

# **BLACK HERITAGE SUPPORT SERVICE**

## **The Caribbean Health Exhibition Addressing the Black mental health epidemic in the Black Community**



***How to Live Longer - Special tribute to Marlon Semper.***

# Background

The Caribbean Health Exhibition is a Black Heritage Support Service curated space that is dedicated to opening up routes to life-saving research, advice and information that can help community members live longer.

With growing suicide rates, depression, anxiety and trauma, we wanted to bring together mental health professionals of Caribbean heritage to aid the community with their expertise and services.

For so long, our community has been underrepresented in medical research; we have been left undiagnosed, we have been misdiagnosed, we have experienced medical racism and we have been excluded from mainstream services.

This has resulted in NHS services lacking the cultural understanding needed to meet our community's needs. This is what we refer to as institutionalised and systemic racism.

Ethnic minority people have the right to equal and good quality healthcare, yet we still continue to see poor outcomes. CHE is our effort to equip our community with life-saving information.

## Summary and learnings

### Services

We opened a **British Caribbean Doctors** Advice Surgery led by the British Caribbean Doctors and Dentist Association.

Having access to Black Caribbean Doctors is very rare in the UK.

Caribbean representation in STEM in the UK is deficient and still needs to be improved. The exact figures of Black Caribbean Doctors in the UK are

unknown. Most Black Doctors in the UK will be of West African heritage. According to BCDD, only 238 students registered at medical schools in 2018 were of Black/mixed Caribbean heritage. In 2022, of 600 Black PHD students, only 30 were of Caribbean heritage.

CHE attendees signed up to receive advice and guidance in a private room with Dr Stacey Byran and other Doctors from the network. <https://bcdd.org.uk/>



## **Mental Health Appointments**

Psychotherapists Lynda Macfarlane and Fiona Henry spent the entire day offering community members free mental health appointments. There is a huge financial barrier when trying to gain access to therapy. In the UK there are currently over 7 million people waiting for therapy.

The Black community are less likely to gain access and are less likely to be offered talk therapy, let alone therapy that is inclusive of their cultural needs.

For many CHE attendees, this was their first time in therapy. They went through a general assessment and were given advice as to what their next therapeutic steps should be.

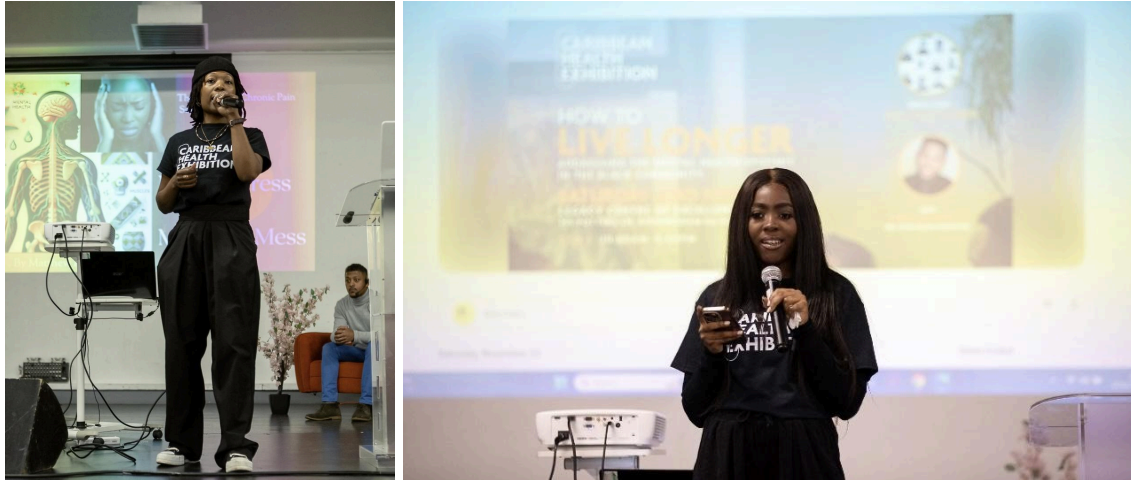
## Advocacy

The Black Heritage Support service was available all day and offered community members advice. Community members were advised on ways to gain access to public services. Advocacy serves as a vital tool for marginalised groups. The Black community continue to experience direct racism and microaggressions when using public services. Advocacy offers the individual agency over their circumstances and the right to equal and fair treatment.

You can complete our advocacy training on our website or contact us for further support. [www.bhss.co.uk](http://www.bhss.co.uk)



## Event Summary



*Natalie Scarlett*, the founder and designer of CHE, addressed the audience to offer context and clarity around the racial disparities we see in our healthcare services. She engaged the audience by highlighting the problems we see in the design world.

Every service and product we use is made by design; without marginalised communities being a part of the design team, we risk further exclusion from mainstream services. She unapologetically called out problem areas but also offered solutions in the form of CHE.

Our host for the day, *Sian Duckworth*, opened the event with an interactive exploration of male mental health journeys as seen through the lens of the **'Study of Men'**. The exhibition featured eight Black men of Caribbean and African heritage who shared their stories.

We were joined by *Omar Junior* and *Joel Ambalu* who were participants in the study. They shared their reasoning for publicly platforming their stories, from creating community to encouraging peer support and therapy.



The images included a QR code which scanned directly to short interviews beautifully filmed on a 6 inch iphone frame in Black and white.

**Rere Demarae**, a local artist produced a live painting throughout the day, which was given away to an attendee. As a community, we have used the arts as an outlet to regulate our emotions. Rere used an A3 canvas and acrylic paints to create a painting that represents the challenges of Black male mental health management.



## Lectures



### **How chronic stress leads to chronic pain.**

The Black community are more likely to experience chronic stress due to lifestyle and institutionalised and direct racism. Experiencing racism within education, healthcare, employment, housing and within our justice system can lead to chronic illness and premature death.

