

“Until Lasting Peace”

Diaspora Women Building Peace Where They Are

CASE STUDY: BRITAIN

Sustain Black Women, Sustain the Fight: The Impact of Black Women’s Leadership in Resisting Racial Injustice and Criminal Legal System Harm in Britain—on Health and Visions for Healing

This case study is part of the “Until Lasting Peace”: *Diaspora Women Building Peace Where They Are* report created by the Women PeaceMakers program.

“Until Lasting Peace”

In an era defined by human mobility and multiple, mutually reinforcing crises, diaspora communities have emerged as vital actors in shaping peace and social cohesion—far beyond the traditional boundaries of conflict zones or homeland politics. Yet, the contributions of women within these transnational networks remain obscured by disciplinary silos and policy frameworks that too often address peacebuilding, migration and gender in isolation. The “Until Lasting Peace”: *Diaspora Women Building Peace Where They Are* report begins from the conviction that understanding diaspora women’s peace work demands an integrated lens—one that traces the trajectories of diverse migration waves, centers gendered experiences, and bridges the worlds of international law, community activism and feminist care.

At the heart of this inquiry lies the question of how existing international frameworks—embodied, among others, in the Women, Peace and Security agenda, global migration agreements and human rights treaties—create (or fail to create) an enabling environment for diaspora women to be recognized and well supported agents of peace. This research interrogates how international instruments recognize (or omit) the capacity, participation, leadership, resources and belonging of diaspora women.

This report was co-created by the three 2024-2025 Women PeaceMaker Fellows — Bochra Laghssais from Morocco and living in the Netherlands, Mariia Levchenko from Ukraine and living in Germany and Temi Mwale from the United Kingdom — and was supported by leaders in the peacebuilding field, who provided their own expertise and perspectives to shape this work. By bringing together insights from generational legacies, long-standing communities and emergent diaspora networks, this report offers a multidimensional analysis that transcends geography and history. This report seeks to chart a path toward policies and practices that not only acknowledge diaspora women’s agency but actively support their leadership in forging just and lasting peace across borders.

Since 2002, the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (Kroc IPJ) at the University of San Diego’s Kroc School has hosted the Women PeaceMakers Fellowship program. The Fellowship offers a unique opportunity for peacebuilders who focus on issues of gender, peace and conflict to engage in a cycle of learning, practice, research and participation that strengthens peacebuilding partnerships. The Women PeaceMakers Fellowship facilitates impactful collaborations between peacebuilders from conflict-affected communities and international partner organizations. The Fellows also co-create research intended to shape the peacebuilding field and highlight good practices for peacebuilding design and implementation.



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Case study Britain

Sustain Black Women, Sustain the Fight: The Impact of Black Women’s Leadership in Resisting Racial Injustice and Criminal Legal System Harm in Britain—on Health and Visions for Healing

By Temi Mwale



CASE STUDY

Context^a

This case study explores the experiences and visions of Black women in Britain¹ leading the fight against racial injustice and criminal legal system harm. It examines how we protect and heal our communities amid systemic violence, racism and state neglect. Our work is emotional, physical, mental and spiritual labor — yet too often we are met with a lack of care. This research offers insight into how our leadership can be recognized, resourced and sustained, affirming that we cannot carry this work without infrastructures that protect our wellbeing. Positioned within global traditions of Black resistance and diasporic solidarity, it honors Black women’s everyday peacebuilding. For us, peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice, safety and collective flourishing. This work is for those who have held too much for too long — for our elders, our youth, the women who came before us and the ones yet to come. Our healing matters: not only so we can keep doing the work, but because we deserve to be well and to be whole.

The Black community in Britain is a diverse diasporic constellation, rooted in centuries of history entangled with the violence of the British empire. We are African, Caribbean and of mixed heritage — spanning generations shaped by migration, survival and resistance. As of 2021, around 3.17 million people in England and Wales — about 5.3 percent of the population — identify as Black or of mixed Black heritage.² Against the odds, we have built lives, families, communities and futures. Peacebuilding in Black communities cannot be understood without naming the systemic harms we endure. Racism in Britain is not history; it is embedded in housing, education, healthcare, employment and the criminal legal system.³ These harms reflect how state power devalues Black life, denying safety, justice and dignity. Nowhere is this more acute than in the criminal legal system,⁴ where Black people face disproportionate harm at every stage.⁵ Racism also takes a profound toll on Black health⁶ — socially, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Chronic exposure to trauma,⁷ injustice and systemic neglect contributes to widespread anxiety, depression, PTSD, hypertension and long-term illness.⁸ Yet when Black people seek care, we are often pathologized,⁹ misdiagnosed or dismissed, and health services fail to meet our cultural and emotional needs.¹⁰ Health inequity is not a byproduct of racism — it is one of its primary mechanisms. In the face of systemic failure, Black communities have always organized to resist harm and build care to meet our own needs.¹¹ Across the country, Black-led initiatives confront racialized criminalization,¹² demand accountability and build community safety. But this resistance carries a cost: for those of us on the frontlines, the labor of holding our people through state violence and constant grief often leads to burnout and long-term harm.¹³

