

ORGANISATION OF BLIND AFRICAN CARIBBEANS

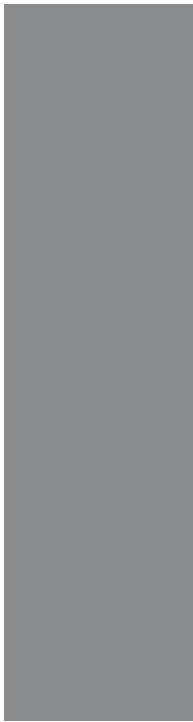
ANNUAL REPORT 2001/2002



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Registered Charity No. 1042756



CONTENTS

Mission Statement

Page 4

Chairman's Over view

Page 5

Director's Statement

Page 6

Over view of Activities for 2001/2002

Page 7 - 14

Operational Management

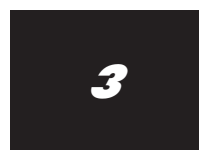
Page 14 - 16

Summary of OBAC Strategic Directions

Page 16 - 17

Management Committee, Staff & Volunteers

Page 18



OBAC's mission, core aims, values, aims and objectives

Mission Statement

OBAC exists to ensure blind and partially sighted African and Caribbean people access relevant services, influence decision and policy makers, to enable them overcome barriers that prevent them becoming active members of the community.

Core Aims

- Supported Services
- Work
- Poverty
- Immigration

Values

- Integrity
- Respect
- Taking responsibility for each other mistakes
- Transparency
- To be nice to each other professionally, socially and culturally
- Understanding and accepting individuals for what they are and what they can become

OBAC Aims and Objectives

- To support and advise visually impaired African and Caribbean people on matters affecting their lives.
- To represent visually impaired African and Caribbean's to mainstream and voluntary service providers so that their interests are promoted and protected.
- To offer training and education to enable visually impaired African and Caribbean people to take up opportunities in the areas of employment or self-employment.
- To provide a focus for visually impaired African and Caribbean's for mutual support, networking and social activities.



Introduction

Chairman's Report

First and foremost, on behalf of the management committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff, voluntary or paid. Furthermore, none of the good work would have been possible if it wasn't for our funders and, as such, I pass on the management committee's gratitude to them. Last, but not the least, the management committee members, themselves; they ought to take pride in the way the organisation is managed and developing.

The last twelve months have seen a review of our strategic directions for the next five years from the review we have seen a significant increase in the membership and accessing service provisions. Over the next five years this figure must increase to 1,000 with the view of reaching 50% of visually impaired African and Caribbean people living in the United Kingdom.

I reported that we would review the administration of the organisation in order to make it better fit the needs of our service provisions, this has been completed and now we have a more efficient and effective team.

We were not able to complete the consultation process and the review of the Constitution and review of the organisation moving towards Company Limited by guarantee, these will be given higher priority in the next year. Our transcription service has improved; there is the opportunity for Braille services within the organisation and it is now possible for members and service users to access the Internet within the organisation.

The management committee is actively working towards OBAC owning its own premises due to high rent of our current premises; this falls within our strategic directions for the next five years.

Finally, on behalf of the membership, I would like to extend the organisation's gratitude and recognition to those members who have gone before us for their invaluable contributions, in whichever capacity they served the organisation.



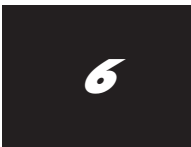
Director's Statement

This year has been one of working in maintaining a standard of service to our members, apart from being recognised as an Investor in People, we have had to apply and comply with other national standards introduced by the Community Legal Service; the Quality Mark. One of our achievements this year was achieving the Preliminary Award of the Quality Mark, this of course puts us a step above other information and advice centres providing a first class service to our members and service users.

We have been very active in nearly all aspects of our work, constantly reviewing and creating innovative ways of developing and delivering better services to our members. We have strived to be at the forefront of consultations and participating in new initiatives in order that visually impaired African and Caribbean people can have a voice in their local communities and to ensure full participation of the members and service users. We are looking at community involvement through civic training that will equip our members on how to represent and negotiate on behalf of themselves.

