associated with many negative feelings – guilt, ignorance, fear of using the 'wrong' word or of being accused of 'being a racist'. It paralyses many into inaction and an avoidance of anything that might raise apparently 'difficult' and uncomfortable situations. It affects nearly all issues involving young children – in child rearing practices, in legislation, in policies, in the organisation of early years services and settings and in training.

I have been working in the field of racial equality and young children for many years. When the National

Children's Bureau (NCB) asked me if I would like to update a book I had written some years previously, I saw this as a specific opportunity to explore the issue of racism and its implications for people who work with and care for young children. Four hard years and nearly four hundred pages later my book was published.\*

I believe that it is almost impossible to put racial equality into practice unless there is a real understanding of racism, what it is and what it is not. If we do not understand why racism exists in the first place and how it is perpetuated and manifested, how can we know how to break down the existing racial hierarchies of language, ethnicity, religion, culture and skin colour? How can we help ourselves not to make negative assumptions, judgements and stereotypes about people who are different from us? How can we engender genuine and honest notions of respect and equal value if such mostly unrecognised aspects of our lives influence our opinions of, and behaviour towards, others? We only have to read the newspapers, visit websites and blogs and access evidence of the ways that racism is practised to realise the way it impinges on the lives of us all, including the lives of young children.

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### Special points of interest:

- Jane Lane's article
- Going for Gold Showcase Evening
- National Black Boys Can Conference in January 2009
- **FREE SUBSCRIPTION**

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 adverts arrive by 28 February 2009

Next issue: March 2009

## Starlight to become a WISE (Black Boys Can) project and one of Excell3's Centre of Excellence

On Friday, 5 December we travelled to Birmingham to meet with Stephen Brooks, the National Network Development Manager for The National Black Boys Can Association.

He had previously visited us at 26 Kingfisher Green in October and had observed us working with some young offenders who were participating in our 'Move On Up!' course. He also met one of the young people currently working with us to complete the 'Going for Gold' course.

Following these observations and discussions he suggested we might wish to consider becoming one of their Excell3's Centre of Excellence. This meeting in Birmingham was therefore a follow-up meeting to explore how we might achieve this status.

Excell3 is the umbrella organisation for the WISE project, which is where we fit. We are an educational project that aims to raise



aspirations and attainment of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds irrespective of their gender or race.

We think this will be a very good opportunity to gain partners who hold the same values and belief in the potential of people.

The National Black Boys Can Association is also looking to run our Going for Gold course, the Raising Aspirations of Young Men & Fathers and the Inspiring Confidence parent engagement course in their regional centres.

It looks like we are ending the year on a high and are looking forward to developing more partnerships with organisations in 2009.

Please do get in touch if you too would like to explore ways in which we might work together - "Out of many, one people" (the Jamaican motto).



## Youth Crime in the UK - why don't we treat it like a public health problem?



Peter Harvey, the first African-American to become Attorney General in the New Jersey US State, was speaking at the National Black Crown Prosecutors Association's (NBCPA) eighth annual conference on 31 October this year.

He questioned why we don't treat knife and gun violence like a public health issue. According to Harvey, if there was an outbreak of flu we wouldn't simply wait for people to die; we

would treat those who are sick and also prevent other people from getting sick. There would be a 'multi-pronged' response including giving information to people about how to avoid it; we would give medication and vitamins to people so they could inoculate against it. For those that had picked up the symptoms we would offer them treatment and the ones who were actually ill would be treated more aggressively.

He argued that violent behaviour is learned behaviour and this can often be taught unwittingly by adults at home as they solve their own problems with violence. If they learn to problem solve by watching two adults treat each other as

if neither of them matter then they will also solve their issues with violence.

He referred to a project in New Jersey known as 'Project Vision' that reflects the type of after-school programme that can make a difference. He feels there are enough singers and dancers and we need programmes where young people do homework and focus on what profession they may want to enter and what qualifications they will need to attain it.

He emphasises the need for a collective solution to a collective problem and it is an issue for us all.

