

STARLIGHT

Starlight Black Child
Mixed Heritage Group

September 2009

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 September issue of our newsletter.

Another disappointing summer although we were extremely lucky again this year with the 'Sounds like Summer' event in July as we enjoyed a gloriously sunny day. We were also lucky with the weather on the 'Kids Kare' fundraising day held on Saturday, 8 August.

We were devastated to hear that Michael Jackson had died on 25 June. Such a genius talent taken too soon. Despite some troubled times he remained an exceptional performer and he will be sadly missed. May he rest in peace.

We went back to Bristol for the second Going for Gold Showcase Evening and have included a poem about Bob Marley by Nick Willitts, who prepared this for his presentation. The Children's Society are also

running the Going for Gold course in Bristol this September with the intention of offering young people who complete the course the opportunity to facilitate the course with other young people. We also begin work with the Oxford Academy later this month, running both the Going for Gold course and the Inspiring Confidence programme with parents. We are looking forward to introducing a peer mentoring programme to compliment the Going for Gold course to help young people remain focused on doing well in their studies.

We have also been asked by Family Learning to work with young people and their families to put together an anti-knife education pack including a DVD for use in schools and youth clubs. We hope to complete this by December so that is available in January 2010.

The Mary Seacole Memorial Statue

The Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal was set up to create a permanent reminder of the 19th Century nurse and the winning design was revealed in June 2009. The artist Martin Jennings created the winning sculpture which is expected to be erected at the end of 2010 or early 2011. It will be located near Big Ben standing in the grounds of St Thomas' Hospital in central London. The Jamaican-born woman was also voted the greatest black Briton of all time in a poll in 2004.

generally - will feel very pleased because it's like a real recognition



The winning statue

In 1854, she approached the War Office asking to be sent as an army nurse to the Crimea where there were known to be poor medical facilities for wounded soldiers. She was refused but funded her own trip to the Crimea where she established the British Hotel near Balaclava to provide comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers. She also visited the battlefield, sometimes under fire, to nurse the wounded, and became known as "Mother Seacole".

Baroness Amos, the chair of the Mary Seacole Memorial Artist Selection Panel, said she richly deserved to be recognised. "People in - not just the black community, but in ethnic minority communities

of the contribution that we have made to Britain's history. Britain's history has been diverse for generations and we need to recognise and understand that."

Miss Seacole was the daughter of a Scottish soldier and Jamaican mother.

Mr Jennings said: "She'll be facing Big Ben and marching towards the river - a wind, as it were, coming off the river - representing in some ways perhaps the wind of the resistance that she had to push against constantly in order to achieve what she wanted to achieve with her vocation. This is a wonderful location."

(Extracted from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/8106416.stm> on 4 September 2009)

What relevance has this family to the Titanic?



The story of the 'Titanic' is familiar to most of us but do you know the significance of this family? Turn to page four to find out more.

'Overcoming Underachievement'

Sue was invited to talk at the Education and Health Promotion Symposium in East Oxford on Saturday, 20 June. A summary her talk is reproduced here.

'I recall researching the history of state education in England whilst studying for my degree, when it became apparent to me that state education was never intended to 'educate' the masses. The curriculum at that time was very much geared to the roles required by the economy which meant that reading, writing and arithmetic were essential for work in the new industrial towns and cities, with domestic skills for girls so that they could manage the household in this new division of labour between men and women. Add in a measure of Christian values to instil a sense of 'reward in heaven' if they were dutiful and hardworking and you have a 'tamed' workforce ready to serve the economy. The Education Reform Act (1988) was passed whilst I was studying this topic and the introduction of the National Curriculum seemed to mirror the same purpose more or less one hundred years later!'

Inside this issue:

'Overcoming Underachievement'	1 & 2
The Mental Health Service & BME patients	2
'A Little Time with Ahmed Baba'	2
'Kids Kare' Fundraising Event	3
Aston Rowant 'Sounds Like Summer' event	3
Businesses regret link with slavery	3
Community Development in Action course	3
First black 'Mock Mayor'	4
First black rabbi	4
Poem by Nick Willitt	4

Special points of interest:

- Mary Seacole Memorial Statue revealed
- Businesses regret links with slavery
- Overcoming Underachievement
- Bob Marley poem by Nick Willitt, aged 15
- **FREE SUBSCRIPTION**

Starlight BCMHG
26 Kingfisher Green
OXFORD OX4 7BX
Tel: 01865 776691
E-mail: StarlightEnt7788@aol.com

www.starlightenterprise.co.uk
Please ensure any contributions/
adverts arrive by 30 Nov 2009

Next issue: December 2009

Continued on page two

'Overcoming Underachievement'

Continued from page one

In fact, the 'Great Debate' in the 1970s talked of a crisis in our education system with James Callaghan speaking at Ruskin College about the poor level of literacy and numeracy skills amongst school leavers and the need for educational standards to be raised to help our economy thrive in an increasingly competitive global market. This indeed led to the legislation being passed by the Thatcher government in the 1980s.