We have been consulted by major organisations on how we are successful in developing and delivering services to the members. Our answer to that is we develop and implement projects as a direct response to the needs identified from our membership through detailed consultation process, this has been the strength of the organisation. We will be carrying out a review of the methodology of our consultation process with a view to linking in with local and government initiatives and how this impacts on our strategic direction.

Once again, I would like to thank the management committee, especially the Chair, Secretary and other key committee members for their continued support. I would also like to thank the staff team and volunteers who have demonstrated a great commitment to OBAC and its objectives. Lastly, I would like to seize this opportunity to thank those other organisations that support OBAC in its efforts to provide services for visually impaired African and Caribbean people in the community.



Overview of activities 2001/2002

Report from the Support Services team

During the past year, OBAC supported services were continuously funded by both the statutory and voluntary sector funding agencies. This financial support has enabled us to not only consolidate existing services, but has also enabled us to carry out a review, identify and develop new innovative projects.

During the year of review we saw an increase in the numbers of visually impaired African and Caribbean people being referred to OBAC, for access to services, as well as applying for membership. Consequently our workload over the period increased quite significantly, the impact of this increase has been translated within our current strategic development plan for the next five years.

In looking at our work over the past year we will be making comparisons with the statistics from the previous year, in order to demonstrate how the increase in membership and users, is impacting on the service delivery and uptake. This is of particular importance in those areas where our membership and service uptake is low and also in many areas, which are based in outlying boroughs and where a lack of mobility mitigates against access.

We will also be looking at any perceived or notified gaps in service, with a particular view of developing projects that are designed to address any issues and meet, as much as possible the needs of our client group. Again this will involve user participation in helping us to identify and address issues of major concern to them.

Referrals/Membership

During the year under review, we have seen an increase in the membership and the numbers accessing the service. This has been facilitated by the 81 referrals that were received, mainly from social services departments across various London boroughs and other voluntary sector agencies.

Our current membership stands at 652, as compared to 571 in 2000/01, a percentage increase of 14.18%, with the majority of the members accessing the service at least five times during the year. Obviously, where cases involved a level of complexity and work across several areas, there is a continuous process, with multiple interventions and reviews, until completion.

Welfare Rights

The focus of our welfare rights service involved assisting clients in checking that they were in receipt of the correct level of benefit such as housing, council tax benefit, unemployment benefit, income support, incapacity benefit, disability living allowance and attendance allowance. Giving a breakdown of this service during the year we dealt with 4003 telephone and written enquiries, which includes 3696 enquiries involving welfare benefits, this compares to a figure of 812 for 2000/2001, a percentage rise of 355%, majority of the caseload covered were assisting the clients in completing application forms, writing letters, making telephone calls, as well as accompanying them to case conferences and tribunals ensuring that individual clients have access to the full range of entitlement.



We also dealt with Housing and council tax benefit cases, which numbered 290, a slight fall on the previous years figures of 333, a percentage fall of 14.8%, which was primarily due to the fact that most housing/council tax benefit offices were dealing with cases quite quickly and efficiently. Apart from the benefit cases, we had a number of housing cases which involved working with vulnerable, homeless, disabled adults and liaising with special needs housing in the various London boroughs. The numbers of cases dealt with under housing were 526 and last year we had total number of 346 cases, a percentage increase of 65.7%. These cases involved clients who needed to move from unsuitable accommodation into more appropriate accommodation, according to their disabilities.

Entitlements

We also had an increase in the numbers of clients wanting a review of their Entitlements from 23 in 2000/01 to 50 in 2001/02, a percentage increase of 117.4%, with most of the cases being centred on disability benefits and travel and other entitlements.

From the above figures and the comparisons between the year just ended and the previous year, it clearly demonstrates the outcome measures in terms of service delivery and how this has had a direct impact on the users by improving the lifestyles of visually impaired African and Caribbean people. The increase in the service take up of our welfare rights advice is a direct consequence of our intensive networking, marketing strategy and a growing awareness of OBAC's service provisions, among our membership, as well as other statutory and voluntary sector agencies working in the field. Obviously such a dramatic increase in client enquiries and casework, is bringing into question the ability of current OBAC staff to keep pace with the demand and it is therefore imperative that we either look at new working methods, or seek additional funding and staff, so that we are able to meet service users requirements. These issues were highlighted and discussed in detail at the OBAC Planning Away Day and feed into the current Strategic Development Plan.