a Literature review support from Holly Burton.

Black women in Britain live at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression. We experience racism compounded by misogyny, classism, ableism and other forms of marginalization. The compounded stress of navigating these oppressions is rarely recognized in mainstream support systems¹⁴ or mental health frameworks.¹⁵ We face distinct and often overlooked health disparities. Conditions such as fibroids,¹⁶ lupus¹⁷ and certain cancers disproportionately affect us yet remain poorly researched and inadequately treated.¹⁸ Systemic racism in healthcare leads to misdiagnoses, neglect and delayed care — shaped by harmful stereotypes. The “strong Black woman” trope — rooted in childhood as the “strong Black girl”¹⁹ — enables this neglect, forcing us to suppress vulnerability and hindering our ability to seek support²⁰ or express emotional needs.²¹ Black women in Britain experience hypervisibility and invisibility at once.²² Those at the forefront of community organizing and peacebuilding face significant health impacts with little tailored support. We have been central to resisting criminalization and building community-led responses envisioning care beyond the carceral state,²³ yet this work — often outside formal systems — is rarely recognized or resourced. Activist spaces, too, are not immune to harm: racial and gender discrimination persist within movements.²⁴ Constant engagement with trauma and the burden of responsibility²⁵ heighten the risk of secondary trauma²⁶ and burnout. For decades, Black women have built infrastructures of collective care.²⁷ Since the 1970s, Black women’s organizations have created spaces for healing, education, health advocacy and political mobilization.²⁸ Yet our contributions to public health²⁹ and social justice³⁰ remain under-documented.³¹ This erasure is ongoing and deeply political. As Adele Jones and Diana Watt write, “When Black women are rendered invisible in accounts of social life in which they were not only present but made significant contribution, this is the literary equivalent of wielding a slave-master’s whip to subjugate and silence.”³² Despite attempts to erase us, we have always documented ourselves.³³ Greater recognition³⁴ and investment are urgently needed to ensure our work and experiences are centered, not sidelined.

Methodology

This research is grounded in Black feminist, decolonial and participatory methodologies, drawing on abolitionist thought, critical criminology and Black studies — traditions that root theory in lived experience, and frame survival, care, refusal and resistance as political practice.³⁵ It affirms that knowledge must be created with and for communities, positioning research as a tool for liberation, reflection and repair within a broader lineage of struggle.

The work was guided by three interrelated core questions:

- What unique experiences and challenges do Black women in Britain face while leading peacebuilding work focused on racial injustice in the criminal legal system?
- How does this work impact their health and wellbeing?
- What has sustained them in this work, and, in light of its impacts, what do they need to heal and continue?

I write as both researcher and contributor — a Black woman community organizer from a criminalized community, whose work has been forged through fifteen years of responding to racialized harm and building healing-centered justice. My lived experience is not a limitation to this research but its grounding, depth and integrity. This is not an external study of justice work but a reflection from within it. The women in this project are my sisters and co-organizers, connected through long-standing relationships — spanning three to ten years — with me and with one another, shaped by shared histories of resistance, care and community-building. These relationships are a core strength, grounding the study in trust, accountability, vulnerability and shared purpose. My work and my life are inseparable from the story this research tells.