My background as a white working class girl living in a village in Hampshire led to my leaving school with few qualifications and a belief that I wasn't very bright. It took until I had my son Rory in my late twenties for me to brave going back into education - only to realise I wasn't stupid after all! Combining my return to full time study with the experience of bringing up my beautiful black son of mixed heritage, I began to explore the impact racism can have on a child's achievements. Through my studies I had begun to see how the 'structure' of education could leave working class children like myself succumbing to teacher's stereotypical opinions about our level of ability, and a similar process seems to happen to black students too.

As a single white mother I wanted to ensure my son did not yield to others' negative opinions. I actively sought out books with positive images of black children and began to discover the hidden history of black people. This made me particularly angry to discover that even the limited education I had received at school had included a complete omission of anything positive about black achievements or their contributions to our society. Inevitably our education system covertly reinforces discrimination and inequality as we focus on a white Eurocentric view of the world. I was incensed that I had been educated to 'big up' the white European whilst remaining ignorant of the richness of other cultures.

I began to look a little more closely at my own

family's history - they were clearly educated to 'look up' to rich people and to serve the gentry with respect, diligence and humility. It was not their place to question those better than themselves - only to serve. This meant that my parents never questioned or challenged 'experts', including teachers who would make claims about 'lack of ability' or other similar remarks.

I do not believe there is a malicious intent by teachers to undermine the potential talents and ability of their students but I do think teachers have little time to consider what underpinning values, attitudes and beliefs they have grown up with that can often lead to preconceived ideas about who is likely to achieve and who is not. We are all a product of our upbringing and what life experiences we have had. If we are constantly presented with a world in which

We need to continue to campaign for a fair and equal education for all and we need to work collectively; recognising that there is more to unite us than divide us.

certain people are devalued or ignored, we are likely to pick up messages from an early age that some groups are inferior to other groups in society. Also, if we find ourselves defined as 'inferior' by this process we can begin to see the impact discrimination and negative messages can have on our perceptions of ourselves. It is therefore inevitable that without reflecting on whether some of these values, attitudes and beliefs may hinder our ability to really know someone from a different background to our own, it can lead to unfair, unconscious discrimination. Teachers are not immune from this process of making sense of the world and we all need to be willing to reflect on our values, attitudes and beliefs. Some of our beliefs may have been learned from parents or other significant figures in our lives but, whatever their origin,

beliefs are not facts. Beliefs are emotionally held opinions that we take to be true and that determine our subsequent actions. The more we become aware of our own negative attitudes towards others who are different from our self, and the way these attitudes influence our behaviour, the more likely we are to behave towards others in a non-discriminatory way. We need to begin to break down these barriers by raising our awareness in order to create a new 'us' group that embraces difference and sees it as a strength within the group and not as a weakness or threat.

Starlight works with talented young people out of the school setting and we find that they are often underperforming in school. Our NOCN accredited 'Going for Gold' course and 'Move on Up!' course are specifically designed to support young people and provide a platform for them to 'shine'. They can help a young person to regain a sense of their own ability and self worth, encouraging them to do well in their studies or other training and employment.

We plan to facilitate a conference whereby young people are given a voice and an opportunity to share their skills and talent with teachers. We would like schools to listen to their ideas and suggestions to begin to affect positive change that would benefit everyone. Teachers would find willing students prepared to work hard to succeed, students would feel valued and respected, working toward a win-win situation for all. We also need to empower parents and help them to gain confidence in their right to challenge a school system that may have failed them and is now failing their children. We can only do this if we overcome our own pre-judgements of each other and work together with the schools for positive change.

We need to continue to campaign for a fair and equal education for all and we need to work collectively; recognising there is more to unite us than divide us.