Health & Social Care

Under health and social care we covered health issues, housing, aids and adaptations and individual fund-raising to address issues around poverty. During the year, the figures for health enquiries were 148, as opposed to 40 for the previous year, a percentage increase of 270%. During the year we organised workshops and attended events such as Diabetes, strokes, heart disease and arthritis and also working with health professionals and assisting the client in gathering the necessary information and to access the relevant services.

We continued to deal with enquiries in relation to aids and adaptations in the home, as well as technological aids and adaptation to enable access to ICT¹ to aid communication and independent living skills. The figures for this year are 46. We are not able to make any comparison because the figures were not differentiated in the previous year 2000/01.

¹Information Communication Technology

During the year under review members/service users benefited from our Individual fund-raising provision, which is one of our growing areas of work and also demonstrates evidence of the need to improve living conditions of blind and partially sighted people. The figures increased from 284 in 2000/01, to 659, a percentage increase of 132%. The majority of applications made were for social welfare needs, such as household equipment, clothing etc, and education/training needs and involved approaches to specialist blind and other charitable trusts.

Advocacy

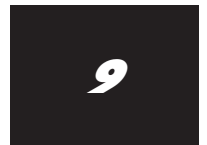
OBAC recognises the essence of the advocacy provision, which is integrated into our support services provision to assist clients/users in accessing benefits and services commensurate to their needs.

Majority of the caseload dealt with was in relation to issues identified through our Initial Needs Assessments and regular Client File Reviews. The main areas of work centred around DLA Super-sessions, housing, housing/council tax benefit, community care provisions, direct payments, health issues, education and training and income support. Some of these cases involved attending case conferences, team meetings and tribunals. We have identified that advocacy is an area we need to develop focusing on empowering the client group in representing their own interests.

Counseling

We offer counselling at the initial point of contact to the organisation as part of the Initial Needs Assessment process. We also placed more emphasis on the motivational guidance offered to OBAC trainees on our training programmes in enabling and enhancing their interpersonal skills. During the year we conducted 1421 sessions, which included group sessions, one-to-one, home visits, telephone calls and motivational guidance sessions. These sessions have been designed to assist the members/service users in developing self-motivation, orientation coping with their loss sight. Thereby enhancing their ability to make informed choices about their own personal development and assisting them to identify the areas of work best suited to their abilities.

In comparing the year end figures with those of the previous year (1307), it shows that there has been a 8.72% rise in the numbers accessing the service, some of the rise is due the expansion of the OBAC training programme and some can be attributed to an increased awareness of the service and it's value to individuals with emotional and other problems.



Transcription

OBAC recognises that information in the appropriate format can assist visually impaired African and Caribbean people to access information and services, OBAC worked at improving the provision of information in the clients preferred format during the year. We continued to produce the Voice newspaper on tape weekly, New African Magazine monthly and OBAC quarterly newsletter, which is circulated to the members and external agencies. The service also provides transcription for individual members/users and the Management Committee, as and when requested. For the period under review the numbers accessing the various transcription services are as follows:

1. The Voice Newspaper	5532
2. The New African Magazine	592
3. Other Transcribed Documents	3062
<hr/>	
TOTAL	9186

The general rise in those accessing OBAC services is also reflected in the figures for transcription and when comparing the service delivery in 2000/01 (8173), to the current total, one can see that there has been a 12.39% increase. This has quite significant implications for the future as it is anticipated that this service will continue to grow and the team will have to grow accordingly to facilitate this.

Summary of Outcomes

In measuring outcomes these would be categorised as soft and hard outcomes to ascertain how our service provisions have benefited the client group. In terms of improving the general lifestyle of the client this may be difficult to measure because this may depend on how the client feels after accessing the service. In terms of hard outcomes these can be measured through client casework and action plans agreed with the client i.e. welfare rights advice, individual fund-raising and advocacy the results from these areas may either be deemed as favourable or unfavourable to the client/user based on the final outcome and cases are not closed until we have exhausted all means of assisting the client/user in achieving their goals.