(adapted from an article in *The Voice*, 10-16 November 2008)

## What's behind the Term 'Mixed-Race' - A fear of Black Unity?

According to Darcus Howe, writing in *The Voice* he believes the term 'mixed race' was introduced by those in power in an attempt to undermine the black unity that arose in the late 60s and throughout the 70s. Howe points out that you will find this term on official forms, in the white press and he believes it is accepted by those who wished their children to be superior to the mass of 'darkies'. He argues that it has never been a popular term claiming it lacks 'authenticity among the mass and lacks too an ease of statement'.

He wrote this article following the successful election of Barack Obama as the US President. He feels that anyone claiming he is not black but of mixed race is up to mischief. Howe points out the incessant struggle to end racism that has raged in American society for hundreds of years and that Obama's election represents a huge leap forward in this struggle. To engage in a debate about whether Obama is 'mixed race' or black should not distract anyone from the real message of this election that black Americans are at the heart of this movement for change.

**What do you think? We'd be pleased to hear from our readers, so do get in touch.**

(adapted from an article in *The Voice*, 17-23 November 2008)

## Where do you come from?

Many black people have, according to Trina John Charles writing in *The Voice*, accepted that they are African. However, according to Cambridge DNA services, a quarter of all African-Americans and African-Caribbeans are the direct descendants of white Europeans.

It is common to look at history with completely pre-conceived ideas and assumptions about black people's heritage says Nick Barratt, CEO of Sticks Research Agency and historical researcher of programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* The common format is that of African slave brutally mistreated by white slave owner, having being shipped over from Africa to work in the plantation. However, this just isn't the case and each individual, each island or American state will have their own individual story.

For example, when Barratt was researching Colin Jackson's heritage, his DNA

tests showed that he only had 55% Sub-Saharan African genes, 38% European and 7% Native American.

It is also easy to assume that all white people were brutal, violent, rapist slave masters yet there are exceptions to this too. There are cases of white men and black women cohabiting and having families despite the racism and oppression present at the time. For example, Morgan Freeman discovered that his great-great-grandmother Celia Johnson co-habited for 35 years with a white man, Alfred Carr, Freeman's great-great-grandfather. They continued to live together after the end of slavery and had eight children together. They were prohibited from marrying but when they died they were buried side by side in Attala County, Mississippi, along with their children.

(adapted from an article in *The Voice*, 8-14 December 2008)

# Going for Gold Showcase Evening in Oxford

## CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR YOUNG STARS!

On Friday, 17 October we hosted the 'Going for Gold Showcase Evening' at the Town Hall. It was a fantastic evening!

The African Choir opened the evening with an uplifting song, followed by seven powerpoint presentations on different black achievers - Oprah Winfrey, Walter Tull, Trisha Goddard, Martin Luther King, George Washington Carver, Nelson Mandela and Ben Carson. Rhaea had put together a display about Olaudah Equiano and spoke about his life. Messy Jam, a local dance troupe, performed an amazing dance routine in a small space. They were followed by two musical performances - both original compositions - the first by Esther Tolani with the message that we all have to work hard to strive for what we want, followed by Laura Gayle whose lyrics summed up a powerful message of the evening that we are all unique and equal and we should not accept injustice or cruelty to others.

The Lord Mayor presented all the young people with their certificates at the end of the evening. It was a very moving and impressive show and the young people had clearly all worked really hard on their presentations - and all out of school time!

We continue to meet on a Tuesday after school between 5 and 6.30pm. The young people have found the opportunity to speak about their experiences in

school extremely useful. Part of the course asks them to look at what helps and what hinders them doing well in school and they are currently comparing their experiences with those expressed in a report, compiled by Sue, entitled 'I Can Do It!' that records young people of African Caribbean heritage's view of school in April 2005.

We have asked them to consider what they feel may have improved, stayed the same, got worse, or whether there are other issues that affect their ability to do well in school. Once this has been put together we hope to host an event in the Spring, offering teachers, connexions workers, youth workers and any other interested parties the opportunity to come along and hear these views as well as see footage of the showcase evening, demonstrating how well they worked on this course.

It is a real shame that none of the schools sent along anyone to see the hard work of the young people or celebrate their accomplishments. We sincerely hope more interest will be shown in the future and we are also keen to hear from anyone who would like to run this course in their own youth club, school or community group.