This research was shaped with twenty Black women in Britain, including myself, who work to address racialized harm in the criminal legal system. Together we engaged through two community conversations, sixteen one-to-one dialogues and a collective validation gathering. We are organizers, healers, community builders, lawyers, educators, campaigners, founders, producers, curators and artists — Black women on the frontlines of transformative change. We confront state and structural violence while building the care, healing and safety infrastructures our communities need to survive and thrive. Our work spans housing estates, schools, protests, galleries, police stations, universities, courtrooms, hospitals, prisons, policy spaces, detention centres and media platforms. Across these spaces, we organize resistance, offer care, shape public narratives and challenge systems from the streets to the state. Ranging in age from our 20s to 60s, with roots across Britain, our leadership is grounded in shared struggle and unwavering commitment. This work is not abstract for us; it is personal, embodied and continuous: the labor of love, grief, resistance and imagination. This research centered Black women as co-researchers, not subjects, affirming that those most impacted by systemic injustice hold essential knowledge for shaping solutions.³⁶ Storytelling was used as both method and medicine, prioritizing care, trust and collective meaning-making. Contributors shaped the analysis and recommendations to ensure the research remained grounded in lived realities and aligned with our collective priorities.³⁷ This research had limitations of time and scale. Conducted over a short period, many contributors described the conversations as powerful and therapeutic yet wished for more space to share their stories in depth. The study focused on women who self-identified — or were identified by peers — as engaged in work addressing racialized criminal legal system harm, but it does not capture the full spectrum of Black women whose daily lives resist criminalization in informal or undocumented ways. While the participants reflected diverse experiences across age, profession, spirituality and organizing contexts, the study is not exhaustive. Voices of young Black women under 25, gender-expansive people, incarcerated women, undocumented migrants and more regions across Britain were not represented but would have further enriched the findings. As with all qualitative work, these insights are situated, not generalizable. Yet the themes that emerged reveal enduring patterns in Black women's lives — of harm, resistance, healing, and leadership — and a collective refusal to abandon our communities in the face of systemic violence.

Black British Women Shaping Peace and Justice in the Diaspora

Conceptualizing the Diaspora's Role in Peacebuilding

We, the Black women who shaped this study, reflect the diversity of the Black community in Britain: 30 percent of us are of Caribbean heritage, 25 percent African heritage, 25 percent mixed African and white heritage, 10 percent mixed Caribbean and white heritage, and 10 percent mixed Caribbean and African heritage. Like many Black women in Britain, we navigate an "insider/outsider" relationship to both "here" and "back there" — where "back there" is not always synonymous with home.³⁸ As Douglas suggests, "diaspora space" is a powerful lens for understanding how we organize to challenge inequities and build collective wellbeing.³⁹ Though we rarely used the term "diaspora" explicitly in our conversations, our lives and work embody diasporic consciousness: holding layered connections to African and Caribbean heritage, ancestral resistance and global Black struggles for justice. Many of us see ourselves as bridges: between generations, between nations and between visions of survival and transformation. Whilst some of us name our work as peacebuilding, others may not use those terms but are deeply engaged in practices that challenge state violence and sustain our communities. For many of us who define our work as justice work, the movement phrase "no justice, no peace" deeply resonated. One contributor named it perfectly:

"The work that we do, we automatically always call it racial justice work, although it's way more than that, it's way more intersectional than that, right? But actually, peace is inserted right before it in a silent way, you know, like you've got the letter K in front of knowledge... I feel peace is like that letter K, you know?... absolutely you can't remove it. It is silent, but it's essential."⁴⁰

Our work is building peace — not the "peace" of state-sanctioned order, but a daily practice of refusing violence and creating the conditions for Black communities to live, heal, thrive and be free. We confront criminal legal system harm at every point of its violence, while simultaneously constructing infrastructures of care that the state refuses to build. Across communal, legal, political, cultural, educational and spiritual terrains, we organize and build community-led systems of safety and wellbeing. What follows offers only a glimpse of this work — a testament to the breadth, brilliance and necessity of Black women's leadership in redefining peace and justice on our terms. Documenting this legacy remains an ongoing, vital task.

