



**SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**

SUMMER 2011



**OBV 15 YEARS  
OF CHANGE**



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*'If you don't vote'  
London Mayor and  
GLA election poster  
launch 2008. (from  
left to right:) Francine  
Fernandes, Simon  
Woolley, Richard  
Sudan, Winsome-Grace  
Cornish, Leon Green,  
Ashok Viswanathan, US  
intern Celina Chan and  
Faz Hakim.*



*Christmas in Rome  
2006: Staff on a one day  
trip to see the ruins –  
Louise Alexander, Ashok  
Viswanathan, Sanjay  
Mistry, Faz Hakim, Leon  
Green, Rafiq Maricar,  
Francine Fernandes.*



## TRIBUTE

I have come to the end of a fantastic 10 year journey with OBV. I arrived in 2001 to offer my services as a volunteer and got a small but unexpected paycheck the end of the month.

It's been a rollercoaster ride – the anxiety before thousands arrive for an event and tremendous high when happy smiling faces leave the venue.

Over the years our small team has done a tremendous amount of work, which is nowhere near captured in this special 15 year anniversary magazine. There is still an enormous task ahead, and the hard work continues by the dedicated team, including volunteers and interns, both local and international whose invaluable help and enthusiasm spurs us all, urged on by our Director to 'worry the work like a dog worries a bone'.

I have worked alongside a great number of awesome people who have generously supported OBV's work, and on behalf of the team I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the thousands who have taken part in our programmes; to those who have become magistrates, politicians or appointed to serve in boardrooms around the country; to those who have tried for elected office, and will try again; and to those who are inspired, empowered and challenged to take a place among the trailblazers who stand in the gap for communities marginalised by society.

I honour and thank the scores of politicians and magistrates who have given their time as mentors; court officials, staff and civil servants who work quietly behind the scenes; the campaigners, organisations and individuals that support us; to our alumni and the vast wider membership, including those who year after year join us for our events, thank you; and to every new person reading this, welcome.

Happy Birthday OBV, well done!

**Winsome-Grace Cornish MBE,  
former OBV Communications Director**

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# Contents

- P 4** **OBV's 15 year celebration!**  
Simon Woolley tells the inside story about how OBV was formed – and how it powers black politics today.
- P8** **Six of the best!**  
Ashok Viswanathan remembers the campaigns that helped OBV to 'hit the ground running
- P11** **Celebrating success**  
Graduates and their political mentors speak about the influence and impact of OBV's community empowerment programmes,
- P19** **Breaking bread**  
Adeela Shafi , Matilda MacAttram , Merlene Emerson and Cllr Lester Holloway recount their political journeys:
- P23** **OBV - Fifteen years on the road**
- P31** **Lahore to London:**  
Ajmal Masoor, reflects on Britain's Asian communities
- P32** **Vision of unity:**  
Ade Sawyerr looks at the future for African and Caribbeans
- P33** **Raising aspirations:**  
College principal Ali Hadawi CBE worries about youths' lack of ambition
- P34** **Rousing the Sleeping Giant:**  
Rev David Shosanya argues the black church can wield power in politics



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# OBV's 15 year celebration!

1996 – 2011

**Simon Woolley** tells the inside story about how OBV was formed – and how it powers black politics today.

**There are many people who want to make a positive difference to their community and wider society. For a multitude of reasons very few are lucky enough to fulfil that dream or desire.**

I've been extremely lucky. With Operation Black Vote I've been afforded a unique platform that continues to make a difference both for BME individuals and wider society.

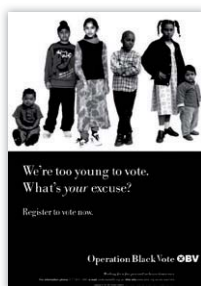
The start of OBV's journey? Wayne Douglas had died in police custody and there were civil disturbances after it was ruled that no one would be held responsible for his death.

Activist Derek Hinds met Lee Jasper in Brixton and told him: "If we want change we must follow Malcolm X and use the ballot box not the bullet or rioting."

His words set off a chain reaction. "Woolley", Jasper enquired, the day after the riots, "Can you find out how many black people are eligible to vote? We've got to think of a long term political strategy".

At this time I was a volunteer for Charter 88 - an organisation dedicated to democratic reform. I'd met Jasper at York Hall when he and Ken Livingstone had launched the National Assembly Against Racism.

After three months research I not only found out



approximately how many black people could vote, but also, and critically, in which constituencies and how much of a difference we could make.

In the offices of the 1990 Trust, at the Elephant and Castle, I was able to show that the black British electorate was powerful way beyond its own perception. Collectively we had real political power to halt race inequality.

John Major's government had a majority of 21 seats, but our vote could decide who wins in over 100 seats. Everyone's jaw dropped. Operation Black Vote was born.

Despite having no money and no salaries everything seemed possible. I remember walking into one of the world's most prestigious advertising agencies at that time with Jasper and Hinds, and literally turning down their offer of working pro-bono for us, because we had decided that in the spirit of our vision only black creative groups would help with the job we were about take on. Advertising and design gurus Trevor Robinson and Jon Daniels had easily convinced us that the empowerment of black Britain was their gig. Their poster campaign 'Spot the Black MP' and accompanying campaign film shook the establishment. Black people were voting and could not be ignored. The





Far left: Simon Woolley meets Patron, Prince Charles, London String of Pearls Festival launch, St James Palace, 2002. OBV contributed a leaflet for the Festival detailing the contribution of minority ethnic groups in Britain over 2000 years. (Far right top). Getting out the Black Vote: General Election day campaigning Brixton 2008. (Far right below). Operation Black Vote Houses of Parliament launch 1996. Election campaign posters. (Below) Campaign posters. This page -Election Day interview. Mobile poster van and young voters 1997 Elections.



*“The feeling that you can make a difference to peoples lives is, frankly one of the best feelings in the world.”*



momentum we had achieved could never be rolled back.

Imagine this. I'm a volunteer activist and I receive a call from the Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw who we had asked to attend a meeting. "Yes, I'll come, and if you don't mind I'll announce that if we win the next election the Lawrence family, the black community and Britain will have a Public Inquiry into Stephen's death... Is that fine by you Mr Woolley?"

Fifteen years later our remit is wider than Westminster. Having the power to tackle race inequality is required not only in Parliament, but in local authorities, magistrate courts, among school governors, trade unions, and increasingly big business - our small but dedicated team, including fellow founder Ashok Viswanathan, has made this happen.

The feeling that you can make a difference to people's lives is, frankly, one of the best feelings in the world. Together the OBV team is nurturing a new generation of leaders who will take their place to continue this most wonderful journey.

Happy birthday Operation Black Vote and thank you, in no small measure, for making me the person I am today.



## MESSAGES FROM WESTMINSTER



"I am delighted to be sending a message of support to Operation Black Vote on the occasion of your 15th Anniversary.

The work of OBV is a striking example of success in meeting the challenge of the Big Society, by putting more power and opportunities in people's hands. We need to draw on the skills and expertise of all people across the country, as we respond to the social, political and economic challenges Britain faces.

The MP Shadowing Scheme is one of a number of successful programmes run by OBV since it came into being. The Government has valued the work carried out by OBV, to promote the councillor and magistrates roles, which has helped to enable Britain's diverse local communities to be increasingly represented in the local democratic process. I know that Andrew Stunell, as Minister with responsibility for race equality, is only one of the politicians to act as a mentor under the scheme, who can bear witness to its effectiveness.

And I am delighted to be able to share the floor of the House of Commons with Helen Grant MP, and alumna of the scheme who is now the Conservative Party's first female African Caribbean MP.

I wish Operation Black Vote every continued success."

**DAVID CAMERON, PRIME MINISTER**



"I've seen the work OBV does first-hand having had the privilege to take part in the mentoring scheme last year. I know that thousands of people have benefited from this scheme and the many other programmes and events that OBV organises.

There is a clear problem with under-representation of people from black and ethnic minorities in all levels of politics. The work OBV does is really important in helping to tackle this issue by promoting engagement with politics for people from minority communities.

I'd like to congratulate OBV on its 15th birthday and wish them all the best for the next 15 years."

**ED MILIBAND, LABOUR LEADER**



"Operation Black Vote has worked incredibly hard to ensure ethnic minority communities are represented and listened to, and I want to pass on my warmest congratulations on its 15th anniversary. Everyone should feel empowered to take part in all aspects of democratic life, from simply casting a vote to becoming a political representative. By being democratically active you are giving you and your community a voice, and that can bring about real change.

"I encourage everyone to make sure they take the opportunity to be heard. Get on the electoral register, if you're not already on it, so you can have a say in who represents you both locally and nationally and look for other opportunities to get involved in political life in your community. Don't underestimate the difference you can make by having your say."

