

Case Study

Screening and Q&A Session of the “Blacks Can’t Swim” Documentary Hosted by RNLI



Introduction

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), a charity committed to saving lives at sea, is devoted to promoting water safety across all communities. In an effort to address racial disparities in swimming participation and water safety education, the RNLI actively partners with the Black Swimming Association (BSA) to drive meaningful change within ethnically diverse communities.

As part of this collaboration, the cast of the documentary "Blacks Can't Swim - REWIND" made several enlightening visits to the RNLI headquarters in Poole. These visits offered invaluable insights into water safety, drowning prevention, and the wide array of career opportunities within the aquatic sector. Similarly, the RNLI's head of water safety travelled to London to engage with the cast and local community, gaining a deeper understanding of the specific challenges these communities face in their everyday environments. This reciprocal engagement has not only strengthened the relationship between the RNLI and the documentary cast but also enhanced water safety initiatives and facilitated the dissemination of vital messages across various communities.

Through these interactions and the broader impact of the documentary, the RNLI has successfully collaborated with young people from diverse and often low socioeconomic backgrounds. This partnership has helped to empower the youth and increased their awareness of water safety's importance and enabling them to spread this essential knowledge further.

Objectives and Goals

On 16th November, the RNLI hosted a private screening of the documentary "Blacks Can't Swim REWIND" at the Waterfront Suite. The event focused on illuminating the barriers faced by ethnic minorities in swimming and water safety, allowing the BSA to use insights generated from the documentary to work closely with partners such as the RNLI in addressing these issues. Furthermore, the collaboration has facilitated the RNLI's understanding of the extensive challenges regarding aquatic participation within African, Caribbean, and Asian communities, while also understanding the cultural differences that influence these issues.

The Shocking Facts (Current Key Statistics)

According to a survey conducted in 2024 by **Sport England**, **97% of Black adults and 82% of Black children in England do not swim. 96% of Asian adults and 79% of Asian children in England do not swim.** (Sports England Active Lives Survey 2024)

Black Children are seven times more likely to die from drowning than their White peers, prompting experts to encourage them to learn how to swim. Children from African and Caribbean backgrounds have been held back from learning the life skill because of fears about water, hair protection and financial means which has left them at a greater risk.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that, on average, 236,000 people drown globally every year, with 90% of these deaths occurring in low- to middle-income countries. Africa has the highest drowning rate, while Asia experiences the highest number of drowning incidents.

Benefits to RNLI

The collaboration between the RNLI and the BSA brings numerous benefits that enhance the organisation's outreach and effectiveness. By hosting events like the screening of "Blacks Can't Swim," the RNLI gains a deeper understanding of the cultural barriers that prevent ethnic minorities from engaging in swimming and water safety education. This enhanced insight allows the RNLI to tailor its programmes and initiatives more effectively, ensuring they resonate with diverse communities and address their specific needs. Strengthening community ties fosters trust and engagement, creating a supportive atmosphere where individuals feel empowered to learn and advocate for water safety.

Moreover, the screening was integral to fulfilling the RNLI's social responsibility initiatives, aligning with its mission to ensure that everyone has the education and resources necessary for water safety. By actively addressing the challenges faced by communities disproportionately affected by drowning, the RNLI not only works towards reducing these risks but also demonstrates its commitment to equity and inclusivity. Collaborating with the BSA, the RNLI is dedicated to reducing drowning risks among African, Caribbean, and Asian communities through education and community engagement programmes. The documentary serves as a foundation for understanding these issues, paving the way for effective solutions. Overall, this collaboration positions the RNLI as a leader in promoting inclusivity in aquatics, setting a precedent for organisations across the sector and significantly impacting the safety and well-being of all communities.

Audience Engagement and Learning Outcomes

All the attendees, who work for the RNLI and are well-versed in water safety, were particularly intrigued by the personal stories shared in the interviews with the cast and through the documentary. This exposure provided a deeper understanding of how different cultures engage with or disengage from aquatics.

The event featured a 45-minute screening followed by a 30-minute Q&A session with Ed Accura. He nurtured an atmosphere of open dialogue, encouraging attendees to ask questions without hesitation. This inclusive environment allowed individuals from various backgrounds to share their experiences and insights, enriching everyone's understanding of the barriers to water engagement. The discussions emphasised how the documentary's insights could guide the creation of more focused and effective interventions, ultimately enhancing water safety initiatives across diverse communities.

Research and Community Engagement Programme

The BSA's new research programme aims to investigate the barriers faced by individuals of African, Caribbean, and Asian heritage in participating in aquatics. This programme, supported by RNLI, will help unravel whether these barriers are cultural, faith-based, or influenced by community dynamics. The findings will contribute towards RNLI's ongoing FLOAT to Live safety campaign and aim to dispel myths surrounding the swimming abilities of these communities.

BSA Chair Danielle Obe noted, "We're confident that this pioneering research will improve our understanding of the issues faced by these communities. The documentary highlights these challenges, empowering us to engage effectively and create solutions that encourage swimming for all."

Conclusion

The screening of "Blacks Can't Swim REWIND" highlighted the RNLI's commitment to fostering inclusivity and safety within the community. By bringing attention to systemic barriers and promoting open discussions, the RNLI and BSA are setting a precedent for organisations across the sector. This collaboration is crucial in working towards a future where swimming is an accessible and valued life skill for all, regardless of background.

The engagement and insights gained from the screening will guide further initiatives aimed at highlighting the importance of swimming and water safety within ethnically diverse communities across the UK. Additionally, the partnership that has emerged from the documentary has allowed the RNLI to engage with various water safety and drowning prevention programmes, significantly impacting youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Through this collaboration, these young individuals are not only learning the importance of water safety but are also becoming advocates, spreading vital messages within their communities.

Moreover, the RNLI's ongoing efforts to understand the extent of the lack of aquatic participation in African, Caribbean, and Asian communities, combined with insights into cultural differences, equip them to better address these critical issues. In conclusion, together with the BSA, the RNLI is paving the way for meaningful change that fosters a culture of understanding, safety, and empowerment for all.

About the Documentaries

The **Blacks Can't Swim** and **Changing the Narrative** documentaries have provided crucial insights into why a disproportionate number of people of African, Caribbean, and Asian heritage do not swim. These documentaries offer valuable perspectives through the lived experiences shared in the films.

These documentaries are essential for anyone who would like to better understand how a lack of diversity and inclusion in aquatics has impacted individuals within ethnically diverse communities. By participating in these screenings, viewers will gain insight into the complex barriers to aquatic engagement, the opportunities and benefits that being able to swim can provide, and how participation can be promoted within African, Caribbean, and Asian communities.

The screenings offer a comfortable and safe environment for individuals to reflect on their views and address these issues. Additionally, the documentaries delve into important topics beyond swimming, exploring mental health, physical health, dietary choices, and other areas that can benefit from aquatic activities.

For organisations or communities aiming to align with their strategic priorities and focus on reducing inequalities, especially those with a diverse workforce, these screenings offer an opportunity to engage with important societal issues and encourage positive change. By fostering discussions around inclusivity and water safety, organisations can contribute to enhancing community well-being and collectively work towards changing the narrative surrounding swimming participation.

If you are interested in hosting your screening, private packages including a Q&A session are available via the details below, furthering the documentary's mission to raise awareness and advocate for inclusion in aquatics regardless of ethnicity.

Contact info@changingthenarrative.film to initiate change in your workplace and community.

Together, we can foster a culture of understanding, safety, and empowerment for all.

For more information, interested parties can visit www.changingthenarrative.film