



## **Working with children and families**

### *Families and origin*

#### **Stan Tucker**

Calvin Wilkes is a member of the Black Man's Forum in Leeds. He talks about his family origins and his childhood in Leeds.

#### **Calvin Wilkes**

Well I was born in Curacao, which is Dutch West Indies, my mother was from Saint Kitts, that's West Indies, and my father from Nevis. My parents, I, my brother and two sisters came to England, to Leeds, in 1960 I think it was. My mother was the authoritarian, she was a, big-statured woman, my father was very quiet, my mother did all the telling off and shouting. My eldest sister, she'll have been in her teens, so she was, out at work, but my brother and my younger sister all went through the school system, over here. That was difficult at times, given that my parents hadn't had the same education process. So it was difficult in terms of not always being able to get support, with help with your homework, understanding some of the subject areas, especially when, in looking at history, it was almost like having two separate identities, a home identity and a school identity. Because throughout my entire education, I was probably one of two or three in either the class and, at one point in the entire school, that were African-Caribbean. So I was always different, right, and at times felt like an outsider. Having said that, because I felt so secure at home, that gave me the confidence to mix at school, and not feel that I was inferior. There were the odd one or two individuals who call you names, and test your resilience at times, sometimes you really had to stick up for yourself, from time to time assert yourself, to overcome some prejudices, which were, born out of ignorance more than anything else.

#### **Stan Tucker**

Does Calvin feel that attitudes to the family have changed since his childhood?

#### **Calvin Wilkes**

There are more support mechanisms. There's a variety of views and cultural outlooks, and better understanding, I think is one of the main benefits that I've noticed, certainly within the family, racism is not a problem. That's not to say that prejudices don't exist, and from time to time become evident, although that is to have not out of control, but they are highlighted from time to time because of different cultural outlooks. But it's good that we can look at those situations and examine them, and usually come to some sort of agreement consensus.

#### **Stan Tucker**

Calvin's present partner is white, and has two daughters from an earlier marriage.

#### **Calvin Wilkes**

We had to get over issues of her children accepting me, into the family, it was somebody that was taking their mother's attention away from them, and likewise with my son, there was there were two problems, mixed loyalties for his mother and for me, and also there's this other stranger who was also a different colour. Me and my partner were consistent in our in our approach, and in our attitude to each other and the children.

#### **Stan Tucker**

How does Calvin see his parental role?

#### **Calvin Wilkes**

I see myself as a role model, I need to be an example to my son and to the extended family, and somebody there to help them understand, and go through the various change processes

that they will encounter throughout their lives. Don't see myself as an expert, I can only pass on what I've experienced myself, and even then it's my interpretation of what I think is the best solution, best way to deal with any particular issue or problem.

**Stan Tucker**

Racism has been a consistent factor in Calvin's life. Has he seen any changes in society?

**Calvin Wilkes**

I think in schools, there's a definite change, although racism and prejudices are still there, and I think these are hereditary racism. Kids say what they hear, their peers say, do what their elders brothers and, and sisters do, you know, and they build their attitudes that way. Along with that, I think over the last twenty years we've also got this new culture, of 'Well it's me, and so long as you want the same things as me materially, well you're okay.' So there's a sense of much more integrated youth culture, and I think it'd be fair to say, at the end of the day, there comes a point even in those newly created friendships and links between cultures, there's a bottom line where it becomes evident, 'oh well, you've still got more opportunities than I have because you're white I'm black'. So we haven't really eradicated it.

**Stan Tucker**

Does Calvin think his sons have a sense of black identity?

**Calvin Wilkes**

Probably not as strong as I do, because there is now a new black British culture, so they're aware of cultural differences in that they're black, and that there are different cultural attitudes, values, within that. But I think the similarities with the younger generation, are more evident, and accepted these days than when I was that age. And the links with the Caribbean are still there amongst the younger generation, but I don't think they are as tight, because it is a different way of life and I think I've got exactly the same values as my parents, and that I've got them *from* my parents. I think I'm fortunate to have had a better education than my parents, or rather the opportunity to take advantage of education more than my parents did. But the core values are exactly the same. Which is we are all equal, we're all individuals. My approach to life is take people for who they are, not who I think they are or who I think they should be, and sometimes that includes not taking them for who they think they are.