**NICK CLEGG, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**



"Congratulations to OBV on the terrific work you have done over the last 15 years. And thanks to Simon Woolley for the years of leadership he has shown. There is so much still to do so I know OBV will be vital over the next 15 years."

**HARRIET HARMAN, FORMER DEPUTY LEADER, LABOUR**

"I have long been a huge supporter of Operation Black Vote, its aims, its staff and all the volunteers who make it such a success. Since its inception, OBV has been a positive and inspiring organisation. It is a hub for those in the BME community looking to engage in British politics – and offers courses and skills training to develop the next generation of community leaders.

Their non-partisan position has ensured that OBV's aspiration of building a fairer society through greater political participation within, and representation from, the BME community is lifted above party politics.

I am also proud to have worked with students on the OBV's 'Shadowing Scheme'. I hope they learnt as much from me as I have from them!

Operation Black Vote has done much in 15 years, and I am excited to see where it is as an organisation – and we are as a country – at the 30th anniversary.

**SADIQ KHAN MP – LABOUR, FIRST MUSLIM CABINET MINISTER, NOW SHADOW JUSTICE SECRETARY**

"Looking at the impact of Operation Black Vote over the last 15 years we can say that the House of Commons is no longer the 'white male middle class club' as Paddy Ashdown described it back in the Nineties. We now have 27 MPs in the House from a BME background. While a closer reflection of society would be 55-60 BME MPs, there has been progress: and OBV's MP shadowing schemes from 1999 onwards have been a valuable part of that progress. Having participated in these myself, as a mentor, I know how effective they are.

Improving the participation in the democratic process is one way that we can empower communities and the work of OBV over the last 15 years has helped to bring ethnic minority communities into that process. I am delighted to send in my best wishes to everyone involved in Operation Black Vote as you celebrate your 15th year.

**ANDREW STUNELL MP – LIB DEM, COMMUNITIES MINISTER**

"Over the last fifteen years I have been supportive of Operation Black Vote. They have played an essential part in making people from minority communities realise that they have a voice and a say in how our country is run by convincing them to vote. They have also encouraged people to enter the political arena on all levels and become pro-active rather than leaving it up to others and in so doing making our ancestors' harsh journey worthwhile."

**BARONESS FLOELLA BENJAMIN – LIB DEM**

"Progress is made when enfranchised people visit the ballot box. Happy birthday OBV and thank you for urging the exercise of

power through the political process."

**ADAM AFRIYIE MP – CONSERVATIVE**

Congratulations to OBV on their 15th Anniversary. They have shaped the agenda for the BAME community in terms of representation and encouraging our community to take part in the political process through voting. After 20 years of trying I have now been elected as an MP. Our background enhances our participation in public service and in years to come this will be seen as incidental to our commitment to serve and help our country.

**VALERIE VAZ MP – LABOUR, ELECTED 2010**

"I feel very privileged to be the first Sikh Conservative Member of Parliament and believe that it represents a huge milestone. It has not been easy to achieve this; my father came to this country with less than £5 in his pocket and no idea where he would sleep that night, but through our hard work and dedication I now find myself as a successful businessman representing the seat of Wolverhampton South West.

The journey into political life is not easy for anyone, but I encourage anyone from minority communities to be involved in politics – whether this be as an activist a councillor or as a member of parliament. It is a hugely rewarding experience and by making local voices heard you can make a real difference to your local community. It is only through hard work that we will be able to increase participation and representation amongst the BME community."

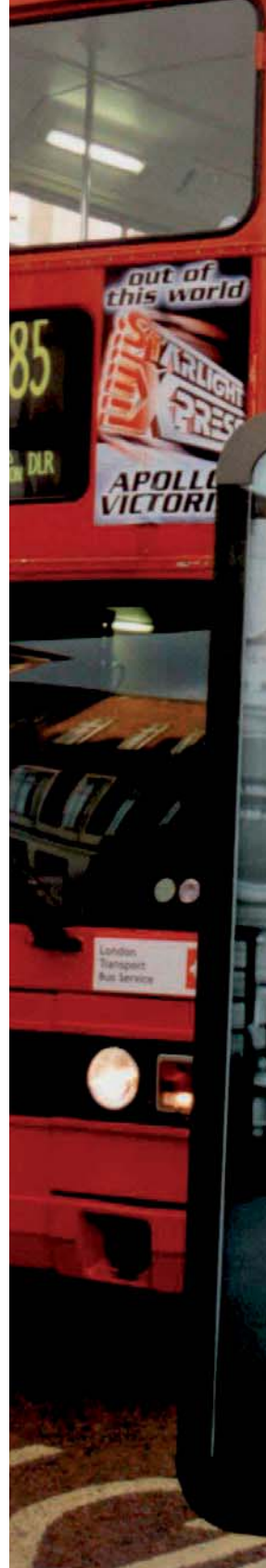
**PAUL UPPAL MP – CONSERVATIVE, ELECTED 2010**

"Come rain or shine, in town and country, up and down roads and lanes, in stairways and in meeting places where ever the business of politics is done, OBV, has been a consistent and steadfast presence. Always committed in the struggle for a successful multi racial society in which our democracy is strengthened and enriched by diverse and plural voices participating at every level. Activism remains the key to building on the real progress that has been achieved over the years so, even as we celebrate the gains made, let's rededicate ourselves to the vision that continues to inspire. A society in which all are judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

**LORD PAUL BOATENG – LABOUR, FIRST BLACK CABINET MINISTER**

"The vision of the mother of all parliaments having a rainbow composition of members in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords remains a goal to be realised. Significant progress has been made in getting more black and minority ethnic MPs but progress has been slow. For BME MPs, getting there is one thing; staying there and being successful is another.

Operation Black Vote (OBV) has made an invaluable contribution to raising awareness about the value and importance of the democratic process, the institutions of government and the necessity of engagement and participation. OBV has also encouraged, nurtured, and supported the emergence of talented and committed BME individuals to have positive engagement and







# Six *of the* best!

**Ashok Viswanathan** remembers the campaigns that helped OBV to 'hit the ground running'.

"Over fifteen years there have been countless campaigns by OBV, many of them a great success. It is a difficult task trying to select a few to highlight and honour the strength and breadth of our work since its inception in 1996. Here are six of the best!"



## GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN 1997

We identified one-hundred seats where black communities could determine the outcome of who wins. By using their collective vote they can determine who gets the keys to No 10.

Setting up an impromptu travelling office, we toured Britain's cities on a campaign bus, embarking on a bold programme of voter registration and political hustings meetings. We took our campaign bus to the heart of major cities. We made a splash everywhere we visited.

## MEETING NELSON MANDELA

The greatest political activist that has walked the Earth, Nelson Madiba Mandela was on a visit to the UK that happened to coincide with our launch week. After meeting Madiba himself it was a matter of hours before the press and public was beating down our doors to be associated with the campaign. We received endorsements from the three main party leaders, while Jack Straw - who would later become the Home Secretary - announced at one of our meetings that he would hold a Lawrence Inquiry if Labour were elected. The rest is history.

## GLA REFERENDUM AND ELECTIONS 1998

In the run-up to in GLA Referendum and Elections, in 1998, we were able to secure a visit from the humblest yet most ablest of men in Emmanuel Cleaver III, then Mayor of Kansas City, and now a US Congressman. He spoke about the need to get involved in the new London government structure. We went on to tour London boroughs to boost voter turnout. ➤



# Racists are now more dangerous than ever.

# They're voting.

June 10th Elections.



Mayoral election poster 2004 (Main). Mayoral Election candidates 2004, Ken Livingstone elected. Mayoral Election candidates 2008, Boris Johnson elected. Reverend Al Sharpton visits the UK to spearhead the 'OBV and Choice FM Lecture', 2002





**EUROPEAN ELECTIONS, 1999**

We continued to attract international figures during the European Elections 1999 with speakers from anti-racist organisations in Germany, France, Ireland and Spain arriving in the UK to demonstrate the collective power of the black vote in Europe. We argued then, as we continue to do now, that if black Britain is strong, then so too is black Europe strong.

**REVEREND AL SHARPTON**

We befriended the African-American firebrand activist Reverend Al Sharpton, who generously agreed to come on a week-long tour, where he set London and the UK alight with his blazing oratory and no nonsense reality check. A flagship event saw him raise the roof of a 2,000 capacity conference venue. In fact, he enjoyed himself so much that we invited him back in 2010 to do it all again. During Sharpton's visit we met with the International Development Secretary to press for urgent and increased aid to Haiti.

