

Canerow

// Weaving Power, Woven
Wisdom of African Diaspora

NOVEMBER TO
DECEMBER 2024

// The online
intergenerational
dialogue



// Context

'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.

Eighteen Black women leaders participated in a retreat to co-design a leadership programme addressing their specific needs and experiences. It resulted in a five-session online series, delivered in November and December 2024, that explored themes of authenticity, history, resilience, power, and self-care through intergenerational dialogue. Sessions attracted 8-16 participants and received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with participants describing the spaces as "soothing," "engaging," and "needed."

Key outcomes include the validation of intergenerational learning as a powerful leadership development approach, identification of critical content areas for Black women leaders, and clear recommendations for programme expansion and refinement.

// Background

Canerow aimed to explore the experiences and needs of Black women at various stages of their leadership trajectories, focusing on what they would like to see in a tailored leadership program designed for them. There is a notable underrepresentation of Black women leaders in many public and private organisations. Interestingly, Black women activists often find

themselves becoming reluctant leaders after recognising specific needs within their communities and stepping in to address those needs. While there is a wealth of Black women in leadership roles within community settings, their passion, commitment, and strong ties to their communities serve as inspiration for younger Black women.

Canerow sought to bring together Black women with leadership experience from diverse professional and community contexts, representing different ages and spanning approximately three generations. The women outlined themes they wanted to explore; these included resilience, impact, storytelling, and history, and these became the foundation for a comprehensive program structured as an online series. The aim was to foster learning and sharing between generations of Black women leaders.

A four-person facilitating team developed a five-session online programme based on the

retreat's identified themes. Each facilitator selected guests representing different age groups to ensure intergenerational dialogue.

The sessions were run in the evenings to facilitate maximum participation and were designed to foster conversations across generations, with participants ranging from their 30s to 60s. The sessions were creative and engaging, incorporating music and other expressive activities. Sessions combined panel discussions, small group work, breakout rooms, interactive exercises, and reflective activities.



Invitation to the online sessions

// Sessions

Session 1:

Being your Authentic Self (Thursday 7 November 2024)

Yvonne Field OBE CF facilitated this session in which she had conversations with Sáaliyha Adur-Raheem & Omolara Martins on Being Our Authentic Self.

This session explored authenticity and its relationship to leadership, examining how social and peer pressure can lead to 'people pleasing' behaviours that disconnect individuals from their values. Authenticity (true authentic self) was defined as 'what you say in life aligns with what being authentic, or being your authentic self, means being true to yourself and your values, even when faced with pressure to act differently'.

Sáaliyha and Omolara were asked questions such as, 'what have ever got in your way to live authentically', 'what if any, blocks have you experienced to living in accordance with what you find important' and 'how often do you listen to your gut'?

Sixteen women participated in the session, which they afterwards described as 'soothing and heartwarming' as well as a 'great space for holding women'.

Session 2:

Black Women in Communities, History and Impact (Thursday 14 November 2024)

In this session Dr Peggy Warren was in conversation with Afia Akbar and Remi Lawrence-Warren. The session centred on the question: "What happens when Black women do not know the legacies of those who came before them?" Participants were given eight photographs of prominent Black women and asked to research individuals they knew least about, identifying their significant contributions to the UK context.

Nine participants attended this session which was described as 'great, ...enjoyed every minute of it, great to have included three generations' and 'really engaging / felt like 'she' was in someone's front room - could lie down.'

Session 3:

Building Resilience (Thursday 21 November 2024)

This session was an intergenerational three-way conversation co-facilitated across three generations with Dr Peggy Warren positioned as the elder, working alongside Macey McMullen and Chanelle Simpson.

This three-way intergenerational conversation explored the question: "What does resilience really mean for Black women?" Key discussion questions included: What does resilience mean to your family makeup? Who taught you tools of resilience? How has resilience changed for you in the past five years? Have you ever noticed the impact of constantly being resilient on your mind, body, and spirit? Are there aspects of resilience you want the next generation to learn or unlearn? Has there been a time when you said 'no' to resilience, and what were the implications?