In the area of individual fund-raising, we have been experiencing a success rate of about 65%, this is primarily due to the fact that we have been able to put forward well thought out applications. Some of the failures are due to the fact that applicants did not fit or were above the earnings limit criteria. However, overall this indicates we have been able to address issues around independent living and communication by accessing funding to purchase adaptive technology, goods and services for the client.

OBAC



10

Work & Poverty

Report from the Training and Employment Team

OBAC training programme's main objective is to assist visually impaired African and Caribbean people in the acquisition of skills that will enable them to access the labour market and long-term meaningful employment. We have designed a training plan, which sets out the varying elements Literacy, Numeracy, Motivation, Communication, Jobsearch, and Work Placements/Experience. The expected outcomes of our training programme are achieving RSA Clait, IBT II, moving into employment and or further training and education.

During the year under review, findings from evaluation and monitoring of our training provision, we identified the need to develop an intensive training for those who have completed and not gained employment or further training/education. We designed a programme that would be one that sets out to combat and overcome the so called 'perpetual student syndrome', whereby a disabled person is encouraged to embark on a never-ending cycle of training.

Through our consultation to ascertain the views of the client group in terms of contributory factors in their not being able to access work, findings indicated inadequate support in terms of transportation to access work i.e. those places offering support were situated in locations that were difficult to get to and that when they did manage to get interviews, employers were sceptical about their ability to do the job being advertised.

Outcomes

During the year under review 37 students enrolled on the OBAC ESF training programme. To date 20 students have completed the course. Ten are still currently undergoing training at this level and seven failed to complete.

In terms of achievements of the training, it is categorised as follows:

- 13 have sat for Clait level and IBT II in one or more elements and obtained a pass.
- 2 students gained employment.
- 3 students self-employment (referred to Leonard Cheshire 'workability' programme)
- 3 volunteering and workplacements
- 3 moved on to further/higher education
- 1 student was assisted in accessing a medical secretary's course and successfully completed and passed.
- 1 offered potential employment with a major bank.
- 10 were referred on to the intensive training programme.



Outputs

To date these students have completed several modules on using access technology, in particular the synthesised speech system, Jaws and the combination system, Supernova, which has the option of being able to use either speech or text enlargement. Those students with very little or no sight at all, were also taught how to use transcribers in conjunction with the speech synthesiser, whilst using the computer.

They have also completed several modules of word-processing and text processing, using database and practising keyboard skills. Those students who are reliant on the use of transcribers, have also completed several modules on using audio descriptive training materials.

FOLLOW THROUGH SCHEME

During the year under review we were successful in accessing funding from the ALG ESF Co-financing programme, which is targeted at those students who have completed the initial OBAC training programme, as well as anyone deemed suitable who have been referred to us by an external agency.

This scheme is an attempt to bridge the gap between what employers considered would make a good employee and the perception that disabled people were unlikely to make good employees. It further sets out to also bridge the gap in support available to visually impaired people actively seeking employment, by offering an intensive training course and support to either enable them to access employment or further/higher education/training opportunities. The scheme will offer I.T training, basic and soft skills training, careers advice and guidance, CV preparation, assisted job-search, motivational guidance and work experience/placements.

The programme commenced on the 2nd of September, a total of 14 students have been recruited.

Monitoring & Evaluation

At the start of the training programmes all trainees completed an individual action plan, setting out their individual employment and learning objectives and goals and to develop an exit strategy that would seek to go some way towards assisting trainees in accomplishing objectives and goals, that they had set for themselves.

There are also consultation group meetings, where trainees can meet and discuss issues of concern, whether in regards to the delivery of the training programme, or other related issues, such as mobility and using public transport.

NEW DEAL

During the period under review 12 students were referred to us by Southwark college, as a part of the FTET (Full Time Education & Training), sub-contract that OBAC has with them for delivering training in ESOL (English as a Second Language) and basic skills. The success rate of the programme can be detailed as follows: We had 10 early leavers, 1 of whom left early because he gained full time employment and 2 completers, who both gained qualifications at basic level.

