

Black History Month Newsletter

October 2024

TOTUM

20
24

Welcome to Black History Month!

This Black History Month, we're focusing on the UK's 2024 theme: [#ReclaimingNarrativesBHM](#). This is all about taking control of our stories and recognising the significant contributions of the Black community. Learn more about this theme [here](#).

BHM Magazine

In this issue, I speak with Chloe Lewis, Founder and Programme Director at the Catalyst Collective, about her impactful work in mentoring and supporting young Black girls.

We also hear from Emeka Obiekwe, our 2024 Totum Bursary recipient, about how this support is benefiting his academic journey.

I also contributed to the BBC Radio 4 show *Heart and Soul: Should I Change My Name?* where we explored the significance of names and narratives in Black history and culture. You can listen to the episode via the link provided in the newsletter.

Additionally, we spotlight Black Pound Day and its role in supporting Black-owned businesses and addressing economic imbalances, highlight some upcoming Black arts and culture experiences, and offer the chance to win a meal at a Michelin-starred West African restaurant.

Finally, challenge yourself with our pop quiz on memorable UK events from the past year.

Thank you for exploring this Black History Month edition with us.

Carolyn Beckford Balogun
Consultant

Interview with Chloe Lewis

The Catalyst Collective is a mentoring community connecting Black young women and professionals. Carolyn Beckford Balogun, Totum's Finance Recruitment Consultant talks to Founder Chloe Lewis about how mentorship can reshape narratives, bridge career gaps and positively impact young Black women.



What led you to start The Catalyst Collective?

I've worked in a couple of different education charities and I found two things to be true. One: they're often staffed by amazing, well-meaning, middle-class white people, and two: they often serve Black and Brown communities.

I worked for some time on one of the biggest housing estates in Europe, which has significant socio-economic disadvantage. We worked with a lot of Black and Asian kids, but the whole team was white middle class women. When I got there, I found that wherever I was working the Black kids and their parents, they kind of gravitated towards me, not because I was anything special but because they thought: "You look like me. You might get it."

I think there's something tricky about telling young people, "you can do anything, you can be anything," but the person delivering that message is someone very different from you. I felt there was a role model gap where young people just want to see themselves in the people around them.

The other thing I felt was that while there are some amazing organisations that work with Black boys, I never saw a lot of focus on Black girls. I think there's something just as urgent about providing support for this group who are often very compliant, self-sufficient, and have a culture of getting on with it because they always have done.

I couldn't see anything that recognised that this group is double disadvantaged. There's racism and there's sexism, and this group is often from working class backgrounds as well, so that they're navigating all sorts of compounding disadvantages.

Mentors can't change structural racism, but they can offer hundreds of girls the opportunity to meet someone working in their chosen field who looks like them.

How did you choose the name The Catalyst Collective?

We launched our first cohort in January 2021 and as soon as we started, it all felt magical. The mentors were really enjoying the experience of seeing their younger selves reflected back to them, and the mentees were enjoying it too.

It felt quite unusual to have a space that was so unashamedly about Black girls and Black women. Having a couple of generations there made it feel like we were doing something that maybe hadn't been done in that way before.

If you're going to do something, you need to put some good structure around it. That's where the name came in. I wanted "Collective" because I loved the idea of it being a community-focused initiative. It would be an "us" thing, not a "me" thing, evolving over time with each generation of girls contributing and coming back as mentors.

"Catalyst" felt perfect because I wanted to avoid the idea that this is a transformative initiative. This isn't about dragging girls out of their disadvantage. There's a lot of unwarranted narrative about raising aspirations for Black kids, because they already have loads of aspirations. All I wanted to do was help them get there faster. I wanted to catalyse their success, not generate it.

How does the programme work?