The intergenerational dialogue revealed significant generational differences in understanding and embodying resilience. Older women described being expected to be 'workhorses,' while younger women questioned whether constant endurance was sustainable. The session explored not only how Black women survive but also how they might thrive without carrying the weight of constant resilience.

There were 12 participants in this session, described as engaging with 'lots of voice.'

Session 4:

Powerfulness and Joy (Thursday 28 November 2024)

It was a three-section session on 'How can we keep bridging the gap between the generations' facilitated by Yvonne Christie, 'How do we celebrate our wins' facilitated by Michelle Killington and 'How to be fearless and focus on selfcare' led by Tori Taiwo.

Nine participants were in attendance; the session was described by one participant as 'a beautiful, wonderful space' where she 'felt uplifted and energetic afterwards.'

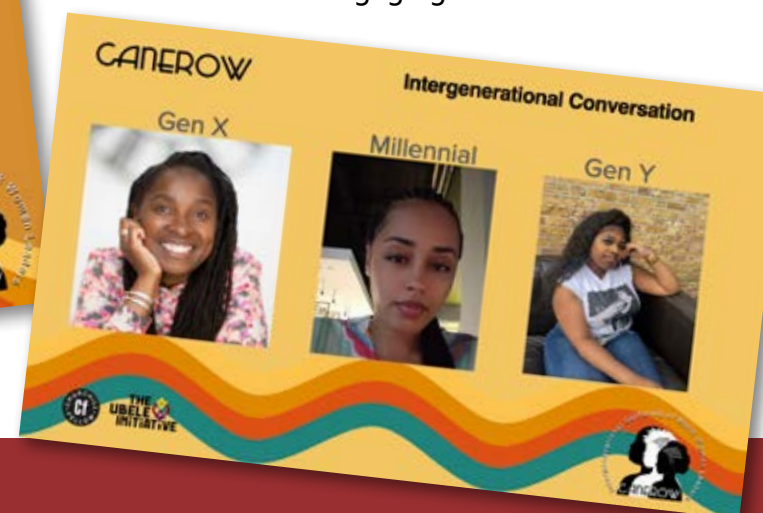
Session 5:

Reflecting and Feedback (Thursday 5 December 2024)

Three questions were put to the attendees during this last session. The first question was on Power and Joy (what part of you was most impacted by your attendance and participation; who were you drawn to in the group and why?). The second question was on Authenticity (what would you tell someone from another generation about your experience of being in this group?). The last question was on Looking back and Looking Forward (what worked well? what could we have done differently? what could we be doing next? what might you do because of this experience?).

Eight participants attended this session and suggested increasing the number of youngest participants, indicating that younger people would particularly benefit from this experience.

► Right: Photographs given to participants for identification and research during Session 2



◀ Left: Presenters of Session 3

// Leadership insights

The initiative employed a distributed leadership model, with each facilitator contributing unique strengths. Yvonne Christie, Yvonne Field OBE CF, Macey McMullen and Dr Peggy Warren, as the facilitating team, collectively brought efficiency to the process, contributed youthful energy and connections to younger participants, showed commitment to documentation and emphasised relational depth and emotional awareness. Afia Akbar played a key technical role in uploading materials.

This collaborative approach modelled the intergenerational leadership Canerow sought to develop.

// Learnings

Intergenerational Learning

The sessions highlighted the value of creating spaces for both older and younger leaders to learn from each other. There is a clear need for spaces where intergenerational leadership can be nurtured.

Learning was described as 'symbiotic,' not just elders teaching the young, but mutual exchange.

Older leaders often face challenges with new technologies, while younger leaders are more agile and adaptable.

Lots of learning also came from the evaluation of the programme and will be discussed in the section that follows.

// Evaluation

The team conducted informal evaluations after each session, discussing attendance, emotional impact, and facilitation. Session feedback was collected, though not always formally. The most significant feedback was about the sessions, their content and methodologies.

Participants valued the opportunity for dialogue, reflection, and intergenerational exchange. One participant's observation captured this appreciation well: *'I loved the space, the space is needed. I love it..... We need more of these conversations. Nice intergenerational discussion.'*

The feedback was that the timing of most sessions was excellent. The interaction in the sessions was treasured, summed up by one participant in these words, *'I loved hearing more about what other women do'*. There was at least one instance where the feeling was expressed that one of panels *'was a little long'*, and another time somebody wondered if there was too much content.

The online format of the sessions proved effective, enabling national participation. There was praise for the breakout rooms, said to have worked well. The groupwork was *'enjoyed'*, the whole team approach was seen as positive. The exercises were found stimulating; somebody observed after one session, *'I loved the exercises, you worked us hard'*. The music and the opportunity to dance was also appreciated. The evaluations feedback indicated that there were issues with the communication strategy of the online series in particular. It was not consistent; it seemed that there were problems with email addresses and that not everybody was reached in time. The question was asked whether advertising should be looked at in future.

Overall, the sessions were experienced as positive and the feeling was that this was the start of something promising with the potential for further development and investment.

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“I loved the exercises. You worked us hard.”

“We need more of these conversations.”

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// Way forward

There is a collective desire to continue the work and ensure its legacy through proper documentation. Documentation consolidation was suggested the gathering and archiving of all presentations, evaluations, and visual materials to create a comprehensive record. At the same time technical support in terms of storage and access issues should be addressed to ensure smoother collaboration and sharing of resources.

A second phase of Canerow building on the lessons learned from phase 1 and the expansion of intergenerational engagement is being envisaged. It was suggested that the curriculum needs critical review and redesign for greater consistency and impact. Recommendations to include the following: a more integrated and less disjointed flow between sessions, extension of the programme to 10 sessions, incorporating practical skills development (e.g., technology

use, community building), embedding wellness and self-care activities in every session and adding in-person retreats or sessions for deeper connection.

It was suggested that similar programmes be developed for men and mixed-gender groups, while maintaining women-only spaces. There is also a need for separate spaces for elders and younger leaders, as well as joint sessions to bridge generational gaps.

Given the complexities of leadership transitions, especially for elders, the topics of Transitions and Eldership need to be considered. It was pointed out that personal and collective transitions were gradual and required time and support.

Two topics specifically mentioned for a future programme were sex and menopause.

The participants also suggested that podcasts form part of a future programme.

// Conclusion

The Online Intergenerational Dialogue successfully demonstrated that co-created, culturally responsive leadership development programmes can meet the specific needs of Black women leaders across generations. The Dialogue's strengths lie in its focus on authenticity, mutual learning, and community and provide a strong foundation for continued development.

Participant feedback and evaluation findings indicate clear demand for this type of programming, with the intergenerational approach offering particular value in fostering connection, knowledge exchange, and leadership development that honours diverse experiences and perspectives.

The insights gathered point toward a leadership development model that is

inclusive, holistic, and responsive to the needs of diverse generations. With enhanced structure, expanded practical skills components, and opportunities for both in-person and virtual engagement, Canerow has significant potential to serve as a model for leadership development that centres the experiences and wisdom of Black women leaders.

Important groundwork has been established during Phase 1. With appropriate investment, refinement based on lessons learned, and commitment to its co-creative principles, Phase Two of Canerow can build on this foundation to create sustained impact for current and future generations of Black women leaders.

// Acknowledgements

This document would not have been possible without the generous support of The Churchill Trust Activate Fund for Churchill Fellows, which enabled me to deepen my inquiry into leadership practices among African and Diasporic women – a vital extension of my original Churchill Fellowship journey. I am profoundly grateful for this opportunity to expand and enrich this critical area of research.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the awesome women who made the sacrifice to attend the groundbreaking retreat; you contributed greatly to the content of this document by your engagement and freely given ideas; my deep appreciation to you.

My facilitation team – Yvonne Christie, Macey McMullen, and Dr Peggy Warren – worked tirelessly to bring this vision to life, with invaluable support from Afia Akbar (Programme Support). Thank you to each one of you.

Kareen Cox (Graphic Designer), Tinuke Fagborun (Illustrator), Becky James (Communications), Nadine Peters (Publication Coordinator) and Dr Patricia Smit (Content Contributor) brought this publication to fruition. I am deeply grateful to you.

Sáaliha Abdur-Raheem, Michelle Killington, Remi Lawrence-Warren, Omolara Martins, and Tori Taiwo enriched our online sessions as conversant and co-facilitators. Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

Published October 2025

