

Ray Sefia

■ Biography

Date of birth: 1955

Place of birth: Nigeria

Date of arrival in the UK: 1992

Ray moved from England to Nigeria with his white English mother and Black Nigerian father when he was a small boy in 1962. He lived in Nigeria until 1977 and spent the most wonderful time in his village swimming, fishing, hunting, tapping for rubber, and playing with his friends. He attended a secondary boarding school and although the school was very strict, he remembers it had great teachers, good facilities and a positive atmosphere.



Ray in traditional African dress
Photo courtesy of Ray Sefia

One year, a fellow classmate was being bullied so Ray organised a demonstration with other pupils to try and stop it. He was suspended from school for this, but didn't dare tell his parents and spent his time at friends' homes using their revision notes! Although he believed he was being unfairly punished, he still worked hard and passed his exams with good marks.

After school, Ray worked for several years in Nigeria and was soon in charge of 2000 employees. He wanted to become a barrister and decided to study law at Manchester University. He moved to England in 1977, but discovered he needed to live in England for three years before he could get a grant to pay for his studies. He found a job with a car company in London, and within less than a year he had become their youngest manager.

The company gave him with a coat that had 'Manager' written on it, but many customers ignored him, and would ask one of his white staff if they could speak to the manager. They did not seem to think that a dual heritage person like Ray could be in charge.

After three years of working in business, Ray decided that he would rather study business than law and worked hard to get his degree at university. Ray then became the director of an organisation in Toxteth, Liverpool, where he spent seven years helping people from mainly Black and minority ethnic communities.

With this experience, Ray got the position of the first Director of the Positive Action Consortium in Bristol in 1992. This organisation was set up to help people, especially those from Black and minority ethnic groups, to get jobs, training and education. Ray built up the organisation and gave it the name it is now known by, the Centre for Employment and Enterprise Development (CEED), now in Wilder St., St. Paul's.

After working with a number of groups in the community, Ray became a Bristol City Councillor from 1995 – 2000. He was the only Black councillor at the time and did his best to benefit people in Bristol, in particular Black and minority ethnic people.

After leaving CEED in 2002, Ray became director of another large organisation in London, the Bow Development Trust for three years.

Now Ray is the owner of Kalabash, the first West African restaurant in Bristol, in Stokes Croft. They serve African food and drink and promote African culture. On Fridays and Saturdays they have a DJ and they also hold events to raise money for projects in Africa.

Ray also spends some of his time filming and playing music for weddings, which he finds exciting and relaxing, and also does some business supplying equipment to Nigeria to develop the roads over there.

Ray was proud that his achievements were recognised in a book called *Remember Me – Achievements of Mixed Race People, Past and Present*. The book features famous people like Shirley Bassey (singer), Cathy Tyson (actress) and Oona King (politician).



Ray with Diane Abbott MP at CEED
Photo courtesy of Karl Ritchie

Ray's message is:

“ Respect your parents and teachers. Be determined, persevere and believe you can achieve what you set your mind to. Set a goal and aim for the top; even if you don't get to the top at least you will be half way there. Remember that life is precious. Forget about guns and gangs and aim for a good profession. Hopefully then you will have a good life. ”

Ray Sefia

■ Teachers' Background Notes

Ray moved from Birmingham to Nigeria with his white English mother and Black Nigerian father when he was a small boy in 1962. He lived in Nigeria until 1977 and spent the most wonderful time of his life in the village called Ovwian – swimming, fishing, hunting, tapping for rubber, and playing with his friends. He attended a secondary boarding school called Government College Ughelli. Although the school was very strict, he remembers it had great teachers, good facilities and a positive atmosphere.

One year, a fellow classmate was being bullied so Ray organised a demonstration with other pupils to draw attention to the situation. He was suspended from school for this, but didn't dare tell his parents and spent his time at friends' homes using their revision notes! Although he believed he was being unfairly punished, he did not become bitter but worked hard and passed his exams with good marks. The challenge was a big motivation to succeed, as was fear of upsetting his parents.

After school, Ray worked for several years in Nigeria rising to the position of Assistant Accountant for Payroll in charge of 2000 employees. He wanted to become a barrister and decided to study law at Manchester University in England. He moved to England in 1977, however, he needed to live in England for three years before he could receive funding to go to university. He found a job with Midas Exhausts and Silencers, a car company in London, and within less than a year he had become the youngest manager. The company issued him with a coat that had 'Manager' written on it but many customers ignored Ray and would ask one of his white staff if they could speak to the manager. They did not seem to think that a dual heritage person like Ray could be in charge. Over the years, Ray faced racist name-calling but he tended to ignore it. His philosophy in life, he says, is to have no fear and that a positive attitude will achieve positive results.

After three years of working in business, Ray decided that he would rather study business than law. He achieved his business and human resources qualifications from Stockport College of Technology and Manchester Polytechnic and a further postgraduate degree in Business Administration from Liverpool Business School. Ray believes he actually gained most of his business experience running a market stall in Liverpool. He had to interact with people and work long hours in the freezing cold, which strengthened his people skills, perseverance and discipline.

After university, Ray became the Director of the Toxteth Activities Group, a community-based organisation in Liverpool. Toxteth is a multicultural, deprived area, which was the scene of riots in July 1981. The riots were incited in part by tensions between the local police and the Black community. Ray spent seven years in Toxteth helping people from mainly Black and minority ethnic communities.

On the basis of this experience, Ray was appointed as the first Director of the Positive Action Consortium in Bristol in 1992. This organisation was set up to open up opportunities for disadvantaged people, especially those from Black and minority ethnic groups, in the areas of employment, training and education. Ray built up the organisation and gave it the name it is now known by, the Centre for Employment and Enterprise Development (CEED). This is one of his proudest achievements because so many people have benefited from the training they receive there. The organisation was so successful that it expanded from two small rooms in the Coach House, St. Paul's to two large buildings in Wilder Street, St. Paul's.

When Ray first arrived in Bristol in 1992, he noticed that it was difficult to find a place to stay or a central place for African people to meet. He therefore helped to set up the South West African-Caribbean Council (SWACC). As well as offering support and advice, SWACC gave awards to families and businesses which deserved recognition each year. The award ceremony was held at the Malcolm X Centre.

The organisation brought people closer together and gave Ray a greater insight into the needs of the community. This motivated him to become a councillor for Bristol City Council for the period 1995 – 2000. He was the only Black councillor at the time and did his best to benefit people in Bristol, in particular Black and minority ethnic people. He sat on the Education Committee, Race Advisory Committee and other committees.

After leaving CEED in 2002, Ray became Director of the Bow Development Trust in London for three years. This was set up to regenerate one of the most deprived areas of the country. Currently Ray is the owner of Kalabash, the first West African restaurant in Stokes Croft. They serve African food and drink and promote African culture. On Fridays and Saturdays they have a DJ and they also hold events to raise money for projects in Africa. Ray spends some of his time filming and playing music for weddings, which he finds exciting and relaxing. He also does some business supplying equipment to Nigeria to develop the roads over there.

Ray's achievements in business and community-based work were recognised in a book called Remember Me – Achievements of Mixed Race People, Past and Present. The book features famous people like Shirley Bassey (singer), Cathy Tyson (actress) and Oona King (politician).

Ray's message is: **“Respect your parents and teachers. Be determined, persevere and believe you can achieve what you set your mind to. Set a goal and aim for the top; even if you don't get to the top at least you will be half way there. Remember that life is precious. Forget about guns and gangs and aim for a good profession. Hopefully then you will have a good life”.**