**REVEREND JESSE JACKSON**

It got even better than Rev Sharpton. Our audaciousness and tenacity secured the visit of Reverend Jesse Jackson, a civil rights legend. Again like those that came a before, he gave his time and attention to our agenda and created a splash that helped define the election and the UK's future political landscape.

What we had never anticipated during these campaigns over OBV's prestigious, yet brief history was that a black man would run and be elected as President changing forever and definitively race politics in the political arena. It's was this thought that propelled our campaigns, our hopes and dreams, our strategy and belief over 15 years.

"Now for a black Prime Minister right? We're laying the groundwork now. And we'll still be here and ready to mark the occasion."



*Reverend Al Sharpton addresses a packed house on his 2nd visit at the 'Realising the Dream' event 2010; General Election 2005 - The Black Manifesto; Rev Jesse Jackson, OBV General Elections 'Be The Best' 100ft poster launch 2010; Pre-election voter registration campaign; Rev Jesse Jackson arrives for OBV 'Power is never given' address, Lambeth Town Hall, 2007*





# Celebrating success

Graduates and their political mentors speak about the influence and impact of OBV's community empowerment programmes

## PARLIAMENTARY SHADOWING SCHEME

In 1999 twenty five young people made history while being mentored by parliamentarians on the MP Shadowing Scheme. The first of its kind – the aspiring politicians got the opportunity to attend MP's meetings in Westminster and follow them in their constituencies. The experience helped the scheme members to learn the ropes and was an outstanding success with five graduates standing for election.



Above: MPs Sadiq Khan MP, Sarah Teather MP and Peter Bottomley MP with 2002 MP Scheme shadows: Harinder Mann, Farmida Bi and Sameer Mirza. Above: MP shadowees, 1999, outside 10 Downing Street and with their parliamentary mentors, Lord Archer, former Conservative Chair Michael Ancram, Chris Smith, Simon Hughes and Bernie Grant at the Houses of Parliament. Also in the picture Lee Jasper, Simon Woolley and Trevor Phillips, then CRE chair.



# Meet the new generation of politicians

**GEORGE 'ORLANZO' COLE (2010-11)**

Mentored by Shadow Health Minister Diane Abbott. George was elected as a councillor for Leicester City, representing the people of Western Park in the May 2011 election. He is a co-founder of the Clarion Group, a Leicester-based organisation which aims to address the absence of African-Caribbeans from local politics, increase political literacy in the local community, and encourage individuals to get involved in all areas of governance.

"Having joined the OBV scheme I've come to realise how much can be done locally if we become organised in the community."

**GEORGE 'ORLANZO' COLE**

"George shadowed me in Parliament and I was very impressed by him. I wish him the very best of luck."

**DIANE ABBOTT MP**

**ELLIN JOSEPH (2010-11)**

Ellen shadowed Stephen McPartland, MP for Stevenage, and was encouraged to stand as a council candidate in the May elections for the Bedwell ward in his constituency.

"I was pleasantly surprised that so many people had come out to vote for me. The journey was exciting and nerve racking! I may not have won this time, but I am encouraged that a relative short campaign resulted in over 400 people voting for me in the Bedwell area. What will happen if I campaign a whole year before the next elections? Watch this space! Ellin Joseph, soon to be councillor and who knows - MP?"

**ELLIN JOSEPH**

"I was delighted to mentor Ellin Joseph and must admit that I think I learned more from Ellin, than I was able to teach her.

I think the programme is successful because it brings together people from different backgrounds interested in politics and delivers a real insight into the job of a Member of Parliament. Ellin and I have become good friends and will work together to help her fulfill her dream of

getting elected. She is now standing in her first local election and I am helping deliver her leaflets."

**STEPHEN MCPARTLAND MP - CONSERVATIVE**

**PHILIP OLANIPEKUN, (2010-11)**

Philip was paired with the Rt. Hon Oliver Letwin. He has made significant strides in his political career in 2011. His time with OBV proved to be a springboard to political involvement and he was Conservative candidate for the Tattenhams ward, Surrey, in the May 2011 council elections. A local to Surrey, Philip was previously a manager at a security firm and his transition into politics has been remarkably smooth.

Philip credits OBV for introducing him to the world of political participation,

"OBV was absolutely instrumental in introducing me to the machinery of how politics works. It gave me an opportunity to have direct access with MPs, people who were real decision-makers. I hope OBV can continue with their excellent work, allowing people from ethnic minorities to become decision-makers."

**PHILIP OLANIPEKUN**

**MARI REES (2007)**

Mari graduated from the Welsh Assembly Shadowing Scheme. Mari stood as the Labour Parliamentary candidate for Preseli and Pembrokeshire in the General Election 2010.



I think a lot of people find the political world a mystery and they feel cut off from it. What OBV has done with this shadowing scheme is very important, and I'm a great supporter. The good thing about the shadowing scheme is that it bridges the gap between ordinary peoples lives and the world of politics."

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

"This Government wants a fair society where race and ethnicity are no barriers to taking part. And we'll need to draw on the skills of everyone across the country as we respond to the varied challenges Britain faces today. The House of Commons is still disproportionately white but things are moving in the right direction."

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"It is a great privilege to have been part of Operation Black Vote's excellent work over the past fifteen years - supporting people like Sayeeda Warsi, the first Muslim to sit in the Cabinet, and Helen Grant, the first black Conservative woman elected to Parliament.

The work of Operation Black Vote in helping to improve and enhance political education and participation is both necessary and welcome. Long may it continue."

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She was due to stand in the Welsh Assembly elections in May 2011. Sadly Mari passed away in April 2011.

**MARVIN REES (2006)**

Marvin participated in two OBV programmes. In 2005 he shadowed Trevor Phillips, then Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, on The Commissioner Shadowing Scheme. In 2006 he shadowed Bridget Prentice MP, then the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department for Constitutional Affairs on the MP Scheme.

“The programme had practical results for me. I built on the knowledge, confidence and credibility I gained to take up public appointments, and I put myself forward for selection as the Labour Party Parliamentary Candidate for Bristol West, in the hope of representing the constituency in which I grew up. I recently drew on my OBV experiences while sharing a few reflections to open a local election hustings. I spoke of the need for a more developed activism, one that appreciates the complexity of political change.

OBV have set the bar for me. It’s about participating in the debate, cutting deals, testing your values, stepping up to lead, taking responsibility and risking failure.”

**MARVIN REES**

**HARINDER MANN (2001)**

Harinder was mentored by Chris Smith MP. Harinder stood in the 2010 General Election. Through the connections of his mentor he won the position of secretary to John Battle MP, the Prime Minister’s Envoy to the faith communities. Harinder credits OBV for introducing him to politics.

“As a result of the shadowing scheme, I was able to broaden my political career in a way I would not have been able to imagine I could do so. It allowed me to network with contacts in high profile political positions. In one of the first talks I heard Simon give he told a room of OBV Shadows about the challenge of the democratic deficit. He spoke about the role OBV would play in helping us build the experience, connections and reputations that would better enable us to do this. That was in 2002 and in the ten years I have been associated with OBV I have found the staff, the network of OBV alumni and the public figures who have stepped forward true to the spirit of the cause.”

**HARINDER MANN**



**MAHROOF HUSSAIN MBE (1999)**

Mentored by Marsha Singh MP. Mahroof was one of the first graduates to achieve success. On completion of the scheme he entered local politics in 2002 and was elected as Councillor in Rotherham, a position which he still holds today. He has worked in high profile positions within the House of Commons and with the European Parliament, and is currently a Cabinet Member on the Council.

“OBV was a precursor to my career, participating gave me a background to politics and gave me the ability to network with other politicians. I am now able to offer my ward of Boston Castle political experience and political understanding. I am hard-working, and what I do best is listen to and advocate for my community.”

