BLACK HISTORY MONTH - A CELEBRATION

2026
MAGAZINE

PEOPLE
CULTURE
HERITAGE
FOOD
WELLBEING
INSPIRATION



OUR STORIES OUR LEGACY

CELEBRATING BLACK CULTURE, FOOD AND EVERYDAY STORIES

Welcome!
Our magazine brings together the voices, stories and creativity that shape Barnet's African, Caribbean and Black diaspora communities, from Windrush pioneers to local changemakers, artists and community leaders.
We celebrate Black culture through the words, food, music and memories shared across our borough.
We hope you enjoy reading, reflecting and celebrating with us.

Lamarra Alo, social prescribing manager and Jenny Jean-Charles, services manager

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Barnet ageUK

BHM 2026

WHY HISTORY IS KEY - LEVI ROOTS



Much-loved chef, musician and businessman Levi Roots has joined us for two of our Black History Month events, sharing stories of his early childhood in Jamaica and the women who inspired his extraordinary career.

Levi spoke powerfully about the importance of knowing our history, and how members of the Windrush generation were entrepreneurs who helped build the NHS and a country still struggling after the war.

Levi also reflected on growing up in Jamaica and moving to London, including the moment he first encountered racism.

“History is so important because it gives us a chance to understand ourselves,” Levi said. “As one of my heroes, Marcus Garvey, once said: ‘Without knowledge of your past, you’re like a tree without roots.’ We need to reveal the true stories of history to better understand who was responsible for the issues we face today, and so we can carve out a better future.”

Why does he think sharing stories matters so much during Black History Month? “Black history wasn’t acknowledged and celebrated when I was a kid,” he explained. “It took me a long time to understand about my past and to make myself feel better when I was a young man, because I hadn’t felt I was worth much growing up.”

In the absence of those cultural touchstones, it was Levi’s late mother who gave him a sense of his own value. “My mum gave me the ability to be me. I struggled at school, but at home there was this wonderful woman ready to accept me for who I was.”

It’s a lesson he carries with him. “It’s important to be yourself,” he said. “It’s easier than pretending to be someone else. That’s what I did on Dragon’s Den - a rasta man with a guitar, loving music and food. Some people might not have thought that was a formula for success, but it worked.”

A ROLE MODEL - BARNET’S FIRST BLACK MAYOR



Agnes Slocombe was elected as a Labour councillor for West Hendon in 1982, served for almost four decades and became the first Black Mayor of Barnet in 1997–98. She was also a founder member of the Barnet Multicultural Centre and played an important role in establishing both the Barnet African Caribbean Association and Barnet Community Relations Group. She had previously worked as an NHS nurse.



ORGANISATION HIGHLIGHT - BACA

Barnet African Caribbean Association (BACA) was established in 1997 to provide day services for older people in Barnet's African-Caribbean community. It has become much more than a service - a place for friendship, food, culture, activities and support.

The charity offers a Tuesday lunch club, health and wellbeing checks, activities and keep fit classes at the Barnet Multicultural Community Centre in West Hendon. It also arranges days out and events celebrating today’s diverse cultures. For more information email baca@barnetmcc.org

THE WINDRUSH QUILT



This wonderful quilt, recently on display at artsdepot, has been hand-sewn by African and Caribbean older people who travelled to the UK in the 1950s-70s to help rebuild the country after the Second World War. The quilt-making workshops run by artist Elizabeth Joseph, took place in community groups across London, including the Barnet African Caribbean Association (BACA).

The quilt honours their occupations and experiences over those decades. Members of the Windrush generation worked as nurses, in factories making hats, ballet shoes and bags. They started small businesses, became bus conductors, shorthand typists, and studied for exams - among many other roles. All these diverse experiences are stitched into the detail of the quilt.

If you missed seeing the artwork at artsdepot, you can see the quilt at the Age UK Barnet activity centre if you come along to one of our activities or events there. The quilt will be on display at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT until December.