Resisting State Violence and Building Community Justice

To address the immediate harms of institutionally racist policing,⁴¹ we have built crisis support services that hold young people, families and communities through police contact, offering emotional care, legal advice and sustained advocacy. We have empowered those whose rights were violated to pursue complaints and legal action, while driving public accountability by challenging the disproportionate stop and search,⁴² launching campaigns against degrading strip searches — where Black children⁴³ are over six times more likely to be targeted⁴⁴ — and resisting the criminalization of education⁴⁵ by opposing school exclusions and police presence in schools.⁴⁶ We have challenged racialized “gang” policing⁴⁷ through legal action that exposed the human rights violations of gang databases and the devastating consequences of gang labelling on housing, education, and social life.⁴⁸ This collective work ultimately led to the abolition of the Metropolitan Police’s Gangs Violence Matrix.⁴⁹ In courtrooms, we have provided emotional support to families, acted as character witnesses, and challenged harmful narratives that dehumanize defendants. We have contributed to fairer outcomes by foregrounding racial trauma in defense strategies and exposing the criminalization of Black vernacular within language justice campaigns. Our work has highlighted how racism shapes prosecution and sentencing, including the racist origins of majority verdicts.⁵⁰ We have relentlessly challenged joint enterprise and conspiracy laws that criminalize Black youth through association,⁵¹ using direct family support, research and campaigns to expose the injustices of collective punishment and advocate for care over incarceration.

In prisons — where Black children⁵² and adults⁵³ are disproportionately incarcerated — we have offered emotional, legal and spiritual care, exposing degrading conditions and advocating for recognition of the profound impact of parental imprisonment on children. Our support extends beyond the prison walls: we accompany people returning home, offering emotional and financial assistance and developing tailored programmes for Black men on probation to resist the neglect that defines post-custodial supervision. We have directly supported individuals facing deportation, challenged immigration policies that criminalize migration and campaigned to stop families being torn apart. We have sustained family justice campaigns after fatal state violence that disproportionately impacts Black people,⁵⁴ accompanying bereaved relatives through inquests, civil proceedings and public inquiries. These campaigns demand accountability for institutional killings and create spaces for grief, remembrance and collective care. We have also challenged the criminalization of mental illness,⁵⁵ campaigning against the use of policing to respond to mental health crises, given the fatal consequences this continues to have for our communities.⁵⁶

Where the state has failed to provide care, we have built it ourselves. We established the UK’s first Community Justice Centre,⁵⁷ a holistic space supporting young people to navigate violence, criminalization and systemic neglect. Across our communities, we have created infrastructures of healing, advocacy and collective safety. Education remains central to this work: we teach legal rights, campaign strategy and leadership to those most impacted, while forming coalitions that coordinate resistance across the full spectrum of criminal legal system harm. We have documented our histories through exhibitions, books and public events to ensure our narratives remain visible and protected. Projects such as *War in a Babylon*⁵⁸ have archived the long history of racial injustice and curated spaces for intergenerational dialogue, connecting young people with elders to trace continuities of resistance from past to present. Our work extends into schools, prisons and universities through research, curricula and cultural production that embed community-led perspectives on justice and healing. We have raised millions to fund resistance and build lasting community infrastructure. Our advocacy has brought local issues to national and international recognition, shifting public narratives and shaping political debate. Through sustained organizing, we have engaged policymakers from local councils to Parliament, influencing legislation and reform. We have led mass protests and intimate memorials alike, mobilizing thousands in defense of life and dignity while holding sacred space for grief and remembrance.

The role of Black women in Britain’s diaspora is not only to resist but to reimagine: to hold space for grief, dreaming, recovery and justice.



For the Black women who shaped this study, this work extends beyond confronting racialized criminal legal system harm — it is about sustaining Black life, culture and legacy through art, education, community-building and the creation of spaces where our people can breathe, heal and thrive. For us, peacebuilding is expansive, radical and spiritual. It means building infrastructure, healing from trauma, redistributing resources, resisting state violence and practicing joy, creativity and care. As one contributor said, “[p]articularly Black women, because of our ancestors, we can’t insult them by doing nothing when we are free.”⁵⁹ What unites this work is not a single tactic or title but a shared refusal to accept the violence of the current system — and a commitment to building new structures of safety, care and justice beyond it. The role of Black women in Britain’s diaspora is not only to resist but to reimagine: to hold space for grief, for dreaming, for recovery and for justice, often all at once. We understand peace as both daily struggle and ancestral inheritance, passed down from the freedom fighters who came before us.