The logo for OBAC, consisting of the letters 'OBAC' in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

12

Our training in this regard is therefore aimed at developing the skills of these students to a level where they are able to sit, pass examinations or gain employment. Which will not only benefit themselves, in that they are acquiring skills that are transferable across the labour market, but also benefits OBAC, as it is a demonstration of the level and quality of training available at OBAC.

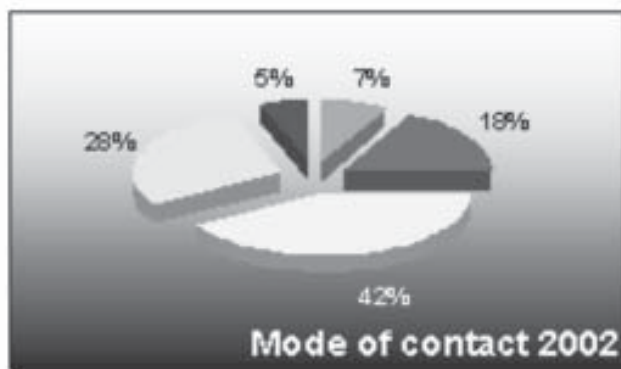
Summary of Outcomes

In general the training programme has progressed well, although we have noticed some issues, which one of them is the length of time allocated for the training programme, which is twenty weeks; from experience of working with the client they need a longer time to actually achieve their goals.

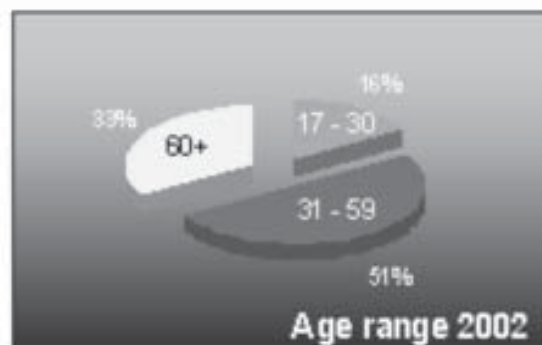
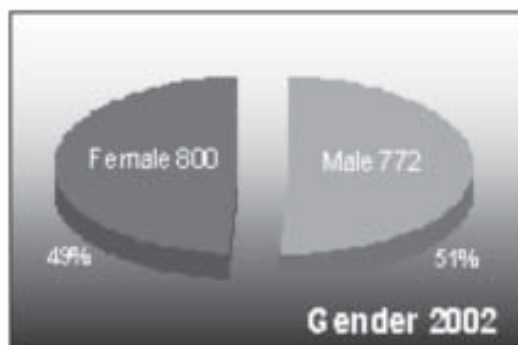
Also, given that in recent times education and training providers have developed distance-learning modules to overcome barriers to access, we think that it is only prudent for us to look at developing our own distance learning modules for experiencing mobility problems using audio transcription as the main communication medium. Further in today's labour market most major employers are looking at 'home working' using modern technology and the Internet, as a possible way of ushering in new working methods and practices. Quite clearly then this is an area of development which holds great potential for future development and benefit for our client group and we have therefore embarked on a pilot scheme to further develop our distance learning modules.

On the whole some of the positive outcomes achieved by the trainees on our training programme, one can discern that there exists a potential for future and further development.

Statistical breakdown of all OBAC services



Home Visits (Outreach)	- 114 (7%)
Personal Visits	- 288 (18%)
Telephone calls	- 647 (42%)
Correspondence	- 438 (28%)
Case Conference/Tribunals	- 85 (5%)



Report from the Information and Administration Team

During the year under review we had a review of the administration structure and looked at ways of making the administration of the organisation more effective and efficient. We had to create the posts of Membership Officer and Information, Advice & Administration Coordinator acknowledging the added responsibilities, which were undertaken by the staff. The new team acknowledging they are the backbone of the organisation and have ensured the good flow of information to the members and service users, which they have excelled by good record keeping for audit, trail purposes for retrieval and access to information. The members have access to advice and information from the information resource library, which is regularly updated and transcribed in the appropriate format as and when required.

