



# ANDREW BROWN AND TALITA MOFFATT

## BLACK HISTORY 365

During *This is Croydon*, London Borough of Culture, Croydon BME Forum launched **Black History 365** – a project designed to celebrate Black history 365 days of the year. The forum partnered with organisations across Croydon to showcase Black creative work and bring a wider cultural offering to the borough's diverse communities. Following London Borough of Culture, sponsorship was secured to continue the programme for two more years.

### IN NUMBERS

#### Black History 365

Croydon BME Forum

**21** commissions and events

**15** partners

**1,700** participants

We caught up with Croydon BME Forum CEO **Andrew Brown** and freelance producer **Talita Moffatt** to discuss the process of bringing the project about, the importance of community, and their hopes for the future.

#### What brought about Black History 365?

**ANDREW:** So, we've been doing Black history events for 15 years. In the last couple, I've been challenged a lot to say, "why is it that we only celebrate Black history in one month?" So, I challenged my team to come up with something to celebrate Black history throughout the whole year. One of our members said, "What about BH365 – Black History 365?"



Talita Moffatt, Freelance Producer

**TALITA:** It was very much about having funding to engage the community in creative activity. That's not to say that the BME Forum doesn't already do that, but they don't normally have specific pots of money to develop that area (arts). I wanted to develop a brand that had legacy, rather than individual events that weren't linked to anything.

#### What did the project involve?

**TALITA:** I wanted to stretch the budget as far as we could. We wanted to work in partnership as much as possible and do a range of activity that reached different age groups and communities. So, we did community commissions, with a pot of money allocated for groups that hadn't yet received London Borough of Culture funding. The groups put in bids, and we had a panel that selected four.

We partnered with organisations including Kora, the Intergenerational Wellbeing Garden Project, the Front Room, Syrus Consultancy, The Nehemiah Project and the Black British Book Festival. We had a launch event for the whole thing at Fairfield Halls, with guest speakers. Before that, just as I arrived, there was the Windrush 75 event at Croydon Minster in June - a big event to celebrate Windrush that kicked off before our main launch.

#### Can you give us an overview of the events?

**TALITA:** We had Whitgift Market, to give BME traders a space in the centre of Croydon. An event called 'LET'S TALK! to Our Sisters' engaged women to talk about their career journeys and obstacles to progression. We had our Croydon Black Book Community Library launch, in

partnership with the Black British Book Festival. We had community arts and crafts workshops. We commissioned the company Rap Therapy to run workshops for young people, in partnership with Croydon Library. The music was then produced and performed, working with Norbury High School for Girls.

#### It sounds busy! How was the process of putting it together?

**TALITA:** It was very busy. We had a tight timeframe, but we worked hard to pull a lot of things off to the standard that we wanted, without having a bigger team.

#### How was BH365 received by the community?

**TALITA:** The fact that everything we put on was brilliantly attended, despite not having an in-house marketing person, just proved the demand. At 'LET'S TALK! to Our Sisters', so many of the women said, "We need to have this again. This is so great!".

#### The work clearly resonated. Why do you think this was?

**TALITA:** There's something about communing with people that look like you, that have backgrounds like you that is so empowering. The events created spaces to share, to feel welcome, to feel safe. In the family workshops, we had such a mixed group – Afro-Caribbean, Asian, groups of kids running around and enjoying themselves. We were able to offer everything for free, which gave equal access for people to come and participate.



BME Forum BH365 Launch. Photo by Dan Richard

#### What element are you most proud of?

**ANDREW:** I think the library – it's only now that I see the impact. When I go in, I see people reading books and saying, "can I borrow this book?" There's so much more that we could do. The launch event was amazing, as was the 'LET'S TALK! to Our Sisters' event – to have 80 to 100 ladies having those conversations. It's something we should do more of.



**TALITA:** I'm most proud of the brand. In my experience, developing Global Majority work in the creative industries, it's always sporadic, it's project-based, it's in isolation. No matter how successful it is, it never continues, and we don't get to grow. So, it's the foundation I'm most proud of. In terms of BH365 continuing, the brand is there, ready to go.

**How can Croydon continue to support opportunities for creative and community work, by and for the Global Majority?**

**ANDREW:** I do sometimes wonder - if myself and Talita weren't around the table at certain times, whether people would remember that Croydon is a borough of 52% Global Majority. I would ask people to remember, when they're having conversations and making decisions, to have a diverse range of people present.

**TALITA:** We shouldn't have to work so hard to be part of the conversation. We're here, living here, working here, with the skills to make things happen.

**How did London Borough of Culture impact the borough?**

**TALITA:** There was a buzz in Croydon with everybody feeling they were part of something

bigger. It did a brilliant job of galvanising people. It triggered more partnership working, which led to resources going further and lots of different offshoots. As a freelancer, it gave me access to organisations that I might not always be sitting across the table from. And for bigger organisations, partnering with new people led to new ideas.

**What's next for BH365?**

**TALITA:** The legacy I'd like to see for BH365, Croydon BME Forum and the whole borough, is a continuation of those partnerships and resource sharing. Drawing on each other's strengths to work together for the benefit of the community. For BH365, the foundation is there, the partnerships are there, and people want to work with us.

**ANDREW:** We're definitely going to continue BH365. I think we just touched the surface. There's so much more that we can do. One thing we have done is create a partnership with developers who are creating two massive buildings in Croydon. They approached us and gave us a kind of wishlist. So, I presented them with a couple of offers and we managed to secure sponsorship for the next two years.



Windrush 75 at Croydon Minster. Photo by Fluid4Sight

London Borough of Culture is  
a Mayor of London initiative.

**MAYOR OF LONDON**

Presented by:

**CROYDON**  
www.croydon.gov.uk



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