**MAHROOF HUSSAIN**



*From top clockwise: MP Shadows meet Prime Minister Tony Blair 2002. MP Scheme 2006 shadowees and mentor MPs including, Peter Bottomley, Sadiq Khan, Sarah Teather, Oliver Letwin, Tom Brake and Susan Kramer (now Baroness). National Assembly for Wales Shadowing Scheme, participants and mentors 2008. Parliamentary Shadowing Scheme 2010, participants and MP mentors; Mentors: Sadiq Khan, Fiona Mactaggart, Dame Ann Begg (all Labour). Stephen McPartland and Andrew Stephenson (Conservative). Sir Menzies ‘Ming’ Campbell, John Leech, Jo Swinson, Baroness Ros Scott, (all Lib Dems). MP shadowing scheme, 1999. MP Scheme shadows 2002. The cross-party MP Shadowing Schemes also included Green, Plaid Cymru and other parties.*



- *For a more representative Parliament there should be least 55-60 BME MPs*
- *Nationally there are 100,000 councillors elected in Local Authorities, of which less than 3% are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic groups. BME groups account for more than 10% of the UK population*
- *2010 Parliamentary Shadowing Scheme successes: Three Shadows stand in the 2011 local elections. Two are in the early stages of the parliamentary selection process. One will be taking up a position within a MPs office while two others have applied for similar posts. One Shadow is the chair of his constituency party. Another is the chair of his local (branch) party*
- *Parliamentary Shadowing Scheme 2011 - OBV in partnership with the Department of Communities and Local Government – RECRUITING. WWW.OBV.ORG.UK*

"We believe that the media should reflect all aspects of British society and that people from Black and other minority ethnic groups should have a bigger voice in the media world. But the fact is, they are under-represented at senior and middle management levels. Which is why Channel 4 and Operation Black Vote have come together to launch a ground-breaking new Business Mentoring Programme". **CHANNEL 4, 2009**

## OBV GRADUATES

### 1999 MP SCHEME GRADUATES ELECTED

**Sonika Nirwal** - Councillor, ex-Leader of Labour Group, Ealing

**Yousuf Miah** - Councillor in Northampton . Stood as a Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Burnley

**Mahroof Hussain** - Councillor in Rotherham . Also stood as Labour Parliamentary Candidate for Sheffield Hallam

### 2002/3 MP SCHEME PARTICIPANTS WHO STOOD IN THE 2005 GENERAL ELECTION

**Sameer Mirza**, Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Birmingham Sparkbrook.

**Farmida Bi**, Labour Parliamentary Candidate for Mole Valley.

**Bushra Anwar**, Independent Candidate, Blackburn.

**Harinder Mann**, Labour, North Yorkshire Parliamentary Candidate, 2005 council elections, and 2010 General Election.

### 2006/7 MP SCHEME GRADUATES ELECTED

**Sukhinder 'Rocky' Gill**, Cabinet Member for Education and the Deputy Leader of the Council Barking and Dagenham.

**Sanchia Alasia**, Barking and Dagenham, Deputy Lead Member of Health and Adult Services Select Committee.

**Anna Rothery** - Chair of the Culture and Tourism Select Committee Liverpool City Council.

**Denise Headley** - Enfield Council (Elected prior to commencement on scheme).

**Helen Grant** - MP for Maidstone and the Weald.

### 2006/7 MP SCHEME GRADUATES WHO STOOD IN COUNCIL ELECTIONS

**Sylbourne Sydial** - Lewisham Council candidate.

### 2010/11 PARLIAMENTARY SCHEME

**George 'Orlando' Cole** - Elected to Leicester City Council in May 2011.

**Ellin Joseph** - Candidate in the May 2011 Council elections.

**Philip Olanipekun** Candidate May 2011 council elections.

### GRADUATES FROM THE 2004 AND 2008 BRISTOL COUNCIL SHADOWING SCHEME WHO STOOD FOR ELECTION

**Ricky Nelson**

**Busharat Ali**

**Marian Ovonten**

**Nasreen Begum**

**Waliur Rahman**

### GRADUATES FROM THE 2007 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES SCHEME WHO STOOD IN THE 2010 GENERAL ELECTIONS

**Shazia Awan** - Stood in the 2010 general election for Leigh.

**Mari Rees**

**Liz Musa** - Stood as a candidate, National Assembly 2011 elections.

### GRADUATES FROM THE 2008 NATIONAL BAME WOMEN'S COUNCILLOR SHADOWING SCHEME ELECTED

**Pathumal Ali**, Lib Dems, Sutton Council - Elected.

**Judy Best**, Lib Dems, Lambeth Council - Elected. Appointed Deputy Mayor.

**Dr Sheila D'Souza**, Conservative, Westminster Council - Elected.

**Margaret McLennan**, Labour, Brent Council - Elected.

**Natalia Shepherd**, Labour.

**Hamira Khan (PPC)**, Conservative, 2010 general election.

**Rachel Nabudde**, Conservative.

**Jeya Nadanakumaran**, Conservative.

**Krystal Johnson**, Lib Dems.

**Mehnaz Khan**, Lib Dems, Candidate Birmingham City Council, 2010.

**Colette Claire Williams**, Independent.

**Bonnie Anderson**, Christian People's Alliance.

### GRADUATE FROM THE 2009 LIVERPOOL COUNCILLOR SHADOWING SCHEME WHO STOOD IN THE 2011 COUNCIL ELECTIONS

**Natalie Nicholas**

### GRADUATES FROM THE 2009 LEWISHAM CIVIC LEADERSHIP SCHEME WHO STOOD IN THE 2010 AND 2011 COUNCIL ELECTIONS

**Jenni Steele** - Stood in 2010 local elections and council byelection 2011 (Lewisham).

**Mervyn Adon-Wint**

**Chiedza Bassey**

**Janet Bowens**

**Shirley Drummond**

### MAGISTRATES SHADOWING SCHEME GRADUATE

**Sareena Sanger** - Stood in the 2010 council elections in Redbridge, London.



Left: The Operation Black Vote AM Shadowing Scheme sponsored by the National Assembly for Wales wins the highly acclaimed Channel 4 / Hansard Society Political Awards 2008. In the photo: AM Shadows Abdool Rahman Khodabocus (left and right) Mari Rees, and (centre) OBV Director Simon Woolley.



# Local decision-makers



Bristol, Liverpool, and Lewisham Councils - along with the National BAME Women's Shadowing Scheme - took up the baton for local political and civic engagement schemes. Many of the graduates have since been elected as councillors.

The working partnerships between OBV, government departments, councils and other institutions has produced a network of talent, helping them to influence decision making.

*Bristol Council Shadowing Scheme 2004 and 2006 (Left top and below left). (Top right and below right) Lewisham Civic Leadership programme 2009 and 2011. Liverpool Council Shadowing Scheme 2009 (Below).*



"I am tremendously impressed at the talent and ability that the programme has uncovered from within our community and I am confident they will play a part in making our community stronger and better. I am also sure there are many others who will be eager to follow in their footsteps."  
**LEWISHAM MAYOR SIR STEVEN BULLOCK.**



## YOU CAN BE A COUNCILLOR

You too should consider standing as a councillor at the next local council elections, or in a by-election if one emerges.

You need to be a member of a political party so your first step is to contact your local branch to sign up, or join online. You may even consider standing for election as an independent candidate.

Volunteering to help your ward councillor or MP is also a good way to learn about the role and responsibilities of a politician. You can find local party branch details on the party's website.

To have a good chance of winning at electiontime, you should give yourself enough time to learn about the concerns of the ward you wish to represent and how best you will serve them.

It is ultimately up to the political party's local group to decide whether to select you as a candidate, so becoming actively involved with their work locally is essential.

A councillor's work involves a great deal of campaigning, so your ability to find your way around obstacles and shouldering responsibility are important skills. Don't be tempted to turn back at the first hurdle. Just like our graduates who are now elected politicians, it is your drive and determination that will get you to the winning post!

**Check the OBV website to see what programmes relevant to becoming a councillor, are available: [www.obv.org.uk](http://www.obv.org.uk)**



*The Parole Board Civic Leadership Programme 2008. The Commissioner Shadowing Scheme (Commission for Racial Equality) 2005.*





Winners:  
Cllr Pathumal Ali,  
Cllr Judy Best,  
Cllr Dr Sheila  
D'Souza &  
Cllr Margaret  
McLennan

## LOCAL WOMEN TAKE A STAND

Sixty women took part in the 2009 National BAME Women's Councillor Shadowing Scheme, aimed at improving the representation of Black and other ethnic minority (BAME) women within the democratic system. This partnership involving OBV, the Government Equalities Office (GEO), and the BAME Women Councillors' Taskforce was led by Baroness Uddin of Bethnal Green.

The women shadowed local councillors from over 25 local Authorities and fourteen

graduates stood in local election elections. Four won victory for their councils - Councillor Sheila D'Souza Conservatives in Westminster; Councillor Margaret McLennan for Labour in Brent; and for the Liberal Democrats Councillor Pathumal Ali in Sutton and Councillor Judy Best won for Lambeth.

**Less than 1% of local councillors are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women despite the fact that they make up more than 5% of the population'. Government Equalities Office - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Councillors' Taskforce Report 2009.**



Left: National BAME Women's Councillor Shadowing Scheme, 2009 participants. Above: Lynne Featherstone MP, Harriet Harman MP.



**||** I always wanted to give back to my community. This scheme was a good way to see if I had what it takes to become a councillor. I was surprised how hard they worked but undeterred I thought I could do it."