**Many thanks to Oxford Brookes University, Studio 45, Undacuva Promotions, Messy Jam, and The Lord Mayor for supporting this event and helping to make it happen.**

## Update from Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group

Since September we have struggled to open the Book and Toy library on a regular basis. We are so busy and we need more volunteers to help.

We will be re-opening on Saturday, 17 January 2009 between 2 - 4pm and on every other Saturday, during term time from this date. We have also been running the Move On Up! Course with some young people and two of the girls, Rachel and Athena, have offered to come and help. They both want to work with children when they leave school. So this could be useful experience for them

too We are really pleased to accept their offer and look forward to working with them in the New Year.

We also hope that the New Year will provide an opportunity to promote the Glad 4 Dads group and successfully apply for funding to run the Raising Aspirations of Young Men & Fathers course in the Spring of 2009.

As always, we welcome new members and would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to help us organise events for the group.



(from left to right) Jael Russell-Cartwright, Oxford School, Zacc Hyde-Thomas, Oxford School, Tia Thomas, Oxford School, Addis Miller, Oxford Academy, Levi Hyde-Thomas, Oxford School, Kieran Ruskin, Matthew Arnold School, Laura Gayle, St Gregory the Great School, Esther Tolani, Cherwell School, Nendelmwa Goyol, Cheney School, Rhaea Russell-Cartwright, Oxford School.



THE NATIONAL BLACK BOYS CAN ASSOCIATION IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE BLACK BOYS CAN NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL PRESENTS

## BLACK BOYS CAN MAKE IT IN EDUCATION 'YES THEY CAN'

A National Conference for Black Boys and their Parents/Carers

SATURDAY 24TH JANUARY 2009

Emmanuel Conference Centre  
9-23 Marsham Street  
London SW1 3DP



Dr Sharon Byfield  
Author 'Black Boys Can Make It'



Lord Morris of Handsworth OJ



Rt Hon David Lammy MP  
Minister of Higher Education



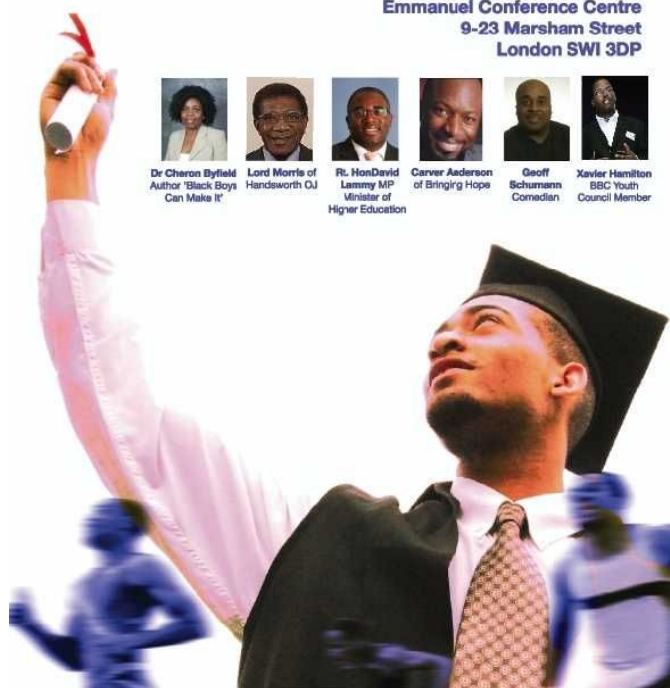
Carver Anderson  
of Bringing Hope



Geoff Schumera  
Comedian



Xavier Hamilton  
BBC Youth Council Member





**Continued from Page 1**

I have therefore tried to clearly define and demystify racism in order to understand it better. By doing this I hope that any previous apprehensions about it will be lessened so that honest and open discussions, within an ethos of no-blame, can take place. Everyone comes to such situations with their own experiences and their own social, educational and family backgrounds. How can we work together in getting rid of racism unless we recognise these differences and are able to talk about them together?

Of course I do not know all the answers to these questions but I hope that by opening up an opportunity for discussion those who want to make the world a better place for all our children may develop a forum to further this objective.

