

Canerow

// Weaving Power, Woven
Wisdom of African Diaspora

SEPTEMBER 2023

// Black women's
intergenerational
leadership retreat





Background

'Canerow' - Weaving Power, Woven Wisdom of African Diaspora Women is a Churchill-funded leadership development initiative designed by and for Black women leaders. The Churchill Trust Activate Fund for Churchill Fellows allows Fellows to deepen their enquiry into an aspect of or recommendation from their original fellowship. Activation can happen up to ten years after the original fellowship. Yvonne Field OBE CF was awarded her Fellowship in 2012, travelling to Atlanta and New Zealand, and the Activate Award in 2022.

Yvonne OBE CF's Fellowship was instrumental in the development of Ubele; allowing her to explore Black Community Leadership in Atlanta and Community-based Enterprise amongst Māori community.

The Ubele Initiative has a proven track record of success working with intergenerational black women leaders. Their work has provided opportunities for a significant number of Black women leaders to travel throughout Europe and parts of Africa engage in development through collaboration. The programmes

which were predominantly Erasmus+ (European) funded provided opportunities for international sharing, exposure and professional development. Such international opportunities are rarely open to Black women leaders and is in this case a unique example of Yvonne Field, using her unique international exposures to research, obtain funding and co-create programmes so other black women could engage in reciprocal learning internationally. In so many public and private organisations, there is underrepresentation of Black women leaders.





The Preparation

From the evaluations of black women's leadership programmes, there are consistent messages:

- The time they spend together in black dominant spaces are priceless as they often enable the women to be, without explanation. The women rarely experience such opportunities as black women living in the UK.
- Their networking is priceless as an overwhelming number of black women work in isolation and in teams where they are the 'only non-Caucasian' individual.
- They deeply appreciate that the programmes provide for them holistically, enabling them to prioritise their wellbeing. There is much evidence

- from studies undertaken following Covid-19 that a number of working people failed to look after their own health and wellbeing during the pandemic. With studies which indicated that black women leaders who invested themselves in leading projects caring for communities identified that their investment came at a cost to self.
- Finally, black female leaders shared that they desired more opportunities to be together, to learn from each other, to co-create new initiatives which met their specific needs.

Canerow explored what black women at differing stages of their leadership trajectory would want to see in a bespoke leadership programme for them.

This project was designed to build on Ubele's conceptual works in this area, led by Yvonne Field. The challenges of sustaining high quality interventions are many, with one of the key challenges being accessing funding especially since the UK has exited the European Union.

The Invitation

For the reasons, outlined above, there is generally a genuine appetite for Black women leaders to meet and share, in contexts where they are neither minority nor undervalued.

Invitations were sent to over 40 leaders who had attended a range of intergenerational women's leadership

activities and initiatives organised via Ubele, in London, nationally and internationally.

The invitation was to attend a retreat planned for the weekend Friday 22nd to Sunday 24th September 2023 in Catford, South London. The venue was a large residential house with recreational amenities, including a hot tub, a large garden and ample indoor space for a variation of activities. It was easily accessible by public transport and gourmet lunch, and breakfast meals services was commissioned from Tyler at The Drip Joint.



The weekend was funded by the Churchill Trust's recently established Activate Fund. However, working and living during times acknowledged nationally as 'cost-of-living crisis', budgetary limitations impacted the number of women that could attend or explore the programme development weekend. The weekend was planned to cater for all aspects of the black female leader. Each attendee would have opportunity for co-creation, exhalation and relaxation and fun.

Pre-Retreat Engagement

Prior to the retreat, the women were encouraged to create opportunities to commence networking. It was suggested that some of the 'younger' and mid-career women connect with 'elders' with decades of experience and hold conversations about their shared and different experiences of leadership. Both groups were acknowledged with a small incentive for their time. The 'younger' women collated information which they would reflect on, highlight key learning from and share at the retreat.

Summary of learning from the retreat

There were 18 women in attendance at the retreat, age ranging from 17 to mid 60s. These women were leaders in government, the National Health Service, local authorities, faith groups, charities and a range of voluntary sectors. Many had experience working overseas, including the youngest attendee. They also knew from collective experiences that bespoke leadership programmes for Black women was both necessary and when done well, proved to be life transforming.

