

# RAY LEWIS CBE

1963 – 2024

## BLACK CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER

### A Black youth leader who sent hundreds of disadvantaged young children to elite public schools in an attempt to address racial inequality has died at the age of 61.

Ray Lewis was founder and CEO of the Eastside Young Leaders' Academy (EYLA), an organisation established in 2002 for Black boys at risk of school exclusion.

A former prison service manager of a young offenders' institute, Lewis recognised the disproportionate number of Black boys outside education and incarcerated. He went on to design a leadership training curriculum to help them stay in school and flourish in the workplace.

Lewis once said: "For too long, Black people have had to wait to receive crumbs from the Master's table. I want to support a generation to believe they can sit at that table."

Part of Lewis's plan to achieve equality involved securing private school scholarships for his Black Saturday school students living in Newham, east London, and over 270 went on to attend the likes of Eton, Rugby and Stowe.

Many went on to secure well-paid jobs in a range of professions including government and law. More recently, three former Rugby School pupils and one who attended Wellington College returned to EYLA to sit on its board. One is now chair of trustees.

Lewis's bold approach to levelling up attracted the attention of senior politicians and in 2008 the then Mayor of London Boris Johnson asked him to serve as a senior advisor on mentoring and youth crime.

More recently Lewis's work was immortalised in the BBC3 series *Boarders* – a comedy confronting privilege and tokenism through the eyes of five Black students who are sent to an elite private school. The writer Daniel Lawrence Taylor revealed he based the drama on Lewis's work at EYLA after reading about in a national newspaper.

Lewis was born in Guyana and emigrated to London aged one with his family. He met his wife Pam, in London, and they raised a family comprising three daughters and more recently two grandchildren.

Lewis's daughter Chloe said: "Ray, our dad, was a force of nature. This was as true of him as a father and husband, as much as it was in his professional life. He instilled in us all the importance of living a genuinely purpose driven

life, and his work ethic was matched only by his sense of humour. He leaves behind a huge legacy, and a hole in our lives and those of hundreds of others."

EYLA has become a model of excellence and continues to transform the lives of boys and girls growing up in adversity. Lewis extended its reach across London and further afield to Milton Keynes, Leicester and Nottingham.

EYLA's co-founder Anne Collard and head of programmes Carol Murraine said: "Ray was not just the founder of EYLA, he was a friend and father figure to many and will be deeply missed. His legacy and light will live on through his family and the young leaders who he inspired and challenged to be the best that they can be. We will now look to them to lead us forward."

Ric Lewis, Executive Chairman and Co-Chief Investment Officer of Tristan Capital Partners and founder of The Black Heart Foundation, became a patron of EYLA in 2007. He said: "Almost from the first days I arrived to live in England 25 years ago, Ray Lewis joined me, partnered with me and taught me how to lead with grace, import and impact as we jointly sought to make a difference in the inspiration and aspiration of the disenfranchised young people throughout our country. I regard him as a mentor and a brother. The Black Heart Foundation wouldn't serve as it does today without Ray's guidance, input and governance. There are few words that can properly quantify the enormity of Ray's impact on so very many of us and the immensity of the loss to our community as we chart our pathway forward without him."

Patrick Derham, a former headmaster of Rugby and Westminster School, added: "Meeting Ray changed my life. He was a visionary who helped so many young people believe in themselves and to be agents of change in their communities and beyond. His legacy will live on."