In the book I discuss such issues as the power of racism, the role of the media, being called a racist and whether black people can be racist too. I also define terminology and, among many other topics, describe what working within a no-blame culture might entail.

Within this context of understanding racism, the book includes sections on how children learn racial prejudice and how they might unlearn it, dealing with racist incidents, skin colour, name-calling, working and living in mainly white areas, the role of families and communities, terrorism,

legislation, government requirements, policy-making and a strategic implementation framework. There are detailed bits on Travellers, refugees and families and children with mixed race or ethnic backgrounds and lots of case studies for discussion. The full contents pages of the book can be seen on the NCB website.

As was to be expected (and not for the first time) some of the media published articles which distorted, ridiculed and took out of context what was actually written. An article describing the reactions, including vile blogs and emails, can be seen on the Institute of Race Relation website.\*\*

All this shows us what an uphill task we have to get rid of racism and its consequences for our children, black and white. If my book helps in this task I shall be well pleased.

Article written for Starlight's newsletter by the author Jane Lane

\**Young children and racial justice – taking action for racial equality in the early years – understanding the past, thinking about the present, planning for the future* (2008) by Jane Lane, published by the National Children's Bureau. [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk) Instead of buying it you can order it from your public library.

\*\*[www.irr.org.uk](http://www.irr.org.uk) Media hysteria around new book

## Poetry & Storytelling in Performance

A unique collaboration between Oxford Brookes University, Fusion Arts, Starlight Enterprise and the Learning Communities Initiative led to an Oxford Brookes University module being offered to members of the local community.

A series of Saturday workshops were hosted by Fusion Arts in June in preparation for a live performance at the Cowley Road Carnival in July. The course tutor, Steve Larkin, is the founder of Hammer & Tongue and is an internationally respected slam winning spoken word artist and singer. Six learners completed the course and have gained a Level 3 qualification. Steve thoroughly enjoyed working with the group and was impressed by the level of talent they demonstrated. He is keen to offer them an advanced course in the near future. There are also plans to run this course again soon, so keep your eyes peeled for more information. One student summed up the whole experience by saying: 'I was blown away by how good it was!'

An award ceremony was held at our office in Kingfisher Green in October to celebrate their achievement. Steve Larkin not only presented them with their certificates, he also allowed us to enjoy a snapshot of his own show too - brilliant! We also had the chance to see the young people perform again - a very inspiring evening.

Three of the successful students, Kymel Austin, Daniel Odong & Rory Campbell, have since gone on to gain a Licence to Teach by participating in the 'Preparation for Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector' course run by Adult Learning here in Oxfordshire. They now intend to participate in a year long project as mentors, working with Fusion Arts and Steve Larkin, to support other young people to complete the Poetry & Storytelling course as well as perform at a number of local festivals in 2009. They are also planning to deliver their own course 'Urban Music Academy' in the local community, starting January 2009.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THEM - 'CREATING OUR OWN ROLE MODELS'**

### Who was he?

**Ira Frederick Aldridge.** He was born in Africa in 1807 but got involved in the theatre in New York.

He went on to become the most decorated actor of modern times.

In 1825, Ira Aldridge arrived in London, and his first appearance was at the Royal Coburg Theatre. His career on the British stage spanned thirty years but his most famous role was as Othello at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden.

He was also an outspoken abolitionist in an era when slavery was endemic in the southern states of America. He donated much of his wealth to the fight for the emancipation of slaves and was knighted in 1858.



Rory 'Rawz' Campbell one of the G Block Family who took part in the course & went on to gain a Licence to Teach.

**FREE SUBSCRIPTION**

Please forward this issue to anyone you feel may like to join our list of subscribers. The newsletter is produced quarterly in December, March, June and September. It is distributed via e-mail to save on printing and postage costs and help the environment too.

**Send us your views or articles**

We welcome contributions from our readers and look forward to receiving your contribution. We hope that this newsletter will provide a forum for promoting positive relations, encouraging an open debate and aiming to improve race relations in Britain today. The deadline for the next issue is February 2009.

**Advertise in this Newsletter**

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- Full page: £150
- 1/2 page: £85
- 1/4 page: £45
- 1/8 page: £25

Please contact us with details. The deadline for the March newsletter is 28 February 2009