**CLLR JUDY BEST.**

Our democracy is supposed to be representative, rooted in the community. It won't be representative until more women like these are at the heart of decision making at a local and national level. We need all sections of society represented in politics so we can get decisions that can have a real effect on everyone."

**LYNNE FEATHERSTONE MP, MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES.**

The project came out of a BAME Women Councillors' Taskforce set up by Harriet Harman MP who said: "Our local democracy needs to be fully representative – but it's not. It lacks the voice of Black and Asian women at a local level. For local government to make the right decisions it must be representative of and rooted in its local communities. Black and Asian women are the missing voice in our local democracy. Our local councils need to understand the different communities that make up diverse modern Britain. You get better informed decision making when all members of the community are involved."

**RT. HON HARRIET HARMAN, EX-MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES.**





# *Changing the face of the magistracy*

## **MAGISTRATES SCHEME**

The scheme was founded after Simon Woolley stopped the then-Lord Chancellor Lord Derry Irvine in a Justice Department corridor and challenged him to 'change the face of the magistracy'. At the time the proportion of black magistrates was under 2% against a minority ethnic population of nearly 5%.

Lord Irvine met the challenge and Bristol's Georgia Ramsey set the ball rolling as the first graduate to be appointed as a Justice of the Peace after graduating from the 2001 Magistrates Shadowing Scheme. Shortly after that Revinder Johal also took her seat on the Birmingham magistrate's bench.

Since then success has followed success as the scheme raised awareness throughout the country about the criminal justice process and the need for greater minority representation within the magistrates' courts.

In 2010 the then Justice Minister Jack Straw hosted a celebration to honour over sixty appointed magistrates - all graduates of the OBV Magistrates Shadowing programme - who have made it to the bench, with scores more on the waiting list to take their place in court.



*Clockwise from top: Former Lord Chancellor, Lord Charlie Falconer with Magistrates Shadowing Scheme weekend seminar participants, 2004. Former Lord Chancellor, Lord Derry Irvine and Bristol participants, Magistrates Shadowing Scheme Launch 2001. Westminster celebration to honour over 60 magistrates, appointed graduates from the OBV scheme, 2010. Scheme graduates appointed, Kirti Soni JP, Pamela Roberts JP, Lord Lieutenant Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher and Ann-Maria Quail JP, Buckinghamshire 2004.*





**YOU TOO CAN BECOME A MAGISTRATE**

Almost anyone can apply to become a magistrate.

Magistrates come from a wide range of backgrounds and occupations. They are bus drivers, office workers, chief executives, and people like you and me - ordinary men and women with common sense and personal integrity. To become appointed as a magistrate / Justice of the Peace (JP) you have to be able to listen to all sides of an argument, make fair and reasonable decisions; you do not have to have any legal or formal qualifications.

If you are considering applying for appointment your first step is to go along to your local magistrates court to observe a court in session. You should try to attend two or three sessions.

The role is voluntary so if you believe that you would be able to fit it into your work and home timetable send off for an application pack.

Visit the OBV or Magistrates Association website and read thoroughly information about the character and time requirements.

Magistrates receive training after appointment and are instructed by court clerks, but you need intelligence, common sense, integrity and the capacity to act fairly.

If you have all these you may apply on line or via the Magistrates Association website, but don't forget to let OBV know how you get on.

**Check the OBV website for information about our magistrates seminars: [www.obv.org.uk](http://www.obv.org.uk).**



*Clockwise from top: Jack Straw, Secretary of State for Justice with Baljit Singh Rihal and mentor Linda Hacker, 2007/8 (top left). Lord Chancellor and 2006 scheme graduates. Khamani Eze, Merlene Carrington JP (now runs OBV Magistrates Scheme), David Lammy, Diane Reynolds and Kofi Pratt, scheme launch 2004. National Media Launch 2005: Nicholas Broachie JP (2004) and Georgia Ramsey JP (2001); Georgia was the first scheme graduate to be appointed as a magistrate and Simon Wolfensohn, (then) Deputy Chairman Magistrates Association. North-West London, shadows, mentors and court staff, 2007/8. Revinder Johal JP the second scheme graduate to be appointed as a magistrate and her mentor Adrian Dence, 2001.*



# Breaking bread

Friends of OBV marked the organisations' birthday by recounting their own political journeys.

## BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒ **fi** talks about her decision to enter politics

**I have been involved in charity and voluntary work since the age of 16 working with disadvantaged families in the inner city area of Bristol. Working with these people gave me an insight into how political decisions affect all of us around us and politics is not as remote as we often think it is.**



*Adeela Shafi attends OBV Prospective Parliamentary Candidates reception at the Houses of Parliament, 2009. In picture Eric Pickles, (now) Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Baroness Warsi, and Helen Grant MP (elected 2010) and other Conservative candidates.*

Some of the difficulties faced by such families were due to political decisions and I felt that in order to effect change on a large scale it was important to be a part of that decision making process.

My decision to enter politics was sealed when after the earthquake in Pakistan we raised considerable sums for emergency aid, and then further money to rebuild a specific school in Pakistan in which 70 girls had died.

The project has been an arduous journey wading through the political structure of another country and once again firmed my view that it is so important to take part in decision making and especially so for ordinary people who have lived life outside politics with real life experiences.

I first made contact with OBV in 2008 just shortly after being selected as Parliamentary Candidate for Bristol East. Since then my relationship with OBV has grown and developed and I have had the opportunity to see first hand how OBV have supported and promoted the active participation of Black and minority ethnic groups in the political arena of Britain.

Given the various barriers,

some of which exist in society in general, some of which are cultural within the BME communities, and some of them being the very individual and personal barriers. OBV have aimed to shed light on these and at the same time find tangible solutions to penetrate those barriers. For example the Councillor Shadowing Scheme which has run successfully in Bristol several times, with many of the participants going on to stand as candidates for local elections. Not all of them yet elected, but in terms of the success of breaking some of those barriers and actually enter the realm of local politics, success has been 100%.

Nationally, OBV have played its part in supporting candidates from BME backgrounds and charting their successes. But true change is a gradual shift which sometimes glides along unnoticed until the change is complete. OBV is an integral part of that change; the organisation has gained recognition and credibility within the political parties by maintaining its goal of encouraging participation from minority groups without falling into that trap of favouring one over the other. That is what has been especially refreshing for me about OBV. ✪

**ADEELA SHAFI, FORMER CONSERVATIVE PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE BRISTOL EAST**  
*Lecturer in Psychology University of the West of England*

# BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE

**Matilda MacAttram**, founder and director of *Black Mental Health UK*

**Driven by personal passion to see the injustices meted out to the most vulnerable in the community addressed, and what many would describe as the naive belief that anything is possible, I launched Black Mental Health UK at Kingsway International Christian Centre way back in 2006.**

This proved to be an important milestone as our presence at KICC's seven day church convention, was an effective way of getting information about this issue into the heart of the community, while galvanising them into action in order to bring about change.

BMH UK came about at a time when parliament had introduced the 2006 Mental Health Bill, which set out the most significant legislative changes in this area that had been seen in a generation.

Our nine month national campaign and constant media coverage through our website and community radio and papers like the Voice and New Nation led to widespread support from the community. This whole process came with steep learning curves and more than a few disappointments, but I have found that my efforts through BMH UK have effectively

changed the perception and understanding of an issue that had been on the sidelines of black British politics for decades.

Once the 2007 Mental Health Act became law, I came across disturbing data on the National Criminal DNA database.

Not one to rest on my laurels, I launched a three year campaign through BMH UK calling for the removal of innocent DNA from the criminal database. This work put the spotlight on a pretty much hidden issue that criminalised not only black mental health service users, but even more shockingly the whole of black Britain. With the support of a growing number of mainly grass roots organisations, whose leaders caught my vision, we managed to secure a commitment from opposition parties, who are now in government, that they would introduce legislation to bring in the changes BMH UK were calling for. Today the Protection of Freedom's Bill, which is currently being debated in parliament, will do exactly that.

I am now launching a new campaign to ensure that all innocent records that are currently stored on the Police National Database and Police National Computer are deleted at the same time as innocent DNA is deleted from the National Criminal DNA database.



For this to happen it will take your support, we need you to visit the campaigns page of our website at [www.blackmentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.blackmentalhealth.org.uk) download the lobbying letter and send it to your MP. Once you have done this, you need to get everyone else you know, who is able, to do the same

We all need to do our part in this – and like all the other issues BMH UK campaign about this will affect the life chances of you or your loved ones. ✖



Matilda MacAttram: OBV battlebus election day campaign, Brixton, 2005.



Merlene Emerson (far left) with (now) Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg and other Lib Dem Prospective Parliamentary candidates at OBV reception, 2009.



