

THE POWER OF DREAMING BIG

Despite successive budget cuts that have limited chances for black Britons, *Voice* finance expert Trevor Williams says we can still thrive



By Vic Motune

SPENDING cuts outlined in recent Government budgets have been particularly harsh on African-Caribbean families, according to the race equality think tank the Runnymede Trust.

In the wake of Chancellor Philip Hammond's recent budget, analysis from the Trust found that African-Caribbean families have been hit harder than any other ethnic group by austerity measures since 2010, with each budget since that year making life harder because of cuts to tax credit and other government benefits.

But *The Voice's* economics expert, Derby University visiting professor Trevor Williams, says that black Britons can still survive and thrive despite the Government's tougher economic policies.

OPPORTUNITIES

He said that there were several opportunities available for people from black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities to start businesses and gain new skills – the key was to find out about them and take advantage of them.

He told *The Voice*: "The adverse affects of welfare cuts have a disproportionate effect on black communities, mainly because they fall with a lower socio-economic group. But you can take control.

"Dependency on the State is something that you should avoid if you can and you do it by becoming creative in thinking about improving your situation so you're not always in a low socio-economic group."

Williams highlighted the case of Medina King-Sam.

At just 29 years old, King-Sam is just one of a tiny handful of black children's interior designers in the UK.

As the head of MK Kids Interiors and two other design businesses, the Londoner has built a client base of successful professionals across London and Surrey.

But it wasn't always the case. King-Sam went from unemployment and scrubbing pