



Introducing ...

Francine*

We're meeting Francine today, an original and established member of the Steering Group. Francine is in the unique position of being a professional working in safeguarding children, has previously worked with children who are in care and has a personal experience of adoption. Francine is in her early 40s, a Black female of mixed-race heritage and adoptee who was transracially adopted as a baby by a White couple who lived in London. A few years later her maternal birth sister was also adopted by the same family.



Home life

It was a home full of love. I remember as a young person growing up in North West London but it wasn't as multicultural as it is now. Looking back, as I got older there were questions about why I didn't look like either of my parents and where I came from... and I dealt with it with humour as best I could. Everyone at school knew I was adopted but as I started to leave the school gates and got older and met new people, I'd get in with my version first, and often invent a 'culture or heritage' when asked where I was from, simply because I didn't actually know what my heritage or culture was. I gave people just enough information and that was it, and then the conversation moved on to someone else.

It wasn't until I was 18 when I really started to think about it. Suddenly I wanted to know everything about my early life. I read my social care files – which had limited information about my heritage and my files didn't specify the racial or cultural origin of my birth parents. I always knew my original name - my parents told me everything they knew about me from before I was placed with them - and although there was no such thing as MyHeritage.com or AncestryDNA back then, I did the only thing I thought would get results and that was to take out an advert in The Voice Newspaper quoting my surname which was unusual – and my phone number.



I wasn't sure if anyone would respond. Everyone in the Black community read The Voice Newspaper at that time but I didn't hear anything for weeks until one day, I got a call. It was from a woman who said she had the same surname and told me she was my cousin. I immediately drove over to meet her – on my own – you could do that 'back in day!' It wasn't the right timing for my younger sister, so I met this woman on my own.

Discovering my heritage

We discovered we were second cousins. Seeing someone - other than my sister - who I was related to - was amazing, my newly found cousin looked like me and she showed me so many family photos and gave me phone numbers of other cousins and my brother. I discovered my actual heritage is 50% Nigerian and 50% Irish on my mother's side and I couldn't be prouder. We - my sister and I - are still in contact with my cousin more than 20 years on, as are our families, who meet up from time to time.

Growing up, I always knew I had an older brother from my birth mother who had remained in the care system and his outcomes had not been positive, and he suffered as a result. Being in care is tough for anyone at any time, but especially back then, and I realised the differences in mine and my brother's lives. The effect and stability adoption has and being placed with a sibling – if possible - can influence and impact life going forward.

Adoption is important to me, now and in the past. It gave me the incredibly close family life I have now. I still live in the same flat my dad helped me choose - a few streets away from the home I grew up in. My sister is close by too. Every Sunday, we all – partners and kids – head over to mum's for dinner. Every Sunday we catch up and get to be together. I know many of my friends who were raised with their birth families don't have such close bonds with their family so I always remind my mum how she lucked out when she adopted my sister and I!

I know adoption isn't the answer for every child, but being part of the Black Adoption Project is incredibly important to me. I followed up on a tweet from Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy looking for adults who were adopted and I've been onboard ever since. I want to be part of and influence tangible change for children already adopted and the next generation. Changing perceptions, better PR and calling out to families to come forward for Black children can only be a good thing. Families are more complex nowadays, and we need the robust support to help make adoption just another way of family life.

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My path to social work

Social care and social workers have been part of my life all my life. At the age of nine, I knew I wanted to be a social worker. My parents were very thankful and positive about the social worker that placed my sister and I in their care, so I've grown up with the idea that social

workers are very important and if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have been placed with my parents. It was a lovely bedtime story to hear growing up. I have been a proud social worker for over 20 years and hold a special place in my heart for children who are in care today, and those who may not be able to have connections with their families.

There are more and more mixed heritage children, and I want to give them permission to identify their heritages and be who they want to be in this world. In the last two years, I have found out the racial heritage of my paternal birth side of the family through DNA testing and it turns out I'm from a country in the Middle East although there's no information about the identity of any family members who may be related to me. I may never fully know where I'm originally from but having an adopted family who accepted me no matter what, has always been a source of security for me. Since my dad died, my mum is the only person in our family who is White and she always says she wouldn't have it any other way.

A huge thank you to Francine for sharing her unique story and her motivation for being part of the Project. Our final question? Please tell us about Your London.



'We are solid North West Londoners! We all – my kids included – love the real diversity of London and it being a vibrant 24-hour city. We love the anonymity and the 'busyness' of it. No one cares where you are from, it's OK to be different and blended families are very much the 'norm'.

***name changed**