

Ray Lewis Biography

Ray Lewis is a family man with three grown up daughters, they are his passion and primary concern. However his wife claims that 'he was born for the world and to make a difference'. Even before their marriage in 1984, Ray was heavily involved in his community and especially young people with whom he has an amazing rapport. He is able to go into the most trying circumstances and communicate hope.

In 1990 Ray was ordained at St Paul's Cathedral. At the age of 24 Ray was one of a very small number of black clergy ordained in the Church of England. During his curacy at St Mary Magdalene, Islington, he set up the Sojourner Truth Saturday School.

In 1993 Ray became vicar of St Matthew's, West Ham, and his ability to communicate with young and old alike facilitated a growing multicultural congregation. He was a founder member of The East London Communities Organisation a coalition of faith communities and community groups that work together on social issues.

In 1995, following the death of a local teenager through drug misuse, Ray set up the Phoenix Project for teenagers with drug problems. Later in '95 he set up an out of school club that enabled lone parents to go back to work or training and provided employment and volunteer opportunities for local people.

In 2000 Ray was employed as a prison governor, one of a tiny minority of black governors in the country. It was during this period Ray saw all too clearly the relationship between school exclusions and the criminal justice system. He was very concerned at the disproportionate numbers of black youths, often very talented, who were being incarcerated. In light of this he sought, in his words, to 'pitch his first aid tent at the top of the cliff rather than the bottom.'

In 2002 Ray set up the Eastside Young Leaders' Academy, an educational project with a strong mentoring component. Based in the London Borough of Newham, Eastside works with African Caribbean boys at risk of exclusion to fully develop their potential.

Eastside is not an alternative school programme; it works alongside schools and head teachers. The Academy provides a rigorous programme of supplemental academic provision, leadership skills, community service, mentoring and parental support. The Academy works with black boys from 8 through to 18 and seeks to reverse some of the negative trends disproportionately affecting them and further to "develop the next generation of civic, corporate, educational, entrepreneurial, political and spiritual leaders".

Eastside is the first such organisation in the UK and during its short life (November 2002) it has witnessed profound change and growth amongst the 80+ boys and families it currently serves. It has since given birth to two new Young Leaders' Academies in Southwark and Luton.

Eastside combines innovative teaching techniques supported by role models from the business community who help raise aspirations. Ray and his team help set clear boundaries, remove barriers to learning and provide consistent motivation to help boys stay on track. This together with an intimate relationship with parents/carers has created a village/community. Eastside is that village and Ray one of the elders.

Through this groundbreaking initiative Eastside has attracted visits from the great and the good from all over the UK, media, MPs, social workers and other interested parties. In 2003 EYLA received the Bernie Grant Civic Award and in 2006 Ray was nominated for the Great Britons Award. In 2007 Ray was named as one of London's 1000 most influential people by the Evening Standard. Later on that year Eastside won the Guardian Charity Award. See link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/jan/30/raylewis.interview>