The Mental Health Service and BME patients

According to a recent guide *Liaison and diversion for BME service users* produced by Nacro, a crime reduction charity, there can be a tendency to 'over-estimate the risk posed by a black offender or mentally disordered black person, or to make damaging assumptions based on someone's race or culture'.

The guide sets out recommendations for criminal justice mental health liaison teams, highlighting the need to improve the experiences of black mental health sufferers who are denied proper support when they are transferred from courts or prisons to mental health teams due to cultural ignorance and stereotyping. Sometimes it may be as simple as not having access to an interpreter or not being made aware of the services available through to more serious assumptions about the black offender.

The Department of Health report, released in June, also noted that black and other ethnic minority BME patients were more likely to report having had a bad experience when visiting hospitals and primary care trusts. This includes finding it more difficult to build a relationship with health care staff and staff talking in front of them as if they were not there.

(adapted from an article in *The Voice*, 29 June - 5 July, 2009)

'A little time with Ahmed Baba' - William and Ahmed By Natty Mark

I know you know of William Shakespeare. So let me take a little of your time, to tell you of a contemporary of his. A fellow writer, from the West African country of Mali. A man called Ahmed Baba. Ahmed Baba Es Sudane, Ahmed Baba the Black. A celebrated Professor, at the Sankore School, of the University of Timbuktu. University of twenty-five thousand students.

Ahmed Baba, taught by Mohammed Bagayogo, a paramount figure of Malian intelligentsia, who was a Professor at two of the schools, of the Timbuktu University. Taken away from his beloved Timbuktu, by the Moroccan invader; across the desert in chains, dumped in a Marrakesh prison. Released, due to the outcry from Moroccan academia. Continuing to write, teach and advise. Finally, with the permission of the new Sultan, he was allowed to return to Timbuktu. Fourteen years in exile. Ahmed Baba, who wrote more than forty books, on such diverse subjects, which he also taught, as history, law, theology and grammar. Whose personal library of 1600 books, was lost during the Moroccan invasion. The Ahmed Baba Institute, a Malian archive and research centre, is named in his honour. Ahmed Baba the Black; brightest star in the Songhai Constellation. Next time someone speaks of William Shakespeare, tell them of his contemporary, Ahmed Baba. Thank you for taking a little time, to get acquainted with him.

©Natty Mark Samuels 2009

'Kids Kare' Fundraising Event - Raising money for Oxford Young Carers

During the Easter holidays Glen and Sue received a letter requesting the use of their office in Kingfisher Green. The letter had been written by Lisa-Caitlin Crawford, aged 8 and Caitlin Dickerson, aged 11. Glen and Sue were given 24 hours to let them know whether they would be willing to help!!

This was the start of a series of weekly meetings where it be-



Lisa-Caitlin, Alanta & Caitlin - the organisers of the event

came clear that the girls and their friend Alanta, aged 10, had been discussing putting on an event to raise money for the Oxford Young Carer's Project. Alanta is a young carer and she enjoys attending the project and the opportunity to go on outings and participating in events with the project.

The girls designed the poster to advertise the event. They wrote letters to local businesses asking

for their support. They received a £100 voucher from TKMaxx, lots of items from Marks and Spencer, and an assortment of other prizes that helped to make it a successful day.

The Oxford Young Carers project is a charity that offers support, advocacy in school, one to one support, time out from caring and trips away. Oxford Young Carers Project Manager, Verity Falvert-Martin commented on the girl's initiative: "This fundraising day is a real celebration of Young Carers and their contribution to their local community! We hope that this day will highlight and raise awareness of Young Carers and help to find hidden Young Carers across Oxford City! ... The Young Carers Project want to say a big thank-you to Alanta, Lisa-Caitlin and Caitlin for all their dedication, time and hard work they have put in to make this day a real success!"

The event was held on the 8 August and raised over £350! The girls were given a 'Community Champion' certificate and a £5 book voucher to say a big THANK YOU for all their hard work.

Businesses regret links with slavery

Merchant Bank Rothschild and the city law firm Freshfield have become the first UK businesses to say they "greatly regret" their links with slavery. The acknowledgments and expressions of regret came after the Financial Times published previously unexamined documents showing that N.M. Rothschild, the founder of the banking dynasty, had benefited from slavery by mortgaging 88 slaves in Antigua. When the debtors who had put up the slaves as collateral defaulted, N.M. Rothschild sought to recoup the £3,000 he was owed through a compensation scheme the government had set up to bail out slave owners after the abolition of slavery in the 1830s.