Origins of the Work: Care as Longing and Legacy

For Black women leading justice work, activism is rarely a choice — it is a calling.⁶⁰ Our paths are rooted in personal loss, systemic violence and a deep responsibility to our communities — a compulsion to serve⁶¹ that many described as spiritual: “[m]any are called, but few are chosen. So we’re all chosen. That’s why we’re here.”⁶² Some of us were “thrust into activism”⁶³ after the police killed our own family members;⁶⁴ others became politically engaged as children, by the police killings of Mark Duggan, Rashan Charles and Edson da Costa.⁶⁵ Grief was a catalyst: the murder of friends,⁶⁶ the incarceration of loved ones⁶⁷ and the cumulative losses within our communities. Many traced the origins of our work to the racism we witnessed in families,⁶⁸ schools⁶⁹ and public institutions: the stark difference in how Black and white parents were treated,⁷⁰ the relentless targeting of our own family members by police.⁷¹ For some, activism was shaped by a sense of duty instilled from childhood, raised in homes where care for one another was a given.⁷² Others were inspired by family members who were community organizers⁷³ or began as teenagers, responding not to career paths but to injustice unfolding before our eyes. These stories show that our activism is not separate from our lives; it is born from our survival, emerging from the conditions that shaped us.

Another shared theme is the absence of care in our own lives, particularly during Black girlhood.⁷⁴ The pain of being unsupported, unseen or unsafe becomes a catalyst. Activism becomes both a response to external harm and a personal attempt to build what we did not have: safety, protection and care. Yet, in striving to meet our communities’ needs, we often neglect our own. The same systems that failed us in childhood⁷⁵ echo through our organising spaces — overwork, invisibility, guilt and doubt about our worthiness of rest or love. This cycle is not merely burnout; it is the re-enactment of the very harms we seek to dismantle. Recognizing these emotional origins is essential. When we name and heal them, we create movements rooted not only in survival but in reciprocity, care and wholeness.

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The Impact of Leading for Black Women

This research reveals the profound toll of Black women's peacebuilding and justice work. The women in this study described how leading this work has transformed them, offering deep emotional and spiritual growth, but the personal costs are unquantifiable. This section shares key findings on the emotional, physical, material, spiritual and structural tolls Black women face in resisting racial injustice and criminal legal system harm. These are not individual struggles or personal shortcomings, but systemic patterns of extraction, rooted in the absence of care infrastructures across movements, workplaces and society.

The Toll on Our Whole Selves: Health, Wealth, Spirit and Time

For Black women, the toll of this work is carried in our whole selves: our mental, physical and spiritual health; our relationships; our finances; and our sense of time. Many described chronic exhaustion and severe mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression and, at times, suicidal ideation. The "relentless"⁷⁶ exposure to harm and repeated trauma leaves deep scars. As one contributor shared:

"The reason why I keep doing this [is] because the deaths keep happening, as my sister just said, they're continuous. So you're continuously bereaved, over and over and over again and re-traumatized. It's not post-traumatic stress, it's continuous traumatic stress disorder."⁷⁷

Another described experiencing "survivor's guilt."⁷⁸ For many, neurodivergence compounded these challenges, intensifying barriers to wellbeing. The strain also manifests physically: contributors linked their advocacy to serious diagnoses, including cancer, fibroids and autoimmune conditions. Some described feeling unable to take time off when sick, because of the responsibilities they were carrying.⁷⁹ Many expressed fear — describing it as "scary"⁸⁰ and "frightening"⁸¹ — that this work is shortening their lives. As one said, "[It's] affecting our long-term health... I think if I stopped [this work] today and did nothing else... I feel my life has already been shortened."⁸²

Our personal relationships also bear the weight of this work. Time with children, partners, family and friends is often eroded, leading to disconnection and guilt. Many of us shared how loved ones struggle to grasp the depth of our commitment or the emotional toll of this work, resulting in feelings of neglect, alienation, loneliness and longing for intimacy, to be truly seen and held. Financial precarity is another persistent strain.⁸³ For some, activism is part of paid employment, yet boundaries blur, and compensation rarely reflects the depth of labor. For others, whose organizing lies outside formal work, insecurity is constant. Some limited their formal work hours or left paid roles to meet the demands of justice work; others were excluded from opportunities because of their activism. Many fear the future — lacking financial safety or retirement security — especially given the health vulnerabilities already described. There is also the toll on time and being: the loss of rest, joy, creativity and the ability to simply be. One contributor said, "my time was no longer my time;"⁸⁴ another shared, "I feel like this work is part of who I am, but it also sacrifices part of me somehow."⁸⁵ Many mourn their "younger selves,"⁸⁶ forced to grow up too quickly under the weight of responsibility and resistance as teenagers, sharing "too much"⁸⁷ of themselves. The resulting burnout is the cumulative toll of carrying state harms: a systemic extraction of our health, time, peace and being.