## AGAINST THE ODDS

**Merlene Emerson,** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**When I stood as Parliamentary candidate for Hammersmith in London in May 2010, I knew that the odds were very much against me.**

With the first past the post (FPTP) voting system and the two candidates from the major parties entrenched in battle, 17 percent of the vote returned for me was perhaps as much as I could have hoped for. Many residents said they

would have voted Liberal Democrat if I had a real chance of winning but otherwise they had to vote tactically: for Labour or Tory to keep the other party out.

I was a supporter of the Alternative Vote (AV), because with AV there would be no need for tactical voting. Whereas under FPTP, large sections of the population become disengaged from the political process; they feel their votes

do not count especially in so-called 'safe' seats - But why enter the fray if I was going to come in a poor third?

To me, it was important that the electorate was given a choice of candidates of every political colour. They deserved as much.

I had also learnt a great deal during my time as Parliamentary candidate: of the need to be on top of local as well as national issues, the art of door-to-door canvassing, hustings and in fielding interviews from the media. It took me six years to become a fully qualified solicitor; I could not expect to become an MP over-night.

So was it worth the toil, you may ask? Having a clear understanding of one's own motivation is key. For me, it was and still is the wish for our children to grow up in a society which is tolerant and free from prejudice, with laws which are fair and inclusive and where there is equal opportunities for all. I should add that the odds of my getting elected have recently improved. I have been selected by my Party to be one of the London Assembly Candidates in 2012, when 25 Assembly Members will be elected based on proportional representation (PR).

This will be my 2nd attempt, having stood in 2008 when I was 11th on the Party List. I have since climbed to 5th place.

Whether we will have a first British-Chinese London Assembly Member will now be in the hands of Londoners! ✖



# WHY I BECAME A COUNCILLOR

*Councillor* **Lester Holloway**,  
*campaigner and journalist*

**Why? I admit to asking myself this question as I and fellow councillors grapple with the grim task of slashing millions from town hall budgets. Why did I choose to become an elected councillor, at this time?**

The answer can be summed up in three words – Barack Hussein Obama. I, like many others, was enraptured during 2009 by his electrifying White House campaign. One speech stood out, in September of that year. Obama told an audience of schoolchildren in Arlington, Virginia, that it was their “civic duty” to give back to society.

After inspiring them to what they could personally achieve, he asked: “So today, I want to ask you, what’s your contribution going to be?” Although the speech was pitched at school children, it was a question that resonated with me. During the question and answer session that followed, Obama elaborated. We can carp and moan about what politicians are doing in our name, but why don’t we stand up and get involved. Influence the decisions, make them ourselves.

I had been a councillor before, in my early 20s, and had no appetite for going back into politics. I thought journalism offered a more effective way of making a contribution and had risen to become Editor of the black weekly newspaper *New Nation*. Yet Obama got through to me; maybe I should once again get stuck in and try to change things instead of merely writing and publishing articles about the failure of politics to bring about equality and justice.

Having already been a ‘sleeping’ member of the Liberal Democrats for a few years having quietly joined while living in Bow – no-one, not even my LibDem contacts knew this – I decided to awake and make contact with the local party where I now lived, co-incidentally the LibDem stronghold of Sutton, in Surrey. Before I knew it, I was a council candidate running in a ‘split ward’, which turned into an almost safe one overnight in May last year as the LibDems trounced the local Conservatives. I personally enjoy the street campaigning nature of local politics. ‘All politics is local’ is as true today as when the saying was coined. As a LibDem I believe the roots of democracy should be as deep and close to the grassroots as possible. I do not belittle concerns about, say, the need for more litter bins. In some ways it is as important as strategic service issues in the borough, or wider policy debates affecting the whole country. To some residents in a particular street, the litter bins matter more.

Things have been hard the past few months. The coalition government has put strains on the whole party. Local government minister Eric Pickles failed to fight the town hall corner in the spending round, as Westminster opted to pass on billions of cuts to local councillors. Sutton has made £11m cuts this year, which has not been without pain, but even this pales into insignificance by the eye-watering figures of up to £50m that some inner London boroughs were forced to save this year as the government dictated the cuts are front-loaded.



It’s a tough time in local government for sure, but someone has to do it. New councillors like me have added a new perspective and new creativity as we collectively seek to avoid axing frontline services while preserving a vision of a green and fair borough.

No-one said it would be easy. Obama didn’t make that claim either. But my role as a local decision-maker, and a community champion in my ‘ward’, is a rewarding one despite the background of cuts. Politics needs people like you, and like me. Just a few people can tip the balance between a local party being in touch or out of touch, active or inactive, having a vision or just plodding along.

I don’t speak for the LibDems in parliament, but I can stand up for my local community. Obama no longer has the shine he radiated in 2009. Domestic compromises and international wars have seen to that. Yet his words, to school children in Virginia, remain as relevant today as they were then. The President himself still has high poll ratings among the poor and among African American communities who understand what he is trying to do and recognise the alternative as not being in their interests. In 2009, Obama inspired a movement. That movement may no longer be there, but what he left was many thousands of seeds. I am proud to say that I am one of them. I may only be a local councillor, but I’m doing my civic duty. And just as Obama predicated, that has made me feel good. ✖



Matilda MacAttram: *OBV* battlebus election day campaign, Brixton, 2005. Lester Holloway interviewed.

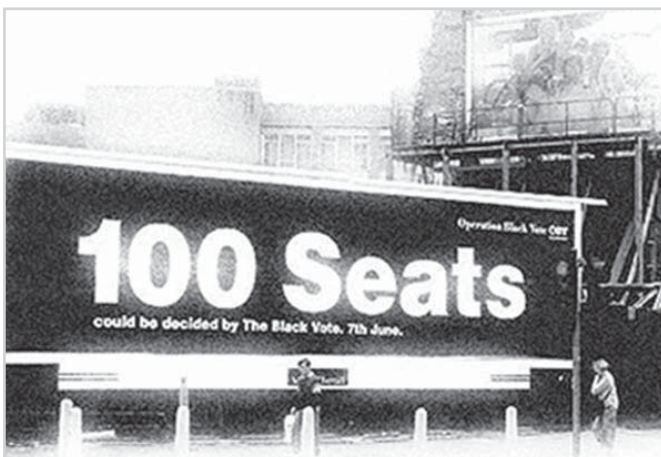




OBV Launch: Group includes Derek Hinds (on microphone), Simon Woolley, OBV board member Rita Patel and former OBV Chair Lee Jasper. '100 seats', the first billboard poster campaign. 'All it takes' poster on its way to 'Keep the BNP out' rally in Burnley, North Yorkshire, 2003.

# Fifteen years of roadshows

The OBV archive is packed with brilliant images that will one day make a fascinating exhibition. In the meantime here is a snap-shot from a few of the events, programmes and poster campaigns over the years







(Left) 'Spot the Black MP' poster that launched during the 1999 MP Shadowing Scheme, calling for a more representative Parliament. (Above) Poster launch, first London Mayoral election candidates, 2000.

01935 425 025  
(PADDY'S ANSWER MACHINE NO)

**IMAGINE THE IMPACT IF  
ONE MILLION  
BLACK PEOPLE  
LEAVE PADDY A MESSAGE TONIGHT**

*Imagine how TOUCHED he will be*  
If we all vote we could  
decide who WINS the  
next GENERAL ELECTION

**OBV**  
Operation BLACK VOTE: Let them know you exist

"All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing."

Use your voice. Use your vote.  
Local elections Thursday, 2nd May, 2002

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AGAINST RACISM

1990 TRUST

**OBV**  
obv.org.uk

'Imagine the impact if one million Black people leave Paddy Ashdown a message tonight' - Message to mobilise the Black vote, 1997 general election. The timeless quote, 'All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing' has been used in many OBV campaigns.

**POLITICAL EDUCATION:**  
Citizenship awareness programmes for schools across the UK.







Clockwise from left: London Mayoral election candidates. Activist Derek Hinds met Lee Jasper in Brixton and told him:



"If we want change we must follow Malcolm X and use the ballot box not the bullet or rioting." Black voters urged to call Tony Blair during the 1997 general election. Lee Jasper, Ashok Viswanathan and Simon Woolley, poster launch 1999. Election Day voter drive, OBV's Faz Hakim takes to the streets, 2005. Change the face of European Politics poster, 1999. OBV's Leon Green hands out 'Use your Vote' reminder cards.



Change the face of European politics.

Use your vote and your voice - European elections 10th June 1999.