Find out about London's Black history

Talk: the history of Black History Walks – 9 November 2026 (6.30pm) at Colindale library

A talk about 20 years of Black History Walks, a group that runs 21 walks, talks, films, bus/canal/river/steam train and helicopter tours on London's Black history.

Author of Black History Walks Volume 1 and the Pearson GCSE history exam text book, Tony Warner will give a talk on hidden history in London's streets, Black British civil rights in the 21st century and the fight for equality on movies screens. Venue: Colindale Library, 7 Bristol Avenue, Colindale NW9 4BR.

To book your free tickets, check out the Barnet Council website or the Barnet Libraries website.

Did you know?

Desmond Tutu, known for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist, lived in Golders Green and was a curate at St Alban's Church in the early 1960s.

"We need to remind ourselves that we stand on their shoulders; they went through a great deal of hardship to make life easier for us."
From the Respect UK BHM 2026 reflection on the Windrush Generation

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO START YOUR CREATIVE JOURNEY!'

Author and actor Andi Osho, currently starring in award-winning BBC1 police drama Blue Lights gave a talk to Age UK Barnet with her mum Charlotte Osho who wrote her life story in later life.

"No matter your age, no matter the story you've been telling yourself up until this point about your creativity, it really is never too late to start. My mum gave so much of her early life to other people - her family, her husband, her young children, then the NHS and it was only when she finally retired that she was able to ask herself what she wanted.
"It turned out that though she'd been telling herself she wasn't a creative person, the reality was, it had all just laid dormant. In retirement she began to draw and paint and then she tackled the mammoth task of writing her life story.

"Not only is The Jagged Path a beautiful story of resilience but also a reminder that it is never too late to try something new, do something you've always wanted to, risk yourself and put your creativity out into the world, not for accolades but to be fully expressed!"



The Jagged Path is available online, and explores Charlotte Osho's journey to happiness after leaving Nigeria and an abusive marriage.

THE ART OF THE NIGERIAN HEADWRAP

At our last Black History Month event, Vicky from Diwis Creations demonstrated how to fashion a Gele (pronounced Gay-lay). This is a traditional Nigerian headwrap originating from the Yoruba tribe that serves as a stunning symbol of femininity, prosperity, and cultural identity. It requires stiff, structured fabrics like traditional hand-woven Aso-Oke or modern Ankara prints to hold its dramatic shape. Rather than everyday wear, this architectural accessory is reserved exclusively for special festive occasions like weddings and celebrations.







Diwis Creations run sewing and creative activities in Colindale, NW9. To find out more email diwiscreationsuk@gmail.com

"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

african proverb

WHAT DOES BLACK HISTORY MONTH MEAN TO ME?



“Black History Month offers a wonderful occasion to draw on the Black British experience. This has always been an important element of my journalistic work running through so much of my reporting, celebrating lives whose significance reaches beyond the familiar public account. I hope that engaging with Black History is a way to explore how Black Britons have shaped the country through cultural achievement and everyday contributions. I always aspired to these stories, which spark conversations across generations about belonging. Remembering and recognising these achievements helps young people of colour imagine their own futures and build hope that they can be part of the changes our society aspires to.”

Professor Kurt Barling, former BBC Special Correspondent and Deputy Dean, Middlesex University



"A time when many black heroes and heroines are celebrated.”

Age UK Barnet *exercise class participant Pearl*

"In school, Black history was condensed into a week! That was my experience as a primary school teacher. A missed opportunity!"

Exercise class participant Janet

"Black history means a lot to me. We go way back to the 60s when people first came over on the Windrush, expecting a big welcome but went through a hard time. My grandad once told me 'When you got to England don't expect much. It's a very cold place - weather and the people!"

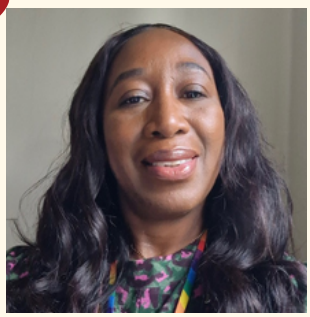
Age UK Barnet
Knit & Natter goer Mari

“My grandparents, along with a lot of Caribbean people, were over to help rebuild the country. They took on so many jobs like bus drivers, train drivers, nurses and cleaners, all vital to the infrastructure. People need to remember what black people did for this country after the war. That’s why Black History Month is so important, especially when learning about the contributions of black Britons are still not routinely part of the curriculum.”