We recruit, match, and train mentors mainly through word of mouth and informal networks. Our connections grow organically. For example, if a girl is interested in property and we don't have a mentor in that field, we might ask around. We have mentors who are sisters, cousins, colleagues and friends, and it just grows really organically. For our girls, we work with partner schools and run our Open Access Mentoring Programme, so girls can apply for a mentor even if they're not in one of the partner schools. Schools shoulder tap the girls, suggesting they might benefit from mentoring. The girls can opt in or out—no one is forced to do it.

Girls start the programme in September, October, or January and work on anything they want. For example, one girl had a goal related to managing her ADHD. Her mentor, who also had ADHD, helped her with strategies and advice, making it a successful match even if it wasn't about achieving a specific academic goal.

We offer one-to-one mentoring with between eight and twelve sessions over the year. Alongside this, we organise social events like bowling, theatre trips, gallery visits, and a winter social. We also have a big end-of-year celebration to recognise the achievements of the girls and their mentors.

Last year was the first time we took girls on a two-night residential. Many of them were at an age where everything like that had been cancelled due to COVID, so it was their first time away.

We also have a careers programmes and have partnered with fantastic organisations. This year, we have a law insight day at Irwin Mitchell, which includes talks from lawyers and a debating workshop. We'll also have insight days around journalism, media and more. Last year, we visited Garden Studios in West London, where the Big Brother house was built, for a day focused on creative careers. Black women hosted us, discussing various routes into film and television. The girls recorded a podcast and participated in a photography studio session. Our aim is to expose the girls to different professional worlds and build their networks.

How many lives have you changed through The Catalyst Collective?

Our first cohort was six, our second grew to 53, which was a valuable learning experience. Our third cohort was around 50 and last year we matched 75. This year, we're aiming to match 100.

Our careers programming has expanded beyond our core girls. We now offer opportunities to Black girls from anywhere in the country, as long as they can get to the programme. For instance, during the summer holidays, a girl from Scotland found us, stayed with family in London, and joined in.

This year, we're launching Catalyst Connects, which offers mentoring opportunities for Black women aged 18 to 25 on CVs, career field guidance and interviewing. It's fantastic to see how far we're reaching.

How do you see the Catalyst Collective helping young Black girls reclaim their narrative?

Oh, that's such a lovely question. Firstly, as Black women who are further down the line, we understand the pitfalls and challenges. What we're really committed to is introducing these girls to careers and the working world with a sense of joy.

When a young Black girl is exploring a career in law, finance, or any field, our goal is for her first experience to be filled with excitement and possibility. We aim to provide opportunities that let them reclaim their narrative. While we know the journey can be tough, we're out here making it happen.

For instance, a mentee wanted to be a pilot and her first mentor was a Black woman pilot, so she now sees that as a normal and achievable path. We're working to expand their worlds and show them that Black women excel in all sorts of fields. It's about normalising excellence and opening up possibilities.

We also aim to shift the narrative that success comes with isolation. By bringing together successful Black women, we create a community that offers peace, space, and joy, countering the idea that success must be solitary.

For more information on [The Catalyst Collective](#) or if you want to [support](#), reach out to [Chloe Lewis](#), Programme Director, The Catalyst Collective.

Spotlight on Black Arts and Culture

[EXPLORE MORE](#)

Black British Book Festival

Where: Barbican Centre, London

When: Saturday, 5th October 2024

[SEE EXHIBITION](#)

Zanele Muholi, South African Artist

Where: Tate Modern, London

When: Until January 2025

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Simmer Down

Where: Southbank Centre, London

When: 4th Oct, 8th Nov, 6th Dec, all at 1.30pm

Discover Black History Celebrations Near You



Explore a comprehensive listing of Black History Month celebrations and events across the UK by visiting [National Listings](#).



ENTER TO WIN A MEAL FOR 2

Black History Month Challenge

To celebrate Black History Month, Totum employees have the chance to win a fantastic prize: a lunch for two at **Chishuru**, one of London's newest Michelin-starred restaurants.