The team have managed the recruitment process of new members and service users in line with our referral system; sending out the necessary information of new service provisions and arranging Initial Needs Assessments with the support service team.



OBAC



14



Operational Management

Learning and Development

During the year under review, we have continued to invest in the development of staff and volunteers to achieve the business objectives agreed by the membership. All staff and volunteers have accessed training achieving NVQ's level 2, 3 and 4 in Information, Advice and Guidance, Administration and Management. In measuring the impact of training staff we have seen a great improvement in terms of effectiveness and efficiency in work delivery, which has resulted in increased service provision.

Quality Mark

Last year we reported that we were putting a portfolio of evidence together as part of our application for the Quality Mark standard. This year, saw us achieving the Preliminary Award for the Quality Mark (Community Legal Service), we continue to provide a first class information and advice service to our members. Also, we continue to work in maintaining our Investor in People standard and recognition.

Working relationships & Partnerships

OBAC strongly believes in working jointly and in partnership with other organisations in order to promote the interests of visually impaired African and Caribbean people. This has been achieved through our networking and being members of a number of active umbrella organisations. We have participated in the consultation process of the Greater London Authority.

All staff, volunteers and members have been proactive in this area attending meetings, seminars and workshops at the following organisations: Southwark Community Care Forum, Southwark Community Care Partnership Boards, Peckham Voluntary Sector Forum, Strategic Ethnic Alliance (SEA), Southwark Race Equality Council, Lambeth Voluntary Action Council, BEMHAG¹ (Southwark), NCVO², BTEG³, LVSTC⁴, The Race Equality Unit (REU), Welfare Rights Forum, Southwark Visually Impaired Sub-Group, Advocacy Alliance, Ethnic Minority Refugee/Welfare Rights Forum, RNIB Executive Council, Action for Blind People and GLAD and UK Coalition Against Poverty.

Reporting our partnership work with Action for Blind People and Royal National Institute for the blind, this has progressed successfully. Through Afbp (SRB6 project⁵) we have secured additional equipment for the training and increased access to human resources. The partnership is looking at ways of securing additional funding to continue the service. We have continued to fully be participative with RNIB, Association of Blind Asians on the Dept of Health Section 64 project and we are currently seeking funding from the department to develop another project. Also, we have jointly put in a research application (RNIB, Sense and Liverpool Association for the Blind) to the community fund into the labour market needs of sensory impaired people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, we are awaiting a decision from the Community Fund.

¹ Black Ethnic Minority Health Action Group

² National Council for Voluntary Organisations

³ Black Training & Enterprise Group

⁴ London Voluntary Sector Training Council

⁵ Single Regeneration Budget



Fundraising

OBAC received funds and donations from the following during the year;

- Association of London Government
- London Borough Southwark
- Community Fund
- European Social Fund
- Department of Health Section 64
- Mauser Office – donation of new office furniture

We have also applied to various other funders and awaiting decisions.

OBAC



16

OBAC



Summary of OBAC Strategic Directions

OBAC's commitments for the next five years are the following:

Support Services:

- To achieve a significant increase in the number of members; OBAC currently has 652 members by the end of the five years our membership should increase to 1,000.
- Ensuring we establish an Advocacy project for the service users, this would be the mechanism of empowering the client group to become self-advocates to increase their knowledge and understanding of legislations such as the DDA¹ and Human Rights Act.
- Ensuring we implement a Befriending/Reader Service scheme, addressing issues around social isolation, Health Promotion and include counselling.
- To develop partnership work with Guide Dogs for the Blind to enable OBAC establish a Rehabilitation and Mobility Scheme. Majority of our service users need rehabilitation, including low vision services, these would enhance mobility and daily living skills.
- To develop training on greater user-involvement, not just at organisation level, but externally. Discrimination and other barriers continue to exclude African and Caribbean visually impaired people from fully participating in the community.

Work and Poverty

Under our training and employment provision OBAC will be committed to:

- Recruit 300 trainees and train for work, education or training.
- To improve the opportunities of access into the labour market for visually impaired African and Caribbean people.

Information & Administration

We are committed to improving the quality of our transcription service to members and service users. We have identified that information is still inaccessible to visually impaired people in the appropriate format, which excludes them from valuable information.