Carole Cooper, Age UK Barnet finance manager



FOR MANY YEARS I WAS JUDGED BY MY COLOUR AND NOT MY CAPABILITY'



As part of Black History Month, Later Life Services and operations manager Jenny Jean-Charles talks movingly about her experience at work before joining Age UK Barnet in 2014 and how she felt as one of the first black women to join our team.

"I am British born of Caribbean heritage. My parents were born in Montserrat, which is a small volcanic island which forms part of the eastern Caribbean islands, and came to the UK during the 1950s. Both worked hard to raise me and my two brothers. My dad was a proud train driver for nearly 50 years and my mother had jobs in various factories and, by coincidence, worked with older people during her later years in a local care home.

"I have worked across all sectors starting out with the Royal College of Nursing, then I moved onto the private sector and was thrown into the deep end working for an IT Consultancy where the ethos was work hard and play hard. I returned to the NHS for a few years before joining the voluntary sector.

"I make my journey prior to Age UK Barnet sound quite easy, but I can say there have been many disappointments due to the colour of my skin. I was often left feeling let down, following an enthusiastic pre interview over the telephone and then a look of shock when arriving for an interview. No words often needed - you just know you're not the right look and will not fit into the organisation. Having a very fancy name, always gets me through the door!

"When I joined Age UK Barnet in 2014, I started out in the Later Life Planning Team as a Welfare Benefits Adviser. I did not know much about Barnet, and I did not know what to expect. I noticed that the staff was not very diverse in terms of their ethnicity and therefore did not know what to expect entering as the first black woman as part of the office team. However, I felt welcomed into Age UK Barnet and their small staff and I got my head down and set about proving my worth.

"The CEO was very interested in any ideas from me about developing the service and he encouraged me to apply for the manager role when it became available.

New role

"What became apparent to me, was that I was being judged on what I could do in terms of my skills, knowledge and experience. This was a nice feeling. However, I had doubts in myself, if I was up to the job. I suppose this was brought about from many years of being made to feel that you are not good enough to work at a senior level. I was also encouraged by other colleagues to apply for the post.
"I applied for the job and was offered the post as Manager. This was one of the best days for me, after many years, often being judged by my colour and not my capability. I was finally being allowed a seat at the top table! Since that time, I have not looked back. I work side by side with the current CEO - Helen Newman - and attend many senior meetings with her. When delivering presentations together I have felt some anxiety and a sense that people are just looking at my colour until Helen simply introduces me as Jenny Jean-Charles - Services and operations manager.

"Age UK Barnet have allowed me to develop in ways which I never deemed possible in my lifetime for me personally. I now manage five services and form part of the senior operational team.
'This has allowed me to prove to my children that anything is achievable, and that sometimes it takes a bit longer than one would want. I also hope that there are other people from all ethnic origins reading this, who will not give up hope that they may soon fulfil their aspirations.
"It means a great deal to me that our staff team is now much more diverse than when I joined - a sign that aspirations really can be realised."



Jenny Jean-Charles,
Services and operations manager, speaking at our Black History Month event in 2025

ASK THE DOCTOR: FOCUS ON HEALTH



Many things affect your risk of particular health conditions, like age, family history and environmental factors. Whilst Black communities are diverse and health risks vary between Black African, Black Caribbean and other backgrounds, it is important to acknowledge that Black ethnicity increases the chance of certain conditions or affects how conditions are experienced. Dr Wakana Teranaka, senior registrar in geriatric medicine at Barnet Hospital highlights a few of these plus what you can do to reduce your risk.

1) HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE
Black African and Black Caribbean adults in England have a higher prevalence of high blood pressure (hypertension) than many other ethnic groups. High blood pressure is often symptomless, but it increases the risk of stroke, angina, heart attacks, heart failure, chronic kidney disease and other cardiovascular problems.