**Operation Black Vote**

Working for a fair, just and inclusive democracy  
For information phone: (0773 452 3042) • email: [obv@blackvote.org.uk](mailto:obv@blackvote.org.uk) Web: [www.blackvote.org.uk](http://www.blackvote.org.uk)  
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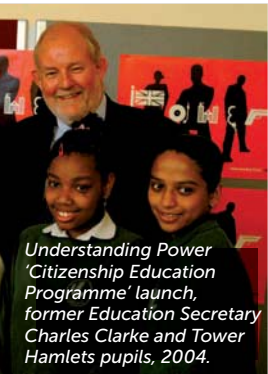
01429 882 202

**IMAGINE THE IMPACT IF ONE MILLION BLACK PEOPLE CALL TONY THIS MORNING**

He *claims* he has fought all his LIFE for us. IMAGINE how *pleased* he will be to chat with ALL OF US...

If we all vote WE could decide WHO WINS the next GENERAL ELECTION

**Operation BLACK VOTE: Let them know you exist**







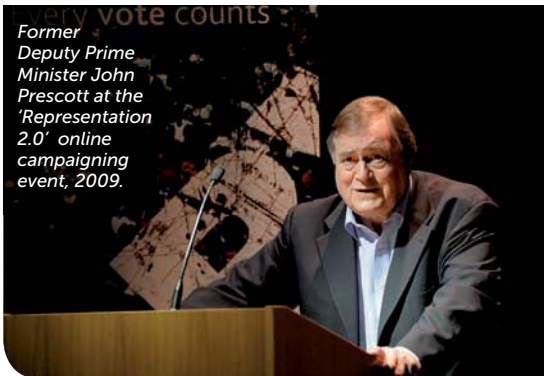
*(This picture and below right) David Cameron and Harriet Harman attend the President Obama Inauguration party in 2008.*



*Chuka Umunna - OBV's USA 'Presidential Election' party, with Baroness Ros Howells and former Baroness Pola Uddin in background in 2008.*



*Former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott at the 'Representation 2.0' online campaigning event, 2009.*



*MPs Vince Cable and George Osborne (right) 'Black Britain Decides' pre-election rally.*









# Lahore to London

**Ajmal Masroor**, political campaigner and media broadcaster reflects on Asian communities in Britain today



**British Asian communities have come a long way since the early encounters with the British – The East India Company arrived at the shores of India for trade but ended up colonising the Asian subcontinent.** They recruited seamen – Lashkars – for their long voyages, hired cooks, domestic servants and nannies who travelled to the UK with their masters. Most of them did not return but married locally and settled. Who would have guessed that within a few centuries Britain would have a sizable Asian community present in its midst?

One of the earliest and significant contributions to Britain came from the first Bengali immigrants. At the beginning of the year 1800 the first notable business opened in central London – the Hindustani Coffee House – serving Asian curry and delicacies. Today Britain has over ten thousand Indian restaurants making Indian food nations' favourite.

The curry industry today employs over seventy thousand people and contributes nearly three billion pounds to the economy every year. Asian communities have not only contributed towards the food revolution in Britain, they have also enriched this country with culture, music, colours and festivities.

Although the British Asian community amounts to nearly 5% of the total population in the UK they have yet to break through and be proportionally represented in the mainstream media and politics.

Racism, prejudice and institutional barriers still play a pivotal role in creating exclusions. I remember the early 70s and 80s when open racism against the British Asians were led by the National Front resulting in the deaths of many innocent people including the savage killing of Altab Ali in



'Be the Best' elections poster launch, Albert Embankment 2010.

Whitechapel and Muhammed Pervaiz in Yorkshire.

One would assume that the lives of those Asian were not lost in vein and racism would have been uprooted from our society. However, in the last decade the rise of British National Party (BNP) and English Defence League (EDL) has brought into sharp focus the racist attitudes and subcultures that still lurk and fester in the hearts and minds of many in our country; and this rotten and sick mind set unless challenged will become culturally acceptable.

In politics there have been a number of Asian MPs, Lords and Baronesses, local councillors and mayors. Sadiq Khan and Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, serving as Cabinet Ministers, certainly has been the peak of our political achievements. In my view the sign of total equality and society without prejudice would be when we will see a Black or Asian Prime Minister in our country.

I do not support positive discrimination but I believe that creating a level playing field requires positive action to accelerate the inequality that exists. I do not believe in tokenism but the struggle to create more representative politics will mean we will have to publicly challenge those who actively exclude people on the grounds of race.

I would like to see 5% of our parliamentary representatives from an Asian background. I would like to see more Asian women in the Parliament too. Political parties need to do more to change the local barriers that prevent talented candidates from getting a chance to even compete in general elections.

It is not all doom and gloom however, there other environments where British Asians have fared better, such as arts, literature, films and sports. Shilpa Shetty made headlines after appearing on the Big Brother show when racially abused by the late Jade Goody, who in that particular outburst epitomised the ugly face of racism.

I can clearly remember watching a brilliant comedy series called "The Kumars at No. 42" and finding myself in stitches. Films such as "East





is East", "Chicken Tikka Masala" and "Bend It Like Beckham" will always remain some of the famous names when people look back at the film contribution made by the British Asians. The international award winning film "Slum Dog Millionaire" made British Asians very proud and one of the most talked about films of our time.

Who does not know Monica Ali or Haneef Qureshi or the infamous Salman Rushdie? Their books have sold in millions of copies, made into films and dominated the literary circle while igniting political furore. Prince Nasim and Amir Khan have landed a few severe blows to some of the typically racist bigots in our country. They have made boxing Asian friendly when it was brilliantly dominated by the Black and African faces.

Cricket is still a dominant Asian past time, a game that is watched by every generation and when the 'Tebbit Test' is used to judge loyalty, if even one of Asian countries are in the match, even the Archangel would not be able to persuade some Asians to support England! I do not think there is anything wrong with that! It only adds to the flavour of our multicultural country.

However, the future of our multicultural country is in danger if our Prime Minister David Cameron is willing to pander to the racist EDL and the fascist right wing mantra by claiming multiculturalism has failed. He needs to be proud of his colourful country and its diverse citizens.

The British Asians have proven a strong case for multicultural Britain as great role model that could be followed by other countries. What British Asians need is not patronising tokenistic tick-box solutions, they need a level playing field, equality at all levels and opportunities to compete. They need a fairer society where they are not judged by the colour of their skin or ethnicity but for the contribution they make to the collective well-being of this country. ❌

# Vision of unity

**Ade Sawyerr** looks to the future for African and Caribbeans



**African and Caribbean people may have followed different routes of migration to Britain and may have different cultural practices but, to all intents and purposes, they are seen by the authorities in this country as one people.**

The first generation immigrants tended to form their own community organisations, support and self help groups that advocated and facilitated their settling and integration into the main communities.

These welfare organisations, formed because of the need to survive in an alien environment, provided an identity that still held on to their old way of life in the countries of origin.

The organisations helped supplement what the statutory sector offered in the area of social support – so health groups, housing organisations, supplementary educational agencies, employment and enterprise based as well as arts and leisure based community ➤



*'If you don't vote' hand out, London Elections 2008.*

organisations were set up to cater for the culturally sensitive needs of those earlier immigrants.

The perception that African and Caribbean people underachieve in education and are therefore on the lower rung of the economic ladder, employed at lower levels and on welfare and benefits and parasites on the state gained credence as party leader after party leader blamed immigrations for the economic ills of this country.

Disadvantage, discrimination bad housing, bad education in inner city schools and the inequality in the health and job systems faced by 'the immigrants' was never actually dealt with.

However the outlook for black people seems brighter as they begin to excel in different skills areas. Equal opportunities in the public sector has helped black people to develop careers that were closed to them several years ago; now black people have risen to senior management levels in local authorities, there have been chief officers and there have also been a few chief executives in statutory sector organisations.

Gradually black people are excelling in traditional areas, in law and medicine as they have done in teaching and other areas. Progression has also taken place in the voluntary and community sector, but is yet to gain root in the private sector, certainly not as fast as has happened in the United States of America.

In this regard whilst many have advocated some form of quota system and other mechanisms such as contract compliance to force the issues of a representative work force, even the voluntary targets set by some public sector organisations such as the Home Office had to be abandoned for lack of effective monitoring of the results.

More and more private sector organisations are recognising the benefits of a diverse workforce and in the next 20 years there should be more improvements in the fortunes of black people in the private sector.

But though African and Caribbean people in Britain have come a long way despite years of disadvantage and discrimination and have managed to achieve a measure of success in several fields including politics where there is now a slowly growing number of members in parliament and more peers in the house of lords, the campaign for racial equality needs to be strengthened lest the few gains are lost.

The talk about curbing immigration, the attacks on multiculturalism and the threat of cuts facing most black voluntary and community organisations signal a situation that may further disadvantage black people. It is as if the system considers that black people have come far enough and now must simply 'fully integrate' into the mainstream to end disadvantage.