OBAC will be committed to implementing our ICT strategy this would benefit trainees and staff. Within the strategy we would be looking at networking and using technology as a means of communication for visually impaired African and Caribbean people.

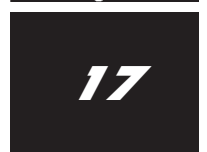
Quality Standards

We are committed to achieving the Information, Advice and Guidance Standard (for training providers) within the first year of the strategic plan and also committed to achieving registration as an accredited centre for NVQ's. We will set targets and ensure that planning and implementation is embedded into staff, volunteers and members (management committee) work programmes. We will adopt a top down planning approach and conduct monitoring and regular feedback in achieving our objectives.

Resources

During the next five years It is important that we explore other areas for income growth i.e. legacies, income generating schemes i.e. social enterprise and finally, acquiring a building or land to build a multi use resource centre.

¹ Disability Discrimination Act



OBAC's Management Committee

Dafton Robinson	-	Chairman
Patricia McCalla	-	Secretary
Anthony Raheem	-	Acting Treasurer
Francesca Osibo	-	Deputy Secretary
Yetunde Oyediran	-	Member
Anthony Griffin	-	Member (resigned September 2002)
Philip Ojo	-	Member
Solomon Odeleye	-	Member
Ambulai Richard Siafa	-	Member
Isaac John	-	Member
Grace Daniel MBE	-	Member
Joyce Williams	-	Member

OBAC Staff Team

Ibukun Olashore	-	Director
Henry Nicholson	-	Development Coordinator
Amal Jama	-	Support Services Coordinator
John Gakpe	-	Support Services Coordinator (Resources)
Bintu Barley	-	Information, Advice & Administration Coordinator
Grace Foster	-	Membership Officer
Pius Aigbogun	-	Basic Skills & Guidance Tutor
Petrit Jaka	-	Information Technology Tutor
Fransica Akanya	-	Support Advice Counsellor

OBAC Volunteers

Alywn Stephenson	-	Transcription Service
Maxfred Greenwood	-	Reader
Derry Newton	-	Reader
Elaine Osborne	-	Driver
Fatmata Dumbaya	-	Reader/Admin
Aisha Korma	-	Reader/Admin



OBAC



18

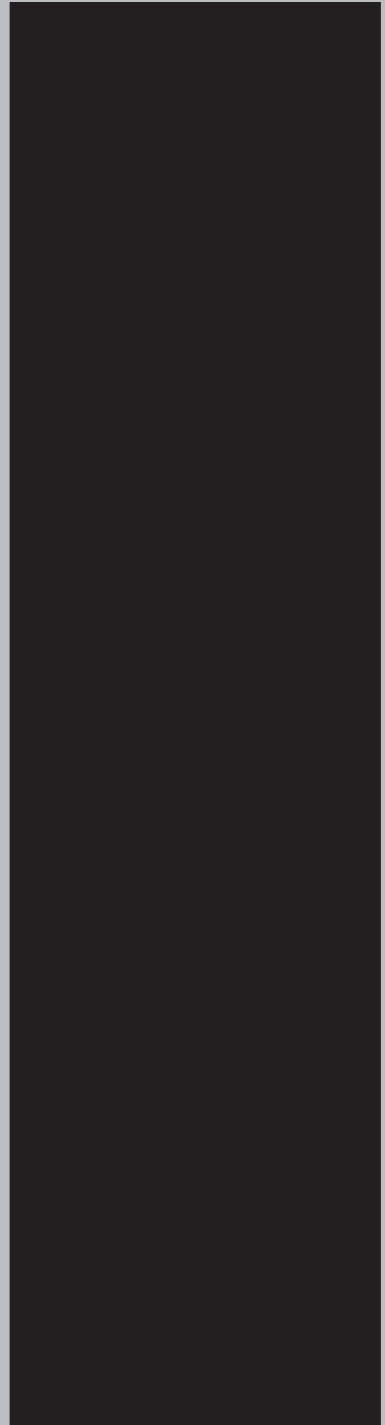


Notes



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Community
Legal Service