Blurred Boundaries Between Work and Life

One of the most pervasive challenges in this work is the absence of boundaries between activism and daily life. As one contributor shared, "It just seeped into my personal life. And then it became my personal life."⁸⁸ For many of us, peacebuilding is not a role we step into; it is inseparable from our identity, making it difficult to say no or step back. Homes and relationships become sites of advocacy, as we are constantly called to navigate harmful systems — schools, social services, healthcare and the criminal legal system — on behalf of loved ones and communities. The proximity to state violence means the work is never truly "off-duty" and attempts to rest often bring "guilt" or "stress" rather than relief.⁸⁹ This blurring of lines is not a personal failure, but a structural reality born of systemic neglect and institutional abandonment.



The Weight of Disproportionate Responsibility

Across our conversations, a shared theme emerged around the immense emotional labour carried by Black women in justice work and the feeling of responsibility for outcomes far beyond our control. When change does not come, failure is often internalized — not as structural resistance, but as personal inadequacy. As one contributor shared, “I kind of feel a personal duty. And if there’s a failure, it kind of feels very personalized.”⁹⁰ Many traced this pattern to childhood, where early caregiving — often without being cared for — instilled over-responsibility. In justice work, this becomes amplified: the scale of harm is vast, and the demand to “hold it all” and be able to “handle it”⁹¹ feels unrelenting. This is not a personal flaw but a systemic dynamic. Institutions rely on Black women to carry the grief, rage and labor of justice work while denying the care structures needed to sustain us. The result is a continuous cycle of responsibility without support, forced to bear harms we did not create and blamed for change we are prevented from achieving.

Threats to Safety and the Cost of Visibility

For Black women leading peace and justice work, the threat of violence is not theoretical; it is constant. Misogynoir, the convergence of anti-Black racism and misogyny,⁹² makes our leadership a target. In legal spaces, Black women who challenge injustice are often policed by the very systems they seek to transform. For those working as lawyers, advocates or campaigners, the surveillance we resist in our communities is mirrored inside courtrooms and institutions. Our refusal to conform — to dilute our message or align with institutional expectations — invites scrutiny. We are penalized by systems and society alike for doing things differently, for embodying a radical imagination that refuses to “get in line.”

This surveillance is not abstract. It appears as racist complaints to regulators, targeted judicial scrutiny and reputational policing designed to silence and control. Visibility becomes dangerous, not because of what we do, but because of how society and the state respond to us doing it. Across this research, contributors described the constant fear of being surveilled, harassed, attacked or vilified. Many, including myself, have been followed, doxxed, and directly threatened, including receiving death threats. These are not isolated incidents but reflections of a structural dynamic that punishes Black women’s leadership with heightened risk. The psychological toll of hypervigilance is immense; it shapes where we go, how we show up and whether we feel safe enough to lead. Most efforts to protect ourselves are managed in isolation, with support often coming only from other Black women. This is not an acceptable “cost” of the work. It is structural violence, sustained by institutional neglect and societal complicity, demanding not rhetoric but real protection and accountability.

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Structural Absence of Care Infrastructure

A core finding of this research is the absence of formal infrastructure to support the wellbeing of Black women peacebuilders. Though we serve as the emotional and spiritual anchors of movements for racial justice, there are no reciprocal systems to hold us. Many spoke of feeling neglected and unseen. As one contributor shared, “Another cost is carrying the disappointment of wanting to be supported and wanting to be cared for, and there’s just an abyss, even when you reach out... it’s not for lack of asking for help.”⁹³ This absence of dedicated spaces, resources and care structures is not an oversight — it is a structural failure that sustains cycles of harm and burnout.