Rothschild bank officials said "We greatly regret that Rothschild is linked in any way to the abhorrent institution of slavery. Rothschild as a firm strongly supports equal opportunities and

human rights."

James William Freshfield, the law firm's founder, financially benefited from slavery by acting as a trustee and owner in fee for several slave owners. Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer said in a statement: "We greatly regret that the firm is linked in any way to the inhumane institution of slavery. Freshfields has a long tradition of supporting equal opportunities, human rights and access to justice, and we are deeply committed to promoting these objectives."

The documents were part of a series of correspondence made by slave owners and others who sought to recoup money after the government abolished slavery. They remained unexamined until Mick Draper, a University College London academic, began to examine them for his doctorate.

(adapted from an article in *The Voice*, 6-12 July, 2009)

'Sounds Like Summer' event at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve

Another successful day out at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve on Sat, 25 July 2009



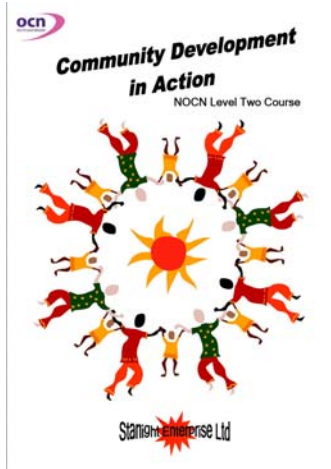
Families from Barton, Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill & Wood Farm all enjoyed the gloriously sunny day for the 'Sounds Like Summer' event

Seven coaches left Barton, Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill & Wood Farm, kindly funded by Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve.

The stage was powered by solar power with the back-up of a bicycle power pack to keep the equipment charged. Steve Larkin and Pete Bearder of Hammer & Tongue, compered the afternoon of entertainment which included some slam poetry. Local artists performed and there were workshops for the children to keep them busy and entertained during the afternoon. There was plenty of space and plenty to do with a range of activities throughout the afternoon including wildflower walks, and tours with a 'green' man. The atmosphere was peaceful and safe with the children enjoying the opportunity to run free and explore the natural surroundings.

As this was such a brilliant day we believe it is likely to become an annual event. Oxford Film Society are editing a DVD of the day if anyone is interested in purchasing a copy.

'Community Development in Action'



Starlight was asked by Barton Community Association to put together a ten week accredited course for local residents in Barton, Wood Farm and Northway regarding Community Development work.

The course 'Community Development in Action' is an OCN Level 2 course that offers learners the chance to learn practical skills to enable them to effectively work in their community and take collective action for change. The course discusses the values and principles of community development work; the opportunities and barriers to community involvement and ways of gathering information and involving people in community action. In liaison with local community groups and service providers participants are able

to have a real impact in their local community and be a model for change and progression. By learning the appropriate skills and approaches to community development they were able to benefit from real 'hands on' research and action that can make a difference in the community in which they live.

The course ran on a Thursday morning between 10am -1pm at Wood Farm Youth Centre commencing in May and ending in July. Thirteen participants completed the course and we are due to celebrate their achievement with an Award Ceremony on Friday, 11 September. The Lord Mayor and Principal of Ruskin College will be in attendance to present the students with their certificates and we anticipate friends and family joining us and celebrating their achievement.

A number of the learners are now taking what they have learnt in to their communities and working towards making a positive change with local residents.

Anyone interested in finding out when the next course will be running locally are welcome to get in touch. We anticipate running it in October 2009 in Greater Leys.

Alternatively, if you are interested in running this course in your local area please do contact us as the manual is available for sale with a CD-ROM including all the necessary paperwork to run it in your own setting.



The first black Mock Mayor

Woodstock, Oxfordshire selected Stan Angol to take the unofficial office as the town's first black Mock Mayor.

The annual ceremony to elect a Mock Mayor dates back to 1786 with a brief gap between 1959 and 1986. The origins of the Mock Mayor occurred when the Borough of Woodstock was separate from Old Woodstock. As the elections for mayor of the Borough of Woodstock got more and more pretentious the residents of Old Woodstock decided to hold their own

elections. Since then, a mayor and corporation from Old Woodstock are elected with 'mock formality', and then ceremoniously tipped into the River Glyme, the natural boundary between old and new Woodstock.

