Honouring the Community

*Black History Month, held in October in the UK, celebrates the achievements, contributions and history of Black people in Britain. To mark the event, **Oluwapelumi Amanda Adeola** of Trinity Chambers asked colleagues from across the law what BHM means to them*



Ruth Reid

Criminal barrister at Three Temple Gardens

Has your understanding of community influenced your approach to clients and case management?

Yes, it certainly has. Having a broader worldview and an appreciation of the nuances, and sometimes overlaps, within distinct communities, while also recognising individual differences, needs and preferences, has significantly influenced and assisted my approach to clients and case management.

I view clients and case management holistically. When people approach counsel, they do not leave their community, culture, background or lived experiences behind. Those things remain an important part of who they are and can influence how they understand their circumstances, how they communicate, how they respond to particular situations and what they need from their legal representatives.

Growing up within a strong Caribbean community, and being heavily involved in wider community issues, celebrations and activities, including various annual multicultural festivals and celebrations, has shaped my understanding of the importance of community and belonging. The active presence of community centres and community engagement also played a significant role in my upbringing and contributed to my wider worldview. I have grown up interacting with and living alongside people from a range of communities, cultures, races and religions, and I think that exposure has given me a genuine appreciation of the fact that there is no single or universal lived experience.

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RUTH REID, THREE TEMPLE GARDENS



Shakira Maynard-Johnson

KJ Smith Family Law

What role does representation within the legal profession play in honouring communities?

Representation within the legal profession plays a huge factor – an integral role – in honouring communities. Whilst I could list many reasons for this, I will focus on the two that I feel are top of the list.

Firstly, representation is crucial for those who aspire to practice within the legal profession. It is an undisputed fact that ethnic minorities make up a small percentage of legal professionals. In other words, those of an ethnic minority background are under-represented in the legal profession. This lack of representation effectively marginalises these communities. The detrimental impact of this on aspiring professionals belonging to these particular communities is that it creates a false perception that the profession may be out of reach for them.

Pursuing a career in the legal profession is challenging. However, when you're faced with such a challenge and you are able to look toward the finishing line and see your community represented in numbers, you have an unspoken privilege. This is because representation symbolises inclusivity, and therefore positively affirms to those aspiring individuals that not only can they too cross the finishing line and make it into the profession; but also, that they will be welcomed into the profession. Sadly, due to lack of representation within the profession, not all communities benefit from this privilege. This is a shame, not only for those individuals who may be discouraged from pursuing their ambitions – it's a significant loss for the profession itself, as it misses out on evolving and strengthening via the benefits that diversity brings. Representation will knock down these barriers.

Secondly, representation within the legal profession is crucial to building public trust. A profession

that reflects and represents diversity is a profession that reflects the realities of society. This will reassure communities that the profession is equipped to represent any and all individuals, regardless of their background, which in turn increases access to justice for all.

What does culturally competent client care look like in family law?

In my view, cultural client care begins with a firm's general marketing and way before a client formally engages with a law firm. For example, when a prospective client visits a law firm's website, they do this to get an initial feel of the firm and assess whether they would feel comfortable instructing that particular firm. If the images used throughout that firm's website and the "meet the team" pages do not reflect cultural diversity, then individuals of certain backgrounds may feel discouraged from engaging with that firm, as they may question the firm's ability to fully meet and understand their needs. They will question the firm's cultural competency.



Andrew Powell KC

Family barrister at 4PB

How has your work helped build trust and improve access to justice for families from diverse communities, particularly where cultural perception of family and parenthood may differ?

I read social anthropology as an undergraduate and have always been fascinated by how family life is shaped and constructed. For me, honouring communities means recognising that families take different shapes and forms. My surrogacy practice has afforded me with the opportunity to represent individuals whose experiences of parenthood and family life do not always fit neatly within traditional legal concepts.

Questions surrounding genetic, gestational and social parenthood and the role of the family often carry significant cultural significance as well as legal significance. A bit like an anthropologist, one of the key things a lawyer must do is to listen without judgement or making assumptions, and create an environment in which people feel able to explain their family. In my view, trust is vitally important to allow the client to know that I am not simply trying to find a legal solution, but also acknowledging the human reality that is at the heart of their case. I try, I hope (!) to use my legal expertise with empathy and accessibility, particularly where the law is uncertain or does not easily reflect people's lived realities.

