

Case Study

Community Screening and Q&A Session of "Blacks Can't Swim –REWIND at Abbey Theatre. St Albans Hertfordshire (Community Screening)



Introduction

On October 15, 2022, the Abbey Theatre in St Albans hosted the community screening of "Blacks Can't Swim - REWIND," a powerful documentary that explores the stigma associated with people of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage and swimming. This event was part of a broader initiative led by KickOff@3 to engage the community during Black History Month. The evening, featuring Ed Accura, co-founder of the Black Swimming Association (BSA), sparked vital conversations around the disparities in swimming participation, aiming to illuminate critical issues of water safety and accessibility. Recognising that many cast members of the documentary were present and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the screening sought to inspire hope and belief among attendees that despite their circumstances, achieving their goals and aspirations is possible.

Objectives and Goals

The event at the Abbey Theatre sought to raise awareness about the cultural barriers and stigmatisation that prevent people of African, Caribbean, and Asian heritage from participating in swimming, emphasising the critical importance of water safety as a life skill. By aligning with Black History Month and featuring the documentary "Blacks Can't Swim - REWIND," the organisers aimed to engage the community in meaningful dialogue. Through open forums and interactive sessions led by Ed Accura, the event provided a platform for sensitive conversations about the historical and cultural barriers facing ethnic minorities in aquatics.

The primary objective of the screening was to engage the audience in meaningful conversations that could lead to increased understanding and actionable initiatives around aquatic inclusivity. Furthermore, the event included members of the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy, and Metropolitan Police, bringing together various sectors of the community. Many young cast members identified as being at risk of falling into negative influences found themselves in a unique position to engage positively with law enforcement in a neutral environment. Additionally, the screening intended to inspire action and mobilise both individuals and organisations to address swimming disparities and promote inclusivity. By encouraging attendees to reflect on their personal experiences and challenge prevailing stereotypes, the event fostered a sense of empowerment and responsibility among participants.

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.

The Event

The community screening of "Blacks Can't Swim - REWIND" was viewed by a mixed audience of all ages and ethnicities. The in-person screening was followed by a 60-minute Q&A discussion featuring Ed Accura and several of the lead cast members from the documentary. This session addressed the critical issue of swimming participation within diverse communities, confronting uncomfortable truths and facilitating essential conversations about the generational barriers to swimming.

Benefits to Participants and the Community

The screening and subsequent Q&A session provided numerous benefits to attendees and partner organisations:

- 1. Awareness and Education:** The event offered attendees an opportunity to gain insights into the cultural and social factors influencing swimming participation among ethnic minorities. Engaging with the documentary enabled a deeper understanding of water safety's importance as a life skill.
- 2. Community Engagement and Dialogue:** The screening attracted a diverse audience—including community members, aquatic advocates, and scholars—creating a platform for open discussions about the barriers faced by underrepresented groups in accessing swimming and water safety education.
- 3. Call to Action:** The Q&A session, led by Ed Accura and cast of the documentary, encouraged audience participation, with Ed inviting attendees to ask questions regardless of how uncomfortable they may seem. He emphasised that every organisation and community has a responsibility to address these generational issues, further driving a collective commitment to marine inclusivity.
- 4. Inspiration and Empowerment:** By sharing personal stories and insights, the event inspired attendees to reflect on their experiences and consider ways to advocate for inclusivity in swimming and water safety initiatives.
- 5. Fostering Partnership and Collaboration:** The positive engagement and discussions initiated during the event highlighted the need for ongoing partnerships between organisations and community groups to promote drowning prevention and aquatic education.

The Event's Significance as Reported by The Voice Press

The screening of "Blacks Can't Swim - REWIND," as reported by The Voice Press, was not only a first for the community but also sparked important conversations around the film's boundary-pushing narratives. The documentary is a crucial addition to the series, exploring the stigma associated with people of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage and swimming through a collection of powerful conversations. It aims to change the narrative regarding swimming participation among ethnic minorities, highlighting the importance of water safety as an essential skill.

KickOff@3, co-hosted by local youth leaders Samson Alexander and Jones Kamil, alongside Rhiann O'Connor, aimed to create a fun-filled evening while also addressing serious issues. The event featured discussion panels, guest performances, and designated areas for attendees to seek advice on water safety. It also welcomed special guests from the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Metropolitan Police, adding further value to the event.

Following the event, a comment posted on the article highlighted an important perspective: "There has been multiple stories of His Majesty's African-heritage English Subjects swimming with their Caucasian family members; colleagues and associates in rivers, getting into difficulties and drowning. There is some truth in the myth of African-heritage people being poor swimmers. For these reasons, African-heritage people should leave the swimming to our Caucasian family members, friends and associates. Enjoying the beach should be the nearest African-heritage people should venture, and certainly not enter the sea."

This comment reflects the prevailing stereotypes and cultural concerns that the documentary seeks to challenge.

Conclusion

The screening of "Blacks Can't Swim - REWIND" at the Abbey Theatre was an impactful event that effectively connected historical narratives of exclusion to contemporary issues of swimming inequality. By fostering an environment for open dialogue and collaboration, the event highlighted the urgent need to address disparities faced by Black and Asian communities in accessing swimming education and resources. The presence of cast members, many of whom come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, added a powerful dimension to the evening, demonstrating that achieving one's goals is possible despite challenging circumstances.

The positive engagement from attendees reaffirmed the importance of initiatives that promote awareness and advocacy for aquatic justice. Many attendees expressed that the documentary addresses not only swimming challenges but also serves as an inspirational narrative, showcasing the potential for success and resilience within their communities. The unique opportunity for young cast members to engage positively with law enforcement in a neutral environment further reinforced the significance of building relationships that foster trust and understanding.

Feedback from participants revealed a heightened understanding of the cultural barriers that inhibit swimming participation, inspiring many to advocate for inclusivity in aquatic settings. Moreover, the Impact Assessment for the screening indicates that the event successfully met its primary objectives of raising awareness and fostering conversations around the critical issues of swimming participation. The diverse attendance and robust engagement during the Q&A session demonstrated a significant interest in addressing the challenges highlighted in the documentary. Personal testimonials reinforced the emotional resonance of the film, while discussions initiated during the event hold the potential for long-term collaborations with local organisations, aimed at enhancing access to swimming education and resources.

As KickOff@3 continues to partner with Ed Accura and advocate for water safety, the event stands as a crucial step towards fostering a more equitable approach to swimming and water safety education for all communities.

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**