They reminisced on the pre-retreat conversations using the following questions:

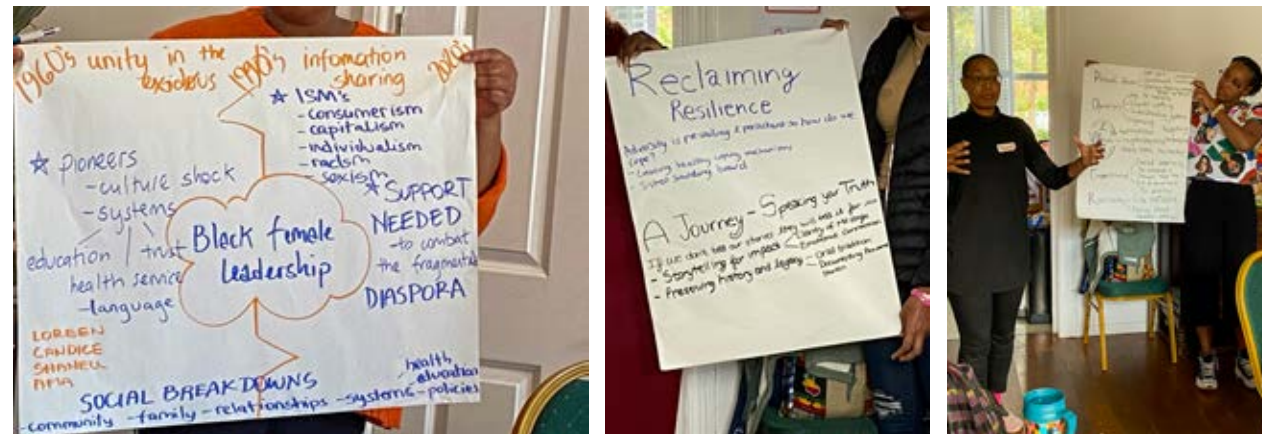
1. What did we learn from our intergenerational conversations around black women and leadership? (Greece 2021, Germany 2023)

2. What are the future needs and best practice learning for current and future black women leadership?

In small groups, they explained the differentiations of their experiences in senior roles within public sector organisations, and corporate worlds compared to plethora of Black women leaders working quietly, and effectively in communities. Within this group were black female leaders who were disrupting systems and meeting the needs of diverse teams through their skilful, sometimes unconventional, but undoubtedly transformational leadership styles. It was also acknowledged that the way organisational systems are constructed contribute to the erosion of the confidence of Black women's ontology often through the subordination of their epistemologies.

// The components of a leadership programme for Black women leaders

Though this section will be void of the deep contemplations and contributions from the small group discussions. It will outline the high-level ask of the women for a modular programme for Black Women leaders.



Module 1 – Understanding and Learning from Black UK History

Contributors: Loreen, Candice, Shanell, Afia

1960's unity in the exodus

- * Pioneers – culture shock, systems: education, trust, health service
- Language

Information sharing 2020's

- * ISM's
 - consumerism
 - capitalism
 - individualism
 - racism
 - sexism
- * Support Needed
 - to combat the fragmented

Diaspora

Social Breakdowns

- Community
- Family
- Relationships
- Systems: health, education, policies

Module 2 – Reclaiming Resilience

Contributors: Barbara, Leonie, Saaliha

Adversity is prevailing and persistent: so how do we cope?

