

**INTERVIEW** BY JANNAT HOSSAIN, PROGRAMMES OFFICER



## STAFFORD SCOTT

## TOTTENHAM RIGHTS

**Stafford is the Director of Tottenham Rights, a community organisation campaigning for racial and social justice for Black communities of Tottenham and beyond.**

You can learn more about Tottenham Rights at [www.tottenhamrights.org](http://www.tottenhamrights.org).

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### **What is the purpose of Tottenham Rights (TR) and what are some of your current priorities?**

TR is a community led initiative based in Tottenham, North London which seeks to address issues around social injustice and structural racism. The struggles of the Black community in Tottenham have been well catalogued. TR exists to challenge all forms of racism, whether institutional or interpersonal. We provide advice and support, and campaign for long-term change.

The experiences of Black people are rarely accepted or understood. One of TR’s priorities is amplifying the experiences of the community so more people understand what we have been through. Our realities are especially important and valid when you analyse how we came to be in this country and the wider history.

We are also committed to building new alliances within the community, particularly to help more young people understand that they are not just victims of the system but can be who they want to be.

One of our main campaigns is on the Metropolitan (Met) Police’s Gangs Violence Matrix.

We worked to expose the matrix. After a successful complaint to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO), we are now working to empower people on it – past or present – to seek redress for the harm it has caused them. Though the damage has been done – loss of work, unable to get driving licences to travel to work, etc. – and the impact will be lifelong, we want to support people out of the chaotic lives that being on the matrix led them towards. We are also continuing to press for further ICO investigations into the impact of the Met’s information sharing practices on people just trying to live their lives.

### **What led you to this work and what keeps you going?**

I became an activist because of my own experiences. I was in Broadwater Farm during the 1985 uprisings. I was there because Haringey Youth Services called to ask me to attend to help calm the situation. I didn’t live on the estate, but I worked there as a youth worker. I ended up being arrested, taken to the police station, and being treated horrifically. I was let go – barefoot mind – and told not to go back to Broadwater Farm.

The whole situation inspired me to go back to the estate and begin campaigning for others, especially those in more vulnerable positions. It was important for me to stand up and support the community. I was elected to be the spokesperson for the community. However, I did stand unopposed for the position because the community knew whoever took on the role, they would be targeted by the police.

As for what keeps me going, the racism and injustice I began fighting has continued and is getting worse. There is no alternative but to keep going.

priorities of the community. And when you know better, do better.

The system is hard. I've met people who think going into an institutional space, they can talk to people and make a difference. Unfortunately, that's not how it works. If that's the work you want to do, prepare for a long, hard struggle. It's not going to be a sprint and you should bring the community along with you.

Social media is great, but there's nothing more real than holding meetings in community settings. When we wanted to engage young people, we cooked food and sold it to them very cheaply.

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### **What advice would you give a young person hoping to do similar work?**

Anti-racism is about being embedded in community. Most people become activists because of their own experiences, but the work needs to be rooted in communities, and your mindset must be about being a servant to those communities, to fully understand the needs and

It was a great way to engage people and tell them about our work. We don't do enough of that anymore.

Another thing, if you've left the community for university, come back, and share those skills that you've learned. Often, when people return, they come back to lead, rather than to do the hard work of engaging with the community.

### **We are always keen to hear about how people take care of themselves within and outside work. What does this look like for you?**

I like being in the community and on the frontline, it's what's normal to me. However, during Covid-19, I knew I needed to slow down and that's when I discovered solace in a place I have been ignoring for many years – the back garden. I now have fruit trees all over the place – pears, apples, and plums. There is a constant stream of visitors in the form of birds, coming for the bird feeders. It's been great to have this little patch of nature.

### **What can some things readers can do to support Tottenham Rights?**

We are currently setting up as a membership organisation, so they can join us that way. They can also sign up to our mailing list and follow us on Twitter (@tottenhamrights) to hear about campaign updates and actions.