



Introducing ... Laura Eden



Laura is the Director of Children's Services in Newham Council, and this includes overseeing the planning, development, and delivery of services and initiatives designed to improve the lives of all Newham's Looked After children and young people, and their families. Her leadership ensures that every service is shaped with care, ambition, and a commitment to equity and positive outcomes.

Laura brings an energetic spirit to everything she does and this is paired with a deep passion for her work and her commitment to the Black Adoption Project. Alongside two co-Chairs for the Steering Committee; Diane Benjamin, Director of Children's Social Work in Hackney and a member of the team with Lived Experience of adoption, Laura tells us more about her motivation for the job she does in Newham and her role in the Black Adoption Project.

“ I've got a lot of ambitions and passions in my role, the two big ones for me are - one, to prevent and reduce the number of children who suffer harm and two, to address the inequality that exists in society to ensure equity for all our children. As part of the Black Adoption Project, this covers both passions, as well as the need for a long term view, how do we ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and attempt to repair the harm so that they can have successful lives?

With the roles I do, for example especially for the Black Adoption Project, it is about addressing inequality and the disproportionality which we know exists so starkly for children who are Looked After particularly with regards to ethnicity, anything I can do to support the elimination or at least the reduction of this, including tackling racism, I am there. Add to that the intersections of special educational needs, being part of a sibling group or being an older child needing adoption, this can all impact further on children's future. So I think about; how can I and how do I influence? How can I use my position, the knowledge I have to share with others who need to hear the messages we experience in social care every day? Often the courts and other services are less familiar with the impact of, for example, delays on the lives of Black children. It is important we remind them. I believe that if a child or children can not stay with a birth parent or in kinship care, the next best option is someone other than the state having parental responsibility for them.

Like my co-Chairs, I'm a do-er. If there is something that isn't fair, wrong or unjust, the Black Adoption Project is how I can be part of something that makes a difference. I want to learn, influence and take action where I can. Originally being Vice-Chair, then Co-Chair means I can offer help in whichever way the Black Adoption Project finds most useful but also influence amazing projects and see them come to life!

The Steering Committee members are a special group of people, tell us about them.

“ I love the Steering Committee. We're all there together, with different lives, lived experiences, professions and diversity, and through that, innovation and creation happen. We have great relationships whether we meet in person at our quarterly Steering Committee sessions or in between on our WhatsApp group chat especially when a member has a really good resource or just some good news to share. We're an established group where we challenge with purpose, creativity, humour and a sense of fun. We're sharing the brilliant outcomes; from the Let's Talk About Adoption (a support initiative for prospective parents in the early stages of assessment) or the highlights for young Black adoptees. It's grounding, it's energising and collectively we're doing something real.

As a white leader in this sector, using my white privilege the right way is important. Not everyone agrees but as a leader one can get into certain spaces where they can use their position and expertise to assist and influence, for example, keeping the Black Adoption Project narrative on the agenda. Like Diane, using our seniority as London professionals, we have an imperative to address the importance of adoption in children's lives, and this Project is just one way to do this.

Ultimately the Project will benefit children being placed swiftly within families - it makes sense - for their development and well-being, which is what we all have at the forefront of our minds. In the long run we can then start to think about the resources that can then go into preventative initiatives.

Thank you Laura for your time and for sharing your insight with us. As well as being united as Steering Committee members, most of us are members of this great city. Tell us about Your London?

“ I just love it - of course sometimes I hate it but I've lived in London all my life – North, East and South and I'm a Londoner through and through. The diversity and the density of the population is unmatched. I love chatting to people, it's so hectic on a daily basis and yet, it still has that community feel.