Located in Fitzrovia, Chishuru is a pioneering establishment specialising in modern West African cuisine. Founder Adejoké Bakare has made history as the first Black woman in the UK to earn a Michelin star and is only the second Black woman globally to achieve this prestigious honour.

Chishuru is celebrated for its exceptional cuisine and welcoming, lively atmosphere. The name 'Chishuru' means "to eat silently", referring to the silence that falls over the table when the food is so good that no one wants to speak.

Treasure Hunt Challenge:

All answers to the questions below can be found in this newsletter. To enter for a chance to win, answer the following questions:

1. What does the name 'Chishuru' mean?
2. What percentage of the UK's GDP is attributed to Black consumers, and how does this compare to their population percentage?
3. Which media platform hosts the conversation between Carolyn Beckford Balogun and Dr Robert Beckford?
4. What is the meaning of "Somnyama Ngonyama", the title of one of Zanele Muholi's featured works at Tate Modern?
5. What unique combination of musical elements can attendees expect at the Simmer Down event at the Southbank Centre?
6. How many girls have been matched through the Catalyst Collective since its inception, and what is the target for this year?
7. What was a key highlight of Emeka's gap year?

Submit your answers by 21st October to competition@totumpartners.com for a chance to win this exclusive dining experience!

Please note: This competition is open to Totum employees only. Good luck!

Quick Quiz

Take the Quiz!

How well do you know recent Black History?



1.

Which television presenter was awarded the BAFTA Fellowship in May 2024 - the highest accolade bestowed by BAFTA - by Clive Myrie for her exceptional contribution to television?

2.

Which Black MP became the Mother of the House of Commons after the 2024 election?

3.

Which White & Case partner was named the sixth most influential Black person in the UK and the most influential in law by the Powerlist 2024?

4.

Which singer-songwriter received seven Brit Award nominations in 2024, setting a new record for the most nominations in a single year?

5.

Who was honoured with a damehood in the 2024 New Year Honours and has previously had a Barbie doll created in her likeness by Mattel?



Answers:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Baroness Floella Benjamin | 4. Raye |
| 2. Diane Abbott | 5. Dame Maggie Aderin-Pocock |
| 3. Joshua Siaw MBE | |

Black Pound Day

Supporting Black-owned businesses isn't just about personal taste; it's about contributing to a more balanced and fair economy. By being mindful of our choices, we can help address long-standing inequalities, encourage market diversity, and support businesses that offer valuable perspectives and contributions. It's a way to make our spending power work towards a more inclusive and equitable world for everyone.

Black Pound Day, observed on the first Saturday of every month, is a significant initiative that encourages consumers to support Black-owned businesses. This movement aims to level the playing field and provide these businesses with the recognition and opportunities they deserve.

Black consumers contribute about £300bn annually to the UK economy, which is 10.7% of our total GDP. In contrast, Black people make up only 3.3% of the UK population. Despite this substantial economic impact, Black-led

businesses receive only 1% of venture capital funding. This gap highlights a clear discrepancy between economic influence and investment.

While it's natural to choose businesses based on personal preference, it's valuable to consider the broader impact of where we spend our money.

Reclaiming the economic narrative means ensuring that Black contributions are properly valued. This month, let's highlight the significant impact of Black communities in the UK and the challenges they face.



Learn about Black economic contributions in [The Black Pound Report](#) by Lydia Amoah.

The Power of Changing Names: Reclaiming Black Identity

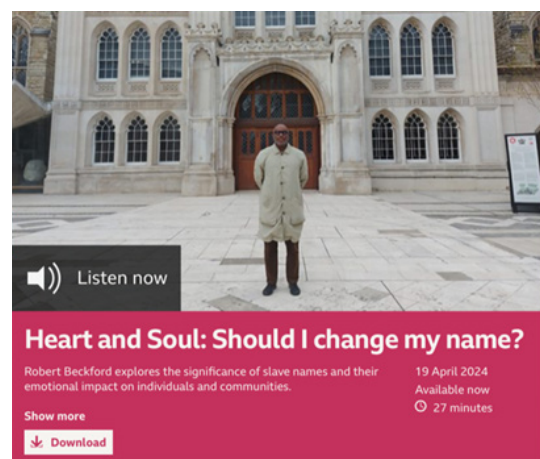
Changing a name can play a crucial role in correcting the narrative of Black culture by rejecting oppressive histories, reclaiming identity and empowering self-definition.