Surrogacy often involves navigating complex legal, cultural and personal issues. In your experience, what are some of the unique barriers that people from Black and other ethnically diverse communities face when building families through surrogacy and how can the legal profession better support and empower those communities?

There are practical barriers, but there are also barriers of perception and confidence. Surrogacy itself can be difficult to navigate because the law does not always reflect the reality of how families are created. For people from Black and other ethnically diverse communities, that can be compounded by cultural expectations around parenthood, genetics and the role of the wider family. There may also be different understandings within families and communities about surrogacy, assisted reproduction or same-sex parenting. These topics can sometimes reflect a wider cultural taboo, which requires sensitivity in how best to approach it.



Patience Abladey

Trinity Chambers

Black History Month 2026 is themed "Honouring Our Communities." What does the theme mean to you professionally?

To me, "Honouring Our Communities" professionally means recognising and valuing the people, experiences and contributions that have helped shape our workplaces and wider society.

It is about celebrating the achievements of Black colleagues and communities, while also recognising the importance of creating an environment where everyone feels respected, included and able to progress. For me, honouring our communities means listening to different perspectives, challenging barriers and inequalities, and supporting others to have the same opportunities to succeed.

Professionally, I see the theme as a reminder that our communities are stronger when we recognise each other's contributions, learn from one another and make sure everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Do you consider family lawyers bear any responsibility to honour the communities they serve beyond achieving legal outcomes?

Yes. Family lawyers have a responsibility to honour the communities they serve beyond achieving legal outcomes. It means recognising and challenging barriers that may affect marginalised communities. It also means listening to clients' experiences, respecting cultural and family differences, ensuring access to justice, and treating people with dignity throughout what can be a difficult process. For example, it could be as simple as, when representing a Black client whose young children have been removed from their care on an interim basis and placed in a setting that is not culturally aligned,

it means raising the children's particular needs, including appropriate care for Afro-Caribbean hair textures and skin, as well as access to culturally appropriate foods. While these matters may not necessarily have any legal bearing on the outcome of the case, raising them can help the client to feel heard, respected and supported.



Angela Kwokori

Spencer West LLP (Qatar)

Family law sits at the heart of some of life's most significant moments and challenges. In the context of this year's theme, how do you ensure that families from Black and other ethnic backgrounds feel heard, respected and understood throughout the legal process?

My multicultural background – Gambian, Nigerian and Lebanese heritage; raised in a Christian household, and now Muslim; married into an Indian Hindu family – enables me to view families, their concerns and cultural practices through a non-judgmental lens.

While my diverse background gives me valuable perspective, I also recognise the limits of my own knowledge. Where less familiar cultural or religious issues arise, I take time to understand clients' perspectives, seeking guidance from colleagues or experts when needed.

Communities are often built on strong family networks and values, yet family law can involve navigating sensitive issues where culture, tradition and the law intersect. How do you approach these situations while ensuring that every client receives compassionate, culturally informed and effective legal advice?

Having spent most of my life in the UK, six years of childhood in The Gambia, and over four years living in Qatar, I have seen first-hand how family networks are shaped by different cultural norms and values. These experiences remind me that what feels "normal" in one context may not be universal, and my personal norms are not "better" simply because they are familiar.



Shanice Edwards-Smith

Edwards Duthie Shamash

As the first point of contact for many clients, how do you build trust with individuals who may already feel apprehensive about the legal system?

Clients who feel apprehensive about the legal system may have had negative experiences, either directly or through people close to them. As a result, they may feel unheard, anxious, suspicious, or worried that the system will let them down.

In addition, navigating the legal system as a lay person can feel overwhelming and unfamiliar. Building trust, which is essential takes time and consistency.

Do you consider your work as a family lawyer contributes to strengthening and protecting communities?

Yes, I firmly believe that my work and that of all family lawyers plays a huge role in strengthening and protecting our communities. Family law involves supporting individuals and families at some of the most difficult points in their lives, and clear, compassionate legal advice can help them make informed decisions and access the protection they need.

