

# Professor Gus John - Co-founder & former Chair



*Professor Gus John and Gerry German*

CEN was founded in 1999 by four people. The late, great Gerry German (who sadly passed away after a CEN event in May 2012), myself, John O'Malley and Alderman Obajimmi Adefiranye.

Gerry with whom I had worked closely on exclusions in my role as director of education and leisure services in the London Borough of Hackney (1989-1997) and he, as Principal Education Officer with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE.). Our collaboration continued when, on retiring from the CRE, Gerry established the Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources.

Gerry and I were alarmed at the disproportionate number of black and mixed heritage children who were being excluded from school annually, especially black boys. The Department for Education publishes the statistics year on year but appeared to be concerned only with associating black students with indiscipline, disruptive behaviour, and commensurately with low achievement.

### Our partners in life

The third founder was the late John O'Malley, a veteran community activist and case worker assisting parents with appeals against exclusions, and with special education needs cases. We had collaborated about three decades earlier in establishing the first law centre in the country, in Notting Hill.

John (who passed away in 2020) was a member of CENs board and supported the work of our education advocates over at least two decades, being our 'go to' person for guidance on dealing with schools' exclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities, including many with neurodiverse conditions.



Obajimi Adefiranye



John O'Malley

The fourth and final CEN founder was Obajimi Adefiranye, a school teacher and long-time member on Lewisham Council. Jimi is now an Alderman in the London borough of Lewisham after having served as a councillor for 28 years.

Gus John  
2024



## **CEN CEO**

*Jennifer Lewis*

When I became CEO of CEN in 2017, I was keen to ensure that as well as focusing upon providing advocacy following an incident, that CEN in addition establishes a strong early intervention platform to prevent incidents from escalating to the point where children require advocacy representation.

Our Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) platform now delivers our early intervention work by providing regular opportunities for parents to network with other parents in a mutually supportive space.

Ultimately, we intend to establish networks of parents in every locality, they will be empowered to effectively advocate on behalf of themselves and others within their communities to improve their children's education and aspirations.

Myself and CENs board of Trustees wish to personally thank you for your interest in our organisation. CEN strives to ensure that every parent exercises their right to be included in all conversations that influences their child's educational outcomes, and with support from our PEP programme, every parent be equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to do so effectively.

**Jennifer Lewis**

**CEO**

**Communities Empowerment Network (CEN)**