What can you do about it?

- Have your blood pressure checked regularly, even if you feel well - this may be through your annual check-up with your GP. If a one-off reading is not clear and your GP recommends monitoring it, please do so under their instructions.
- Take prescribed medication consistently and attend reviews- if your blood pressure is controlled on the pills, it does not mean you can stop them! It means the pills are working as they should.

Remember, managing your blood pressure is directly linked to maintaining your eye sight, your kidney function, your heart health, and preventing strokes.

Seek help from their GP, and you may look to people around you to share experiences. Bear in mind that ethnicity may play a part in your symptoms, and do seek help - the changes you experience may go on for weeks, months or years, and making the transition as easy as possible may have a real impact on your life.

2) INCREASED RISKS OF SOME CANCERS
Black African and Black Caribbean men have a higher risk of developing prostate cancer- up to three times more likely than men of white ethnicity, and are more likely for it to be more advanced than men in some other ethnic groups.

What can you do about it?

- Speak to your GP about your individual risk, especially if you are over 50 or have a family history of prostate cancer
- Don’t ignore symptoms like blood in the urine, weak flow, or ‘stop-start’ urinating – see your GP, though this can also be due to an enlarged prostate for other less serious reasons.

In the UK, there is no national prostate cancer screening programme for all men. You can ask your GP about having a blood test called the PSA that can highlight if there are any problems with your prostate, even if you do not have symptoms. They'll consider your cancer risk to help them decide if the test is the right choice for you. Although less well known, myeloma is a blood cancer that is around 2-3 times more common in Black people than in White people and affects older adults. It is a cancer of plasma cells in the bone marrow.

What should you know about it?

- Book an appointment with your GP for unexplained persistent back pain
- Other warning signs include unusual tiredness and recurrent infections
- It is often not detectable in a scan, unless advanced, but a few specific blood tests can give a good clue.

3) MENOPAUSE IS EXPERIENCED DIFFERENTLY

Menopause causes many changes throughout one's body and mind. Some women have very few symptoms whilst others are impacted significantly.

Some things to know:

- In women of African and Caribbean descent, the average age of menopause is 49.6 years.
- Compared to some, Black women experience a longer duration of pre-menopause until their periods actually stop.
- More likely to experience shorter sleep, more frequent awakenings and less efficient sleep.
- Weight gain and mental health issues may be a large factor.

Even women with severe symptoms may find it difficult to come forward to seek help from their GP, and you may look to people around you to share experiences. Bear in mind that ethnicity may play a part in your symptoms, and do seek help - the changes you experience may go on for weeks, months or years, and making the transition as easy as possible may have a real impact on your life.

THE WINDRUSH SCANDAL - AN UPDATE



The Windrush Scandal erupted in 2018 when long-term UK residents—predominantly from the Caribbean Windrush Generation who arrived from the Caribbean between 1948 and 1971 - were wrongly classified as undocumented immigrants, facing job losses, housing denials, detention, and deportation. The Windrush Compensation Scheme was established in April 2019, and about 15,000 people were thought to be eligible.

A National Audit Office report published in 2026 found that more than half of completed claims had resulted in no compensation. Campaigners argue that the scheme remains unfair and that people need better legal support.

In March 2026, the government said it was reviewing all 30 recommendations from the independent review and working with the newly appointed Windrush Commissioner, Reverend Clive Foster. It rejected calls for a statutory public inquiry, arguing that existing investigations had already examined the scandal.

If you think you might be entitled to compensation call the Windrush Help Team for free who can help you with your application and put you in touch with a free independent adviser. Call 0808 196 8496

"Black communities are diverse, and people's experiences differ. One example is prostate cancer: around one in four Black men in the UK will develop it during their lifetime-about twice the risk for White men. Yet a review of prostate cancer treatment trials found that Black people made up only 9.8% of participants in studies that reported race. The review was about treatment trials, not exercise programmes, but it raises an important question: whose experiences are included in the evidence that guides cancer care?"

