



**WE INSPIRE EMPOWER AND EDUCATE**

**Autism in Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community 2018**

**Symposium Themes:**

- ❖ **Diverse approaches to Autism: culture, religion and ethnicity**
- ❖ **Paving the future for Autism in BAME**

**Speech by Autism Voice United Kingdom Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer Mariama Korrcá Kandeh**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mariama Korrcá Kandeh. I am co-founder and Chief Executive Office of Autism Voice UK.

On behalf of our team, I'd like to welcome you all to this symposium, that will commence the start of a series.

Autism Voice was founded by myself and my sister out of a need to advocate for the recognition and acceptance of people with autism and also to end stigma and discrimination of them and their families.

As a family with a child with autism, we have gained first-hand experience of what it is like to suffer lack of acceptance and recognition in community settings such as the church, parties, on buses and even at parks. These

experiences strengthened us to think beyond us. To think of other children and their families who find themselves in similar situation. As the saying goes, a thousand mile begins with a single step. We decided to form Autism Voice to help end these vices in the community that are detrimental to the happiness of people with autism and their families.

Autism Voice was founded in 2013 but started functioning in 2016. Our goal is to end stigma and discrimination of people and families affected by Autism in communities in the UK. We also aim to campaign for inclusion and end to culturally influenced ostracism of people affected by Autism.

Toward these aims, we have put together a number of services in place. These services include Emotional Support, Mentorship, Advocacy and Advice, Community Outreach, Monthly Group Counselling and Autism Education Programme.

Our Monthly Group Counselling provides a unique means for parents/carers and anyone directly working with someone with the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to connect with each other through shared experience and cultural connectivity.

Our Education programme last year organised the training ‘Understanding Autism: Myths and Stereotypes in BEM community’. This training provided tips into identifying and understanding autism. It also involved a range of tips on Autism myths and stereotypes in the Black and Ethnic Minority community.

We are aware of the low Autism awareness levels and through trainings we hope to help improve participants' knowledge about Autism, its symptoms and how to support people with Autism. We also expect participants to take the knowledge to community levels thereby empowering these communities to recognise and accept people with autism and their families.

Through our education programme, we are also speaking with the Critical Autism/Disability department of London Southbank University to enrol some of our members into the course. Together we have about six members who have expressed interest in the course. Most of them are professionals who had to quit their jobs to care for their autistic children. This opportunity brings renewed hope into life once again for most of them. For us at Autism Voice, there is no better expert than those that have gained first-hand experience through living with an autistic person. These members will graduate with post graduate degrees in autism and will go back to empower and transform society. While many others in our team would wish to enrol for the course, getting the fees and childcare help while they'll be at university pose a serious challenge. As an organisation, we hope to help cater for this in the future by providing a team of trained volunteers who will provide free of cost child care so that we can empower more parents. We also hope to help scout for funding for these enthusiastic parents/carers who wish to study autism in the future. We are

grateful for this opportunity and we want to thank Damian Milton and Nicola Martin for their endearing cooperation.

We are a small charity that aims to do big things to help change perceptions about autism. Yet we are challenged by a number of setbacks. In November 2016, in partnership with the West Indian Association of Service Personnel, we started a once a week social and cultural club for autistic young adults in Lambeth. It was a walk-in club that allowed them to acquaint with black history, African and Caribbean arts, culture and lifestyle. The aim was to inspire and empower them with a sense of cultural identity, instil self-belief and boost their confidence. This programme lasted a couple of months due to lack of funding.

For two years in a row now, we have benefitted from Aiming high, Lambeth play equipment for children with disability. We intend to start a play centre for children with autism and other related conditions. Unfortunately, we lack a permanent place for this service. We are unable to use a temporary space since some of the equipment have to be fixed on the wall for a very long period.

On that note, I'd like to appeal to you all to help us with a place. We are actually looking for a hall which we can use both for the play centre and the arts and cultural club for youths with autism and other related conditions. We are also hoping that we will be able to use it for our other services.

At the moment, we are using at a cost-free, the West Indian Association of Service Personnel (WASP) building in Clapham Common for our sessions, meetings and other administrative works. We want to thank the leadership of WASP for their continued generosity over the years.

Autism Voice is steered by a team of trustees. As we come closer to the end of the trustee year, I want to appeal to you all here to volunteer for us as members of our board of Trustees. We are particularly asking adults with autism to join the team. The trustee year starts in July.

Finally, Autism Voice is seriously challenged by lack of funding to pursue our vision. The organisation is run by mainly the contribution of its founders.

Occasionally we have benefitted from monthly contribution by members and funds raised by the Charity Golf Club.

I'd like to appeal to generous people out there to help support our services. We are small but with a huge commitment to putting every penny into adequate use in the best interest of our clients.

Let me finally thank the LSBU and PARC team for the partnership in ensuring the success of this symposium. Many thanks to Damian, Nicki and Joanna for always been there throughout the planning of this event.

I also wish to thank the Autism Voice symposium planning committee for all their hard work in ensuring the success of this event.

Once again, I want to thank you all for attending this symposium and I wish you all an educative, insightful and informative day.

Thank you