Many have suggested that maybe we need many more successful businesses that will become a symbol of our success and role models for people to follow. There is however no suggestion under this scenario that instead of spending their money in conspicuous consumption on materialistic things the money should rather be 'invested' in community assets and philanthropic gestures that would help uplift the community.



Perhaps what we need here is an effective activist think tank that have horizontal and vertical relationships with all other black organisations, that would play a coordinating role of sorts but that would also come out with research that would influence government policy initiatives but will at the same time be authoritative enough to respond to and comment on government policy.

Fortunately, there are models of what have been achieved in America through having one strategic organisation - the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP) that has a relationship with all other black organisations whether they are in education, in the arts, enterprise and business, employment and housing, that all helps to push for advancement.

However, whilst organisations such as these may help to articulate our issues, we also need to re-examine our priorities. We also need to change the perception of our communities and reject the negative stereotypes leveled at us in this country. By taking control of our destinies, we need to properly define our objectives and determine what we consider to be success within our communities.

As we look to the future we need to recognise what other organisations such as OBV have done to redress the representation rate of black people not only in politics but in the criminal justice system; we need to recognise and celebrate the positive action programmes that they have implemented that have facilitated entry into varied positions as councillors and magistrates.

Many more of such programmes and mentoring schemes may be needed in education, employment and enterprise to increase the numbers and improve the positions.

But we certainly need more campaigning to a refocus of our priorities, we need our community organisations and we need them to focus on creating an air of cohesiveness rather than the fragmentation that we have now. The old adage of united we stand strong, divided we fail and fall is relevant.

**Ade Sawyerr is partner in the diversity and equality focussed consultancy, Equinox Consulting. ✪**





*Tower Hamlets: Pupils from Stepney Green and Swanlea schools meet Tower Hamlets Mayor Lutfur Rahman, OBV's 'Who Runs My City' event, 2011.*

# Raising aspirations

College principal **Ali Hadawi** CBE worries about youths' lack of ambition



**The Higher Education system here in the UK is a world leader. We enjoy this status because Higher Education has always been open to all. However, the new fee system is a regressive step.**

This new system will surely affect the widest band of society, those on middle income. These families are neither wealthy enough not to suffer from the financial pressure of paying fees nor poor enough to be saved by the grant window. There will be particular pressure on families with more than one young

person at university.

However I believe the concept of financial constraints being the barrier to Higher Education disguises the real problem. It is not the level of fees, lack of government funding, nor a graduate tax that is the hindrance, but the lack of aspiration in many young people today.

Sadly they do not believe they can achieve their best and contribute to the prosperity of their community and therefore they miss out, not only on the financial rewards but on the 'feel good' factor of belonging, of being respected and of making a difference. This is not exclusively a BME phenomenon, but one which affects many young people who are growing up in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in our country. Interestingly no one measures this level of deprivation alongside those of income, housing, educational attainment, unemployment or health. Yet aspiration is surely the most important factor in determining social mobility, success and happiness.

During my years in education I have come across many young people with no self belief, no sense that they are intelligent with the potential to succeed, but worst of all there is the sense that opportunities are for someone else but not for them. These

young people need to see that their success is in their own hands and is achievable. They need to be confident that the opportunities of going to University exist for them and not just for someone else, and then they need to go forward and embrace these opportunities.

I think the Prime Minister, David Cameron, was wrong in his recent criticism of Oxford University for not admitting higher numbers of black students. These students do not appreciate being offered places with lower entrance requirements than other students, as this practice merely reinforces the age old belief that white students are superior. The scenario here is not one of Oxford not admitting black students, it is one of black students not applying to Oxford in the first place.

By the time many black students reach the age of 18, they have often experienced years of 'aspiration -building' neglect through teachers and schools who do not believe in them and through lack of being nurtured and motivated by many professional adults who should know better. By the time these students reach the UCAS application stage they have become disempowered, discouraged and feel out of control of their own destiny.

It is our schools who need to work on developing the aspirations of young people. I believe a better system would be one where schools are measured not only on their academic record but also on their 'value-added' in inspiring young people to move on and be successful at subsequent stages of their education, rather than being merely channelled from one school to the next through the compulsory education system. We must aim for all our young people to find fulfillment through achievement to the best of their abilities. ✕

**Ali Hadawi CBE - Principal & Chief Executive, Central Bedfordshire College. He is former Principal, Greenwich Community College and Southend Adult Community Colleges**



*Rev Al Sharpton visits Archbishop Tenison's school, Vauxhall to inspire pupils.*



# Rousing the sleeping giant

Rev David Shosanya argues the black church can wield power in politics







**The late Revd Dr Vernon Johns, then minister at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Alabama commented that negro religion was '40 percent emotionalism, 30 percent hilarity, 28 percent hysteria and 2 percent miscellaneous'.**

A similar point was made by Dr Johns most famous successor, the late Revd Dr Martin Luther King, when he commented that 'much black religion emphasises emotion rather than ideas... volume rather than elocution' and concluded that 'many ministers preached only about the afterlife, rather than about what role the church could play in improving present day society'.

Revd's Johns and King were making the point that for many black Christians superficiality reigned in the place of substance when it came to dealing with political realities.

*Rev Jesse Jackson addresses church leaders at OBV's 'Ask, Seek, Knock' Church leaders roundtable meeting at the Houses of Parliament, part of the Equanomics UK tour, 2007.*



Times have changed since these observations were made. And churches have changed too. Today church leaders like Rev Jesse Jackson and Rev Al Sharpton, to name but two, are at the epicentre of political life in American society. Irrespective of whatever view one holds of these and other Christian leaders it cannot be denied that they have managed to mobilise large numbers of Christian believers to participate in the democratic project and flex their considerable muscle in the public square. By doing so they have added their considerable voice to the political discourses shaping American civic society.

African and Caribbean church leaders in the UK can learn valuable lessons from African-American church leaders. If church leaders in the UK are to exercise influence in the political arena that is comparable to their American counterparts the focus will need to be firmly placed on institutions and not individuals. This will mean that representations in political debates must be made in the name of institutions and the various constituencies they represent and not as subjective or self-interested views of an individual.

Furthermore, church leaders will need to jettison the notion of 'an audience with' and see their political engagement as 'an equal partnership aiming to'. A further benefit of this approach would be that representatives of African and Caribbean Christian communities would be forced to engage critically with policy considerations rather than subjective and personal convictions.

Politics is about constituency (numbers), policy (ideas) and reach (networks). African and Caribbean churches have sufficient numbers and networks. At present, with a few exceptions, conversations with those in power lack a vital and much needed substance, strategic direction and follow-through, because they are devoid of the critical and analytical perspectives that policy-led dialogue inspires and requires. In other words, the conversations being had may well be interesting but they have not yet been translated into influence because they have not, by and large, been conversations about policy.

A significant challenge for the future will inevitably revolve around how leaders mobilise the numbers (constituency), contextualise their ideas (policy) and prioritise which institutions with whom they will develop intentional strategic partnerships (inter-denominational and inter-agency collaboration).

Our American sisters and brothers seem to have found a way to combine those three threads and to bridge the gap between a relevant biblical theology of social transformation and a practical political theory that allows the prophetic imperatives of the gospel to be articulated and incorporated in public life. Christian leaders in the UK are still groping in the dark when it comes to navigating that terrain. Perhaps therein lays the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for African and Caribbean leaders to effectively engage in the political arena here in the UK. I am very hopeful that it will happen! ✪

**David Shosanya currently serves as a Regional minister with the London Baptist Association and is the host of the annual Stat of Black Britain Symposium.**





# Who Runs My City?

The screenshot shows the website's header with the 'xOBV Operation Black Vote' logo and the tagline 'The Home of Black Politics'. A navigation menu includes links for Home, News & Blogs, About Us, What We Do, BME Politicians, Info Centre, Press, and Contact. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area features a large graphic with the text 'WHO RUNS MY CITY?' and a stylized illustration of a person's face. Below the graphic is the article title 'Who Runs My City?' with 'View', 'Edit', and 'Nodequeue' options. The article text discusses the empowerment of Black and minority ethnic communities and the role of public decision-making bodies. A 'Promote in slideshow' section highlights two articles: 'Who runs London' and 'Who runs Birmingham'. A right-hand sidebar contains a 'Within this section:' menu with links to various pages, a 'rafiq' user menu with options like 'Listing - Node Queue' and 'Update Menu/Structure', and a 'Senior editor' menu with options like 'Newsletters' and 'Users'. A 'Recent Comments' section at the bottom of the sidebar lists comments on 'reciprocity', 'Cuts', and 'Internal Politics'.

www.obv.org.uk



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