PHD student Isaac Oppong, co-founder of OncoMove, which offers free exercise support before, during and after cancer treatment

CULTURE, MUSIC, CREATIVITY



Spotlight on Jenny la Touche, who runs our dementia choir

A key member of the legendary London Gospel Community Choir since it first started, choirmaster Jenny has performed and recorded with the likes of Sir Paul McCartney, Sir Elton John, Madonna and Maria Carey.

“We did a recording of the Long and Winding Road with Paul McCartney and three tracks for the Lion King with Elton John. We also performed with Elton at Glastonbury. I would have to say one of my favourite experiences was performing with Luther Vandross at the Royal Albert Hall. That was very special and, although we’ve performed in some amazing venues, I don’t think you can beat the Albert Hall.”

5 THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT BLACK MUSIC IN THE UK



1. The woman who helped inspire rock ’n’ roll
Sister Rosetta Tharpe, an American gospel singer and electric guitarist, performed in the UK in 1964 as part of the famous Blues and Gospel Caravan tour. Her electrifying guitar style helped pave the way for rock ’n’ roll - and she influenced generations of musicians.



2. Poetry meets reggae
Linton Kwesi Johnson, who moved from Jamaica to London as a child, helped create a genre known as dub poetry. He performs poetry over reggae rhythms, using his work to explore racism, politics and Black British life. He became the first Black poet to have his work published in Penguin Modern Classics.



3. Jungle music was born in British clubs
Jungle emerged in the UK in the early 1990s, drawing on Jamaican sound-system culture, reggae and dub, as well as breakbeats and fast electronic rhythms. It helped shape drum and bass and influenced dance music around the world.



4. Britain created its own style of reggae
In the 1970s, British-Caribbean musicians developed lovers rock, a romantic, soulful style of reggae. Janet Kay's 1979 hit Silly Games became a classic of the genre and reached number two in the UK singles chart. Lovers rock gave Black British women a particularly important place in reggae music.



5. A historic Glastonbury headline
In 2019, grime star Stormzy became the first solo Black British artist to headline Glastonbury Festival. His performance was a landmark moment for grime, a genre that grew out of London's underground music scene in the early 2000s.

Love music? Join our Vinyl Club for over 55 - a chance to share records and discover new sounds. Bring your favourites, discover new artists and connect with others who share your interest. Sessions take place every Tuesday at 5pm at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane N2 8LT. £3 a session - refreshments included!. Contact activities@ageukbarnet.org.uk or call 07379 331807.



WORDS THAT INSPIRE

WE ASKED STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND ACTIVITY GOERS WHICH BLACK ROLE MODELS INSPIRE THEM



"Outsiders often have an insight that an insider doesn't quite have."

Diane Abbott - the first black woman elected to the UK Parliament, and in 2024 became its longest-serving female MP, earning the title Mother of the House.

"We are an integral part of the British people and we intend to make our full contribution to the life of this country."

— Claudia Jones (1915-1964) Journalist, activist and pioneer of the Notting Hill Carnival





"Our history has been distorted so as to deny our achievements."

- -Bernie Grant (1944 –2000) British politician and Member of Parliament for Tottenham,

"We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society."

Olive Morris (1952-1979) Community activist, feminist and campaigner for racial and social justice

BLACK PEOPLES MOVEMENT





"Representation matters. It opens doors, it changes perceptions and it allows young people to see themselves in the world."

— Sir Lenny Henry Comedian, actor and campaigner



"Stories have the power to break down barriers, build empathy and imagine a fairer world."

— Malorie Blackman Author and former Children's Laureate

"OUR HISTORY GIVES US ROOTS, OUR STORIES GIVE US STRENGTH, AND OUR COMMUNITIES GIVE US HOPE."

RECIPE TIME!

