



## **Supporting Anti-racism**

### **A case study from Hackney Museum, Emma Winch, Heritage Engagement Manager, Niti Acharya, Museum Manager and Tahlia Coombs, Heritage Manager**

#### **Museum team: 6 Full-time-equivalent staff**

Since our founding in the 1980s we have collected material with local communities about migration, identity and belonging. Anti-racism isn't a standalone strand in our work, it's a thread that runs throughout and has greatly influenced how our learning programmes, displays, exhibitions, collections and ethos have developed.

We have learnt with communities over many years, how to develop our displays and co-design exhibitions where personal stories and experiences of racism, discrimination, trauma, conflict, tensions with authorities and anti-racist campaigning are made visible.

We have a clear understanding of the power of our collections and how they can be used with communities to explore contemporary struggles with racism and anti-racism and as a tool to empower people to tell their own stories.

Resistance to anti-racism work comes in different forms. It is important to continually strive to understand the root causes of resistance and create trusted spaces where different viewpoints can be heard. Working with contentious and divisive issues is not easy, but that shouldn't stop you advocating for anti-racism.

We make clear our purpose through our core work and this attracts a workforce and partnership opportunities with people and organisations who share our values and understand how complex and demanding, but humbling and rewarding the work can be.

Our advice to museums who want to commit to anti-racism in the long-term:

- Know your core purpose and have a clear understanding of where anti-racism fits - it doesn't work effectively as a knee-jerk bolt-on to social or political events
- Be clear about what you mean by 'anti-racism' so the work is not diluted to Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) work, inclusion or community cohesion
- Learn your histories and those of your communities. Invite people to help you rethink what you know about your collections to help you see them in different ways.
- Make sure your communities and stakeholders are able to challenge you both for and against anti-racism work, so you can be clear about your purpose for doing this work, and able to reflect on the nuances in the debate
- Take risks and do the things that feel uncomfortable. Be open and truthful about what worked and what didn't, and also try to understand why - allow time/space for reflection and learning
- Be in it for the long haul as change takes time - we've been at it for over 30 years
- Think about your museum's role outside its four walls - how can it be involved in other work to both share and grow its knowledge in educational settings and the wider public realm?



Caption: **Home Project, 2018** - Our newspaper and community campaign leaflet collections reveal how whole communities have come together to speak out about injustice in their communities. With this group of young Black men we explored a protest in 1963 and the African and Caribbean collections

around it, to inspire them to write their own protest letters, which were turned into songs with professional lyric writers and then exhibited alongside the original archive material in an exhibition at the museum. This exhibition came at the height of rising knife crime in the borough and highlighted the need for council services and communities to do more to understand and tackle the problem together.