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## Why did the Council give Windrush archive funding to a white-led organisation?

Local anti-racism group asks, "Who gets to tell their own stories?" after Council gives funding for Remember Windrush project to Ignite Imaginations.



by [Shahed Ezaydi](#)  
24 June 2021



[Harrison Qi](#)

The Remember Windrush project aims to build up a fuller picture of the lived experiences of people from the Windrush generation, something which is notably missing from Sheffield’s archives.

Funding of £5,000 for the project was awarded by Sheffield City Council to community arts organisation Ignite Imaginations, who were tasked with gathering stories over the course of this month, asking local people to submit photos, voice recordings and text submissions.

When the project was made public, many were quick to point out that Ignite Imaginations - an organisation with white trustees, white staff and at the time, according to their website, no artists of colour working with them - wasn’t the right organisation to archive the stories from Black Caribbean communities.

Twitter users noted how an all-white organisation overseeing this project was indicative of an attitude of 'white saviourism', on their part and the part of Sheffield City Council. The decision suggests that people within their own communities can’t be trusted to tell their own stories - and that they need white people to do it for them.

A group of artists, activists, academics and grassroots workers of colour, who call themselves the Collective, came together to write a letter to Ignite Imaginations, expressing their concerns with the group's involvement in the project.

“They wanted our elders to ‘upload’ their stories to their website and they saw nothing wrong in this. This was a gross injustice,” the Collective said in a statement.

“We felt it was crucial to call it out. There are several Black art organisations in Sheffield that are more qualified and capable. The Council simply chose to ignore them.

"The decision, from our point of view, is symptomatic of the inherent structural racism of Sheffield City Council. And we're very sure they're not the only ones. Ignite Imaginations is not the only story."

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While Ignite Imaginations shouldn't have accepted the funding in the first place, to really understand why they were allocated this project we have to turn to the Council and its processes. When we consider that [the Race Equality Commission is still collating evidence on racial inequalities in Sheffield](#), commissioned by the Council itself, it becomes an even bleaker picture.

When asked why Ignite were awarded the Remember Windrush funding, a Council spokesperson told Now Then that in 2019, the Council applied for a £15,000 grant to fund Remember Windrush projects. As part of this submission, £10,000 was allocated by the Church Urban Fund to the Council to fund community partners, with the remaining £5,000 given to library and archive services.

The £10,000 community funding went to Black-led community organisations, the Council says, but the £5,000 for the library and archive teams was curtailed due to Covid-19. A short extension of a few days was given to allocate this funding or the money would have to be returned. "We approached Ignite Imaginations who have an established track record of working creatively with communities, connecting and collating lived experience."

"We acknowledge the concerns raised by some members of our Caribbean communities, as do Ignite, who have asked to withdraw from the project."

Ignite Imaginations [released a statement](#) recognising the criticism they've received for their acceptance of the funding, withdrawing from the work and outlining what their next steps would be.

"We wholeheartedly support the view that stories about Black experience are best gathered, looked after, and retold by people from those communities," the statement said.

Ignite also offered to continue to work alongside the project unpaid and invited those who raised this issue to join an expert advisory group on a paid basis.

Who's in the room when these decisions are made? Who gets to tell their own stories?

But this still doesn't explain why Ignite were approached by the Council in the first place. As the Collective noted, there are many Black-led arts organisations in Sheffield that the Council could have turned to. Instead they chose an organisation that isn't at all representative of the communities that Remember Windrush would be engaging with.

Even if they weren't aware of the staffing make-up of Ignite, details of which are freely available online, this speaks to an apparent lack of awareness of how the Council's structures and systems are heavily weighted in favour of white-led organisations.

The Council say they're "absolutely committed to creating a publicly accessible documentation of the lived experience of the Windrush generation in Sheffield".

"The Council continues to pay no attention to the city that houses them and Ignite imaginations is a part of a wider problem. Who's in the room when these decisions are made? Who gets to tell their own stories?" the Collective adds.

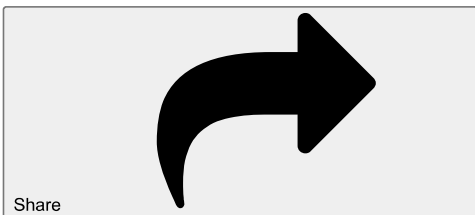
The Collective has been in touch with the Council since the project went public earlier this month, but they're still yet to engage with anyone who was directly involved in the decision-making process.

The Remember Windrush funding is being returned to the Council by Ignite. When asked about the future of the project, a Council spokesperson said, "We are considering the options available to make sure this work can continue with the best interests and representation of our Caribbean communities, we want them to be involved throughout and at the heart of these decisions."

The Council didn't respond to questions about which organisations would be approached for this project - or what the process would be.

The Collective say they'll be watching to see if the Council and organisations like Ignite actually commit to real, transformative change.

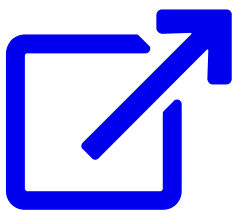
"It doesn't fill us with hope if the Council has to frame their ignorance as 'not on purpose', it goes against the very central ethos of anti-racism: own the purpose, know that the solution is a process rather than a knee-jerk fear of guilt. Be visibly culpable."



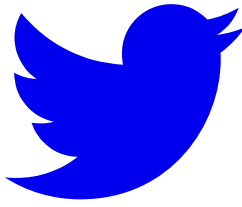
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by [Shahed Ezaydi](#)  
24 June 2021



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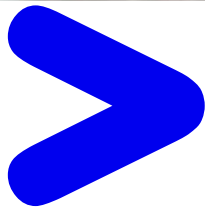
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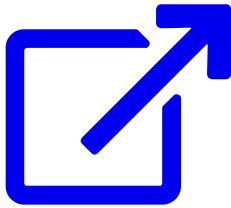


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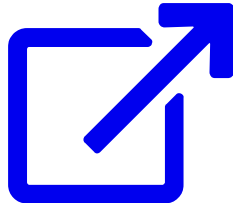
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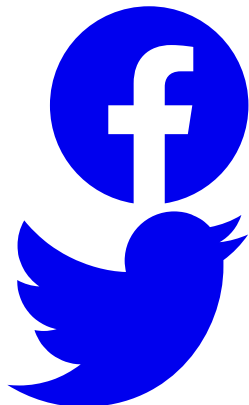


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