MISIR WOT (ETHIOPIAN LENTIL CURRY)





INGREDIENTS

- 4 tablespoons Niter Kibbeh/olive oil
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1 tomato, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons bebere spice (alternative - a mix of curry powder and paprika/cayenne)
- 1 cup red lentils, rinsed
- 2 1/2 cups chicken stock
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

DIRECTIONS

1. Add 3 tablespoons of the Niter kibbeh to a pan. For a healthier alternative, use Olive Oil. Add the onions and cook over medium heat for 8-10 minutes until golden brown. Add garlic, tomatoes, tomato paste and 1 tablespoon of the berbere (or curry powder/paprika/cayenne mix) and cook for 5 minutes.
2. Add the lentils, broth and salt, reduce to a low heat, cover and simmer the lentils, stirring occasionally, for 40 minutes (add more broth if needed) until the lentils are soft.
3. Stir in the remaining tablespoon of niter kibbeh and berbere. Simmer for a couple more minutes. Add salt to taste.

OUR FAVOURITE AFRICAN CARIBBEAN DISHES

Many Caribbean dishes reflect the movement of people and ingredients across the Atlantic, while West African food traditions have also influenced cooking throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. Here are a few of our favourites.

Jerk chicken - Jamaica 🇯🇲 Fiery Scotch bonnet, allspice and thyme, traditionally cooked over pimento wood.
Jollof rice - West Africa 🇳🇬🇬🇭🇸🇳 Rice simmered in a rich tomato and pepper sauce — with legendary debates over whose is best.
Ackee and saltfish - Jamaica 🇯🇲 Creamy ackee with salted cod, onions and tomatoes, often served with dumplings or breadfruit.
Doubles - Trinidad & Tobago 🇹🇹 Soft fried bara filled with curried chickpeas, topped with chutneys and sauces.
Suya - Nigeria 🇳🇬 Smoky, spicy grilled meat skewers coated in a peanut-based spice mix - a favourite street-food snack.

THE BRITISH NAI-JAMA 2.0
AN ODE TO THE BEAUTIFUL COMPLEXITY OF BELONGING BY LAMARRA ALO

The British Nai-Jama,
Is what I call myself,
A little bit of everywhere,
Yet entirely myself.
A concoction of identities,
That complement and conflict,
A beautiful contradiction,
Too colourful to restrict.
Combined together,
Like fried chicken, chips and rice,
I've got the British rain in me,
And the African sunrise.
With Jamaican roots that run so deep,
And rhythms in my soul,
Three cultures intertwined in me,
Each playing its own role.
My ethnic identities are like siblings,
All living in my body,
With different accents, tastes and ways,
And very different hobbies.
Sometimes they clash, sometimes they laugh,
Sometimes they disagree,
But each one has a rightful place,
In the making of me.
I switch between my cultures,
Like changing the TV channel,
From "you alright, love?" to "wah gwaan?"
To "abeg, I can't handle!"
But the beauty lies within the fusion,
Where separate worlds form one,
A story written by my ancestors,
Continued by their daughter.



Jollof. Jerk. A fry-up with some bacon.
A Sunday roast, some rice and peas,
And plantain for the taking.
A weekly menu that tells the tale,
Of cultures intertwined,
British-born, Nigerian-Jamaican,
With a heritage uniquely mine.
But identity is more than food,
More than accents, clothes and hair,
It's the stories of those who came before,
And the sacrifices that brought me here.
It's knowing that my presence,
Wasn't always welcomed in this land,
Yet generations planted roots,
And built futures with their hands.
It's the strength of those before me,
Who made a way where there was none,
Who carried dreams across the seas,
So I could stand beneath this sun.
And now I wear my heritage,
Not as pieces torn apart,
But as a beautiful mosaic,
Held together by one heart.
No longer needing to explain,
Which part of me belongs,
I've learned that I am all of them,
And together, we are strong.
So here's to the British Nai-Jama,
A fusion rare and nice,
And if there's one thing I've learned,
Through all my cultural pride,
It's that some of my British friends,
Cant handle plenty of pepper and spice!

Lamarra is Age UK Barnet's Social Prescribing manager

This magazine has been produced by Pigeon Post Editor and Designer Karen Williamson and Teresa Gallagher