Sustainability Strategies

Despite the toll of justice work, Black women continue to lead, love and imagine. This research revealed everyday practices — rooted in care, connection and collective wisdom — that sustain us. Many of us are anchored by spirituality: God, the universe, faith and our ancestors offer grounding in grief and clarity in doubt. A sense of calling, of being part of something greater than ourselves, guides and replenishes us. As contributors shared, “God, first and foremost. My ancestors, family, culture, community... that sustains me”⁹⁴ and “[h]ope that tomorrow will be different... that belief and that longing for that difference sustains me.”⁹⁵ Relationships are at the heart of our survival. While movement spaces can offer solidarity and sisterhood, many also draw strength from family, partners, close friends, mentors and leaders walking parallel paths. Being deeply loved — romantically or platonically — was described as vital. Feeling safe, affirmed and supported beyond our public roles reminds us that we are more than what we do. Sisterhood with Black women in particular was described as sacred, a space of restoration. “Belly laughter,” “leaving a space uplifted,” and “feeling joy in the company of people who truly see me” were named as healing acts. Joy is not separate from resistance; as one contributor said, “joy is a human right... there has to be joy.”⁹⁶ Cooking together, dancing, talking into the night and holding space for one another’s vulnerability were described not as luxuries, but as necessities. Creativity, culture and intergenerational connection also sustain us. Poetry, art, storytelling and music — reggae, gospel, RnB — connect us to memory and possibility, helping us metabolize grief and imagine freedom. The younger generation — our children, nieces, nephews and students — offer hope and accountability. As one woman reflected, “The babies and the children who are growing up in this world. And I think about my younger self and my inner child, who wished that there were more adults holding me doing this work, showing me how to do this work. And that’s definitely what keeps me in it.”⁹⁷ Nature, movement and rest were consistently named as non-negotiable. Time in the sun, walks, plants, exercise, yoga and retreats help us return to our bodies. Rest was not seen as a reward, but a radical practice of refusal in a world that expects our endless labour. We are not sustained by institutions, but by each other — by love, faith, culture and the spaces we carve to breathe, heal and be well.

To be witnessed, remembered and valued not just for what we produce, but for who we are and how we hold and love our people. These visions are not abstract. They already exist — in memory, practice and possibility. What we need now is to be resourced to live them fully, with dignity, care and trust.



Visions for Healing and Sustainability

At the heart of this work is the belief that Black women's rest, dreaming, creativity and healing must be possible — and that our communities must be shaped to hold that possibility. Our visions for Black women's freedom and our visions for community care are one and the same: communities rooted in justice, protection and deep value for Black life. These visions already live in the spaces we create, the healing we nurture and the joy we insist on. This is not only labor — it is legacy.

Across this research, a shared vision emerged for what it means not just to survive the work, but to feel held within it. We need rest — not as a reward, but as an essential practice. We dream of stepping away without guilt or collapse, trusting we are held in our absence. We need financial resources that trust us to know what we need — therapy, rent, retreat or joy. We do not seek project-based funding, but investment in our full, complex selves, allowing us to live and lead without extraction or pure sacrifice.

We need space together as Black women — to connect in ways that are light, joyful and grounding, to laugh, eat, dance and simply be. We need intergenerational bonds that root and stretch us: spaces to learn from elders, pour into youth and be witnessed as whole people. We need these spaces not only as leaders or activists, but as women with stories, softness and needs. Many of us are driven by what we lacked, yet our work often replicates that same absence. We need time and space to heal — from what brought us here and from what we continue to carry. We need deep care, genuine support and recognition — not tokenistic praise, but grounded acknowledgment of our labor and leadership. To be witnessed, remembered and valued not just for what we produce, but for who we are and how we hold and love our people. These visions are not abstract. They already exist — in memory, practice and possibility. What we need now is to be resourced to live them fully, with dignity, care and trust.

Recommendations

These recommendations focus on resourcing what is already alive — what Black women have long been nurturing, defending and reimagining. They honor the brilliance and resilience embedded in existing community work while calling for bold, intentional infrastructure to sustain Black women's leadership, labor and lives. This is not only about ensuring the continuity of justice work, but about anchoring it in systems of care that match the depth of our commitment. To support Black women is to secure the future of collective liberation. The following recommendations, grounded in this research, outline practical steps to sustain the peacebuilding work of Black women in Britain's diaspora.

For Funders and Philanthropic Institutions:

- **Fund Black women holistically:** Provide unrestricted funding that honors the full humanity of Black women leaders. Resource rest, therapy, housing, spiritual healing, and creative exploration — without conditions.
- **Invest in long-term security:** Support financial security beyond active organizing. Fund pensions, healthcare and savings for Black women who have carried frontline work for decades, often without safety nets. No one should age into precarity after a lifetime of service.
- **Prioritize the care and development of Black girls:** Fund initiatives that provide tailored, culturally grounded care and long-term support for Black girls. Invest in programmes that nurture their leadership, wellbeing, creativity and safety and that are rooted in joy, healing and community.
- **Commit to trust-based, long-term investment:** Move beyond short-term, project-based funding. Provide eight-to-ten-year unrestricted grants to Black-led initiatives rooted in healing, justice and community power.
- **Resource community-led healing infrastructure:** Fund the creation and sustainability of healing infrastructure envisioned by Black women, including physical spaces, networks and systems that support organizing, care, creativity and leadership. Resource what already exists and what is still being dreamed into being.
- **Resource intergenerational and cultural legacy work:** Fund programmes that preserve ancestral wisdom and pass on intergenerational knowledge. Resource storytelling, archiving and cultural work as essential strategies of resistance, repair and remembrance.
- **Redefine impact to include care, joy and restoration:** Transform funding models to recognise emotional wellbeing, collective joy, relational trust and restored dignity as core outcomes, not just deliverables. Fund what sustains life, not just what produces outputs.