*Matthew Henry*, a Musculoskeletal specialist, identified the interdependencies of chronic stress and chronic pain.

Matthew outlined the brain and stress connection and how this could be significantly contributing to chronic pain. He identified how to downregulate the body's stress response by taking the time to identify your stressors and the movements that shut down those stressors. This is integral to managing chronic pain symptoms.

## Diverse Nutrition



Areas in the UK with high minority ethnic demographics have less access to highly nutritious foods. A study completed in 2018 by Public Health found that Black and Brown areas have 3x more fast food takeaways.

Poor quality food and diet will lead to illness and chronic stress. However, this does not mean that Black communities must abandon their cultural foods to eat healthily. NHS eat well guides and dieticians will advise a Eurocentric diet excluding the needs of Caribbean, African and South Asian communities.

Diverse Nutrition has created the first UK Caribbean and African eat well guide and spoke about this live on stage.

*Ashleigh Simpson*, a qualified British Caribbean Nutritionist cooked Plantain and quinoa porridge live on stage. Ashleigh spoke about toppings and foods that regulate your mood in the morning—mainly focusing on healthy fats that stabilise your blood sugar. This included topping your porridge with hemp seeds, chai and pumpkin seeds. Ashleigh also advised being mindful of portion control and reading product labels to avoid added sugars and oils.

Ashleigh opened up a Q&A with the audience and answered some fundamental questions about Nutrition, which spanned around what a healthy breakfast looks like and whether there are Caribbean foods with probiotics. The closest thing we would have to that would be Escovitch's 'pickled vegetables', which we eat with fish.

<https://www.diversenutritionassociation.com/>



## Dementia and Brian Research



Dr Ishtar Govia took to the stage to share her findings on dementia from across the Caribbean. This area is particularly under researched in Caribbean communities. She spoke about the risk factors and how interdependent dementia can be with poor visual and auditory impairments. Neglecting your auditory and visual health can increase your risk of dementia.

The audience seemed incredibly engaged. A third of attendees shared that they knew someone with dementia. You can find more about Dr Govia here → <https://amagibrainhealth.org/>

Short videos were played as segways into upcoming talks.

## Black male mental health

Directed by *Jason Osborne* and produced by *Precious Magaha*, we played **Love Languages: Stories from a London Afro-Caribbean Barber shop**. [Love Languages: Stories from a London Afro-Caribbean Barber Shop](#)

As the 12 minute short film played, the audience were completely drawn into every expression, sigh and word shared on-screen. You could hear a pin drop in the auditorium.

This led into a discussion moderated by BBC 1xtra Presenter *Theo Johnson*, who Peter and Philip Sawyers and Omar Junior joined. The men made space for thoughts and feelings around mental health struggles, sharing and passing on opinions to and with the audience. There was a sense that Black male mental health could be left unattended and that, more often than not, their need for support is often found in friendship groups. The men encouraged the audience to actively seek spaces where they can address their struggles.



## Decolonising Therapy

Another short video was played. [Together TV produced, Nine nights: The Jamaican celebration of death](#). The video highlighted how the

Caribbean community deals with grief; which significantly differs to how our white British counterparts manage death.

Mental health practitioners are not yet equipped to meet the cultural needs of non white, British people. Our mental health training not only centres on whiteness but very rarely acknowledges the genuine impacts that racism has on Black and Brown people.

*Kim*, from Black psychotherapy, identified the barriers for the Black community when using a eurocentric therapy model and shared her thoughts on creating inclusive and culturally relatable therapy spaces and methodologies.

<https://www.blackpsychotherapy.org/>



## Stop di Bawlin

## Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome - AJ+

This video included the interview of Dr Joyce Degruy, an African-American researcher who coined the term [post traumatic slave syndrome](#).

A form of trauma passed on from our ancestors that displays itself as damaging, irrational behaviours.

The video was followed by a discussion led by Psychotherapist *Lynda Macfarlane*. Lynda invited a community member on the stage to open up

a conversation about the negative impacts of colonial behaviours that masquerade as culture. Comments like 'stop di bawlin' seem harmless. We make these statements in an attempt to strengthen individuals. But, the reality is that it can cause years of trauma and destabilisation of one's identity. This can lead to conflict and poor relationship dynamics. Lynda conversed with the audience to welcome truth, honesty and forward thinking.



We closed the event with a soca workout led by twin brothers Peter and Phillip Sawyers, better known as, [Twinsane](#). The brothers hosted a strength competition for men, in an attempt to create a moment of togetherness and brotherhood.



Following on from the workout a lady approached the team to note how proud she was of her son Mykel for going on stage. **Mykel** stood at around 5'10, was slender build, in his early thirties and had Black curly hair. He seemed shy in demeanor and looked at us with a gentle smile. Mykel's Mother informed us that she was proud because Mykel was battling cancer. Mykel is currently fundraising so that he can receive life saving treatment in America.

We thought it was important to address the last of the attendees before they left by allowing Mykel and his Mother the floor to share his story. Mykel has been battling Hodgkin's lymphoma for 5 years and is seeking support to enable him to live LONGER. If you would like to donate to Mykel's fund, you can do so here.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/the-big-c-part-3>

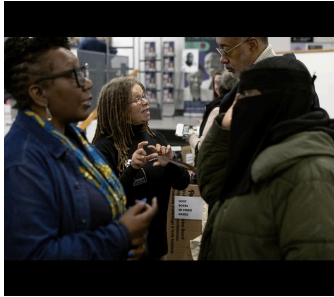
### **Activities**

VR - Inside the human brain

Smoothie Bike

Digital Tour

Black mental health library



## Acknowledgments

*Photography- Lewis Patrick*  
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