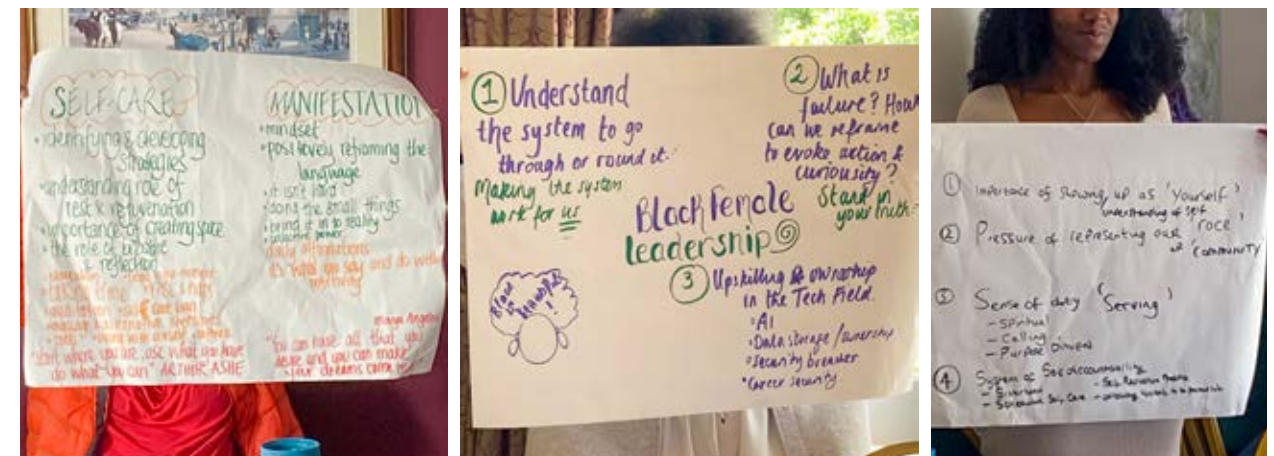
- Creating healthy coping mechanisms
- Sistren sounding board

A journey – Speaking our truth

- Storytelling for impact: clarity of message, emotional connection
- Preserving history and legacy: oral tradition, documenting personal stories
- If we don't tell our stories those who don't understand it, will tell it for us.

Self-Care

- Identifying and developing strategies
- Understanding the role of rest & rejuvenation
- Importance of creating space
- The role of breath & reflection
- Being in the moment
- Taking time
- Meditation
- Self-care bag
- Massage & alternative therapies
- Softness



Module 3 - Women of power and power of Women

Contributors: Shanell, Afia, Candice, Olivia, Loreen, Serena

POWER

Personal Power

- Self-care
- Sisterhood – reflecting, coaching
- Giving + sharing power, enabling power

Operations

- Ways to navigate
- Smarter working
- Understanding systems: Researching + campaigning
- Organising

Women

- Representation
- Insights/storytelling
- People before me/Herstory

Empowerment

- Shared experience
- The collective is stronger than the 1
- Self-empowerment

Relationships

- The collective
- The NETWORK
- Planning ahead (succession planning)

Module 4 – The importance of showing up as 'yourself'

Contributors: Mia, Leonie, Serena, Nykima

1. Importance of understanding and showing up as 'yourself'
2. Pressure of representing our 'race' or 'community'
 - spiritual
 - calling
 - purpose driven
3. Sense of duty 'Serving'
 - spiritual
 - calling
 - purpose driven
4. System of self-accountability
 - Sisterhood
 - scheduled self-care
 - self-reflection practice
 - allowing yourself to be paired into?

Next Steps

The follow up phase of this intergenerational initiative was to design and pilot a modular programme using the wealth of knowledge provided by the women during this Black women's leadership programme.

// Appendix 1

Programme Outline

Friday 22nd September 2023

Arrival and Room Allocation

Session 1

Welcome and Phase 1 and Phase 2 aims

Session 2

Sawubona: This Zulu greeting has been on our tongues and in our hearts for much of the past ten years. It literally means "I see you." More than words of politeness, sawubona carries the importance of recognising the worth and dignity of each person.

Evening Meal

Use of facilities relaxation /Networking, Fun and Games

Saturday 23rd September 2023

Breakfast

Welcome and revisit aims

Check In – Stretching / Breathing / Affirmations

Session 3

Leadership Walk & What is Leadership

Session 4

What we know/learned about black female leadership across generations and decades.

Lunch

Session 5

Liven Up Ourselves – Drumming

Session 6

What are the future needs of Black Female Leaders / What areas of best practice can we bring forward?

Session 7

Feel the Force – Energies and Vibrations

Session 8

Women's Circle –Black Women and Leadership – I'd love to share my experience / a view on.....

Evening Meal and Free-Time

Sunday 24th September 2023

Breakfast

Use of facilities

Session 9

Thank Yous - Recap of the weekend / What Next?

Distillation of interviews and theming to inform the programme.

- Design programme and pilot it
- Reflection on the experience – Gathering for a day.
- Shadow a leader of a different generation exploring their leadership what is it like in your leadership world.
- Black Cultural Archives

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The Ubele Initiative
Wolves Lane Centre
Wolves Lane
London N22 5JD

www.ubele.org.uk

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