For Government and Policy Institutions:

- **Acknowledge harm and tackle systemic racism:** Formally recognize the racial injustice, violence and trauma inflicted by the criminal legal system — as well as the compounding impact of misogynoir across healthcare, education, housing and mental health. Commit to meaningful justice and repair through legislative reform, cross-sector accountability measures and sustained investment in solutions designed and led by Black women.
- **Make healing justice a public priority:** Recognize healing as critical to collective wellbeing. Fund and embed Black women-led healing work — including mental health, spiritual care and community repair — across public health, safety and justice strategies.
- **Center Black women in policy and power:** Black women must shape the policies that impact our lives. Move beyond tokenism. Ensure Black women are meaningfully represented in decision-making, policymaking and governance, from funding panels and public boards to local councils and Parliament. Resource our leadership, expertise and lived experience as vital to social transformation.
- **Protect, teach and resource Black women's legacy:** Preserve the cultural and political legacy of Black women through public investment in archives, oral histories, mentorship and cultural work. Embed our contributions to justice, health, education and liberation in national curricula and public institutions, ensuring our leadership is remembered, celebrated and passed on.

For Activist and Movement Ecosystems:

- **Center care as strategy:** Make care, rest, boundaries and joy foundational to organizing, not afterthoughts. Embed healing, therapy and spiritual practice into the fabric of movement work to resist urgency, extraction and burnout.
- **Share leadership and sustain each other:** Create collective structures where responsibility is shared, and people can step back and return without fear. Build rest cycles, timeshare models, peer support and care agreements that hold us through the work.
- **Confront harm within:** Ensure Black women are safe in our movements. Actively address misogynoir, anti-Blackness, colorism, texturism, ableism and queerphobia. Establish accountability rooted in care and justice.
- **Honor invisible and intergenerational labor:** Recognize the emotional, relational, cultural and spiritual labor that sustains movements. Create space for storytelling and cross-generational learning, ensuring that both elder wisdom and youth vision are honored.
- **Uplift without extraction:** Build platforms that affirm and elevate Black women's leadership without commodifying our pain or exploiting our stories. Celebrate us as full people, not only as producers of labor.
- **Build transnational networks for collective power:** Create and sustain alliances across borders, generations and contexts: spaces where Black women can heal, learn, strategize and organize together.

These recommendations are grounded in lived reality — not aspirational, but actionable. Black women are already leading, healing, building and holding. What is needed now is meaningful infrastructure, affirmation and investment that reflects the magnitude of our work. Without this, the toll of peacebuilding will continue to fall on those already stretched thin. But with sustained support, we lay the foundation for liberation that is not just imagined, but made real: collective, rooted and enduring.

Conclusion

This case study is not simply an account of Black women's peacebuilding; it is a tribute to our endurance, brilliance and unwavering commitment to justice. Our visions are not only about supporting Black communities; they are guides for how society itself can be restructured to benefit everyone. The recommendations that emerge here offer lessons far beyond our experiences, providing guidance for sustaining leaders and movements everywhere. This is an offering of recognition in a world that so often refuses to see us whole. What has surfaced through this research is not only evidence of harm, but a living archive of love, grief, power and possibility. We, Black women, are not peripheral to movements for change — we are the pulse. We carry ancestral knowledge and everyday wisdom. We build without blueprints, hold our communities through crisis and continue creating even when the cost is high. What we need is meaningful support: resourcing without conditions, rest without guilt and recognition that honours the fullness of our contributions. Listen to Black women not as case studies, but as strategists and leaders. The call is not only to witness, but to act — to repair, resource and reimagine. When Black women are supported to live, heal and lead fully, the whole world moves closer to freedom.



Endnotes

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