Representation within the legal profession also plays an important role in creating a fair, effective, and empathetic legal system. Through my work, I aim to help build public trust in both the profession and the wider legal system by ensuring clients feel heard, respected, and fully supported.



Stephen Lue

Garden Court Chambers

"Honouring Our Communities" – what does that theme mean to you personally?

As a Jamaican-Chinese and LGBT+ person, I experience community as something both inherited and actively built. It includes the people whose histories and sacrifices made my path possible, as well as those who have challenged exclusion and helped make professional and social spaces more welcoming.

I am about to celebrate my 20th anniversary as a member of my LGBT+ Aquatics club, Out To Swim, and that has been a journey of being raised by role models that are

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STEPHEN LUE, GARDEN COURT CHAMBERS

not often immediately available growing up within the Black community.

Honouring our communities also means treating one another with empathy and compassion. Communities are not monolithic; people experience race, culture, sexuality, class and family in different ways. All systems evolve best when they are open to growth and consistent learning. We need to listen to each other with humility and with the remembrance that when we look closely enough we can see ourselves in each other. We need to make space for messiness, complexity and nuance and resist the temptation to judge ourselves and each other too quickly.

Have you observed changes in how family courts engage with cultural diversity over the course of your career?

I have observed a greater willingness to recognise that cultural diversity can affect how families communicate, understand relationships, access support and experience the court process.

There is also increased awareness from lawyers and courts about the wide range of what is considered normal within different cultural contexts. For instance, it is now more readily accepted that some communities thrive living in multi-generational households.

However, progress remains uneven. Cultural competence cannot be reduced to knowing a few customs, religious holidays or identifying someone's ethnicity. It requires a curiosity and a willingness to listen to the individual rather than relying on assumptions.

ANNA CURPHEY (2 May 1984 – 2 July 2026)



It is with profound sadness that we remember Anna Curphey, an exceptional solicitor, colleague and friend, who passed away on 2 July 2026. Anna was a highly respected family law solicitor and recently appointed deputy District Judge whose career was marked by her dedication to her clients and her professional approach towards those fortunate enough to work alongside her.

Anna, who qualified in 2008, spent her career practicing family law, with a particular dedication to representing vulnerable clients in care proceedings and those subjected to domestic abuse.

An accredited children representative solicitor, she represented parents, family members and children in some of the most sensitive and challenging public and private law proceedings and her commitment to achieving the best outcomes for vulnerable children and families earned her the respect of colleagues, clients and the courts alike. She was known as a compassionate safe pair of hands.

Anna was a long-time member or Resolution and, in every sense, embodied its values and ways of working. She brought to her work not only her highly-regarded legal knowledge and sound judgement but also her humanity, positivity and empathy for others. She was very tough when she needed to be, but always extremely kind. She undoubtedly had a very bright judicial career ahead of her and all who knew her agree she would have excelled as a judge. It is a sign of her enormous fortitude and determination that she undertook and passed the judicial appointment process even while fighting her illness and at times very unwell.

Growing up in Clitheroe, she spent time working locally at Londsdales, and moved to the northeast post-qualification, working initially at Ben Hoare Bell Solicitors before moving down south to work at TV Edwards Solicitors in London. In June 2016 she returned to the northeast to work at David Gray Solicitors in Newcastle before in July 2024, Anna joined Hay & Kilner as a senior associate in its family law team. Throughout her career, Anna chose to work at firms that provided legal aid services to the vulnerable clients she was always so committed to helping.

While Anna's professional achievements were considerable, those who knew her will remember above all the person she was. She possessed a bright, loving and sparkling personality that lit up every room she entered. Everyone who met her will remember her laugh. Warm, kind and endlessly supportive of others, Anna had the rare ability to make everyone feel valued and welcome.

Away from the law, Anna's greatest joy was the life she shared with her husband, Al, and their beloved dog, Rosie. She loved walks on the beach, time spent with family and friends, and a good spa break!

Our thoughts are with Al, her family, friends and colleagues. Anna will be deeply missed and forever remembered with love, respect and affection.