It's like hitting the refresh button on one's identity, allowing individuals to move away from names tied to painful histories and towards a narrative that reflects their true selves.

This insightful discussion on BBC Heart and Soul sees BAFTA award-winning filmmaker Dr Robert Beckford joined by his sister, Totum Partner's Carolyn Beckford Balogun, as he contemplates changing his name due to its connections to the transatlantic slave trade.

This act represents a way to reshape his personal and cultural story, creating a more empowering identity.

Tune in to the episode here:



Empowered by Totum: Emeka Obiekwe

Totum's Bursary scheme provides financial support to talented undergraduates from less advantaged backgrounds. We caught up with our newest recipient, Emeka Obiekwe on his first day at Queen Mary University, where he's studying for a degree in data analysis.

In our chat, Emeka shares his excitement for Freshers' Week, reflects on his gap year and explains how the bursary is helping him make the most of university life.



How did you discover the Totum Bursary and what motivated you to apply?

I found the Totum Bursary on a website that matches scholarships and bursaries to people based on their background. After looking into Totum, I realised it was a great fit for me.

I really liked their focus on inclusivity and fair representation and the whole application process felt genuinely inclusive.

What made you decide to pursue a degree apprenticeship?

I completed my A-levels in Maths, Physics and Business because I've always been more interested in numbers than essays. I thought focusing on subjects I enjoyed would be beneficial for my future. I figured that doing something I preferred, like working with numbers, would push me, challenge me, and open doors for my future. After not getting into my top-choice universities, I decided to take a gap year.

During the gap year, I focused on what I truly wanted to do, free from school or family expectations. I asked myself if I should settle for the offers I received or take a year out to aim higher and find a better opportunity. I decided to take the year out, believing there was no harm in exploring options that might open more doors for me.

I chose a degree apprenticeship because it offers a combination of work experience, a salary, and a degree. For my specific apprenticeship, I alternate between studying full-time for one semester and working full-time as a data analyst at PwC during the next.

The application process was quite similar to applying for a university course. I used UCAS to submit my personal statement and went through a number of interviews. For PwC, this involved an initial call and an online meeting, followed by an assessment centre where I participated in a team task.

What role do you think the bursary will play in your transition to student life?

The bursary works by giving you a lump sum to support your first year. It's meant to help with general living expenses and things that will benefit my course, like buying a laptop, the right books, and software for data analysis.

Having this bursary means I can afford these essentials and also manage to live in London. So, it really helps make this apprenticeship possible and keeps things fair for people like me who aren't already living in London.

What was the highlight of your gap year?

During my gap year, I travelled a bit, going to Spain a few times with friends and family, and I also went to Portugal earlier in the year. But mostly, I focused on developing myself as a person and figuring out what I really wanted to do.

My greatest achievement was taking powerlifting more seriously. I competed nationally and placed in the top 17 in the entire country.

I also started working on a side project where I created content and did coaching online to help people with fitness. Currently, I'm offering free content to build goodwill and plan to monetise it later on.

With Freshers' Week approaching, are there any specific activities or events you're particularly excited about?

I'm really looking forward to meeting new people and getting out of my comfort zone. I want to make friends and just have a lot of fun.

**For more information,
please contact:**

.....
Carolyn Beckford Balogun
carolyn.beckfordbalogun@totumpartners.com
.....



**Follow
Totum Partners**



**Join the discussion
@TotumTalks**