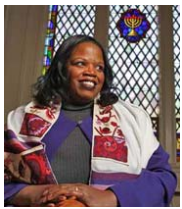
Mr Stan Angol, 52, was elected on the strength of a speech he made to a crowd of spectators in the Black Prince pub in Woodstock on Saturday, 1 August. He moved to the town seven years ago and said 'I am very pleased, I was very emotional when they voted for me. It was a great

day, despite the rain.' After he was elected as Mock Mayor crowds took part in a procession around Blenheim Palace and then watched the traditional Mayorial 'dunking' in the river.

Mr Angol said that during his time as Mock Mayor he plans to create more things for young people in Woodstock to do and it is believed that the events on the day made more than £1,000 for the local youth club and football club as well as the Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance.

(adapted from an article in *The Oxford Mail*, 3 August 2009)

The first black rabbi



Alysa Stanton

Alysa Stanton has made history with her ordination as a Jewish mainstream rabbi on June 6, 2009. She was due to take up her post as rabbi of the Bayt Shalom temple in Greenville, North Carolina, USA last month.

She said she continues to battle prejudice and threats as she was getting ready to take up her post but she will not be deterred by these threats. She began converting to Judaism in 1987 and despite reactions from some white Jews who have mocked her and taunted her daughter, or by black people who think she has 'sold out' she insists she will not be swayed from her path. She said that hostilities between some

African-Americans and white American Jews has not changed but she is still here to serve regardless stating 'My God is bigger. I will not be boxed in.'

She said she is focusing on breaking barriers and building bridges and called on people to focus on their similarities rather than differences.

(adapted from an article in *The Voice*, 22-28 June, 2009)

Who were this family?

The family were in fact travelling on the *Titanic* and the picture is of Joseph Phillippe Lemercier Laroche and his family. He was from Haiti, his uncle was President of Haiti, and he was the only black man to perish on the *Titanic* after saving his wife and children.

He was born in Cap Haitian, Haiti, on the 26 May, 1889. When he was fifteen he left Haiti to study engineering in Beauvais, France. Several years later, he met Juliette Lafargue, the twenty-two year old daughter of a local wine seller. The two eventually married but despite having an Engineering degree, Joseph's skin colour left him unable to find employment in France. The Laroches decided to return to Haiti and booked second-class reservations on the *Titanic*. After the ship struck an iceberg, Joseph loaded his wife and children onto a lifeboat and he went down with the ship. His body was never recovered. Shortly before Christmas of that year, Juliette Laroche gave birth to their son, Joseph Laroche Jr, she never remarried.

No one knew of his existence until recently. The life story of the *Titanic*'s only black passenger astonishes noted *Titanic* historian Judith Geller, author of *Titanic: Women and Children First*, who said, 'It is strange that nowhere in the copious 1912 press descriptions of the ship and the interviews with the survivors was the presence of a black family among the passengers ever mentioned'.

The story of this interracial family was not known until 2000, three years after the blockbuster movie was released. The Chicago Museum of Science & Industry and the *Titanic* Historical Society revealed the information as part of a *Titanic* exhibit.

(<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-biograph/joseph-laroche.html>)

'Bob Marley' by Nick Willitts

Despite the fact that Bob Marley was a man who changed the world's perceptions and first introduced reggae to people all over the land he also suffered racism just like black people everywhere in the past as well as now. He fought for equality and evidently shows this in many of his lyrics.

Bob Marley the King of Reggae

Had words for us to hear and him to say

He had many a message in his songs

Spoke with wisdom and grew his dreadlocks long,

But he had to deal with racism

For his perpetrators he had not hate for them

Although Bob Marley was mixed race

A lot of people thought that was a disgrace

They referred to him as things like half-caste

Discriminated him like the slaves in the past

But Bob still promoted the message of one love

He followed white nor black but indeed God above

Overall Robert Nesta Marley changed the world's

opinion

But he wouldn't let his intimidators become his

dominions.

(Nick Willitts, aged 15, recently completed the *Going for Gold* course at St Mary Redcliffe & Temple School, and this is the moving poem he wrote for his presentation at the *Going for Gold Showcase Evening* held at the school in June this year.)

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 November 2009.

Advertise in this Newsletter

Let us know about your events, services and situations vacant. Our rates are very reasonable.

Full page: £150

1/2 page: £85

1/4 page: £45

1/8 page: £25

Please contact us with details. The deadline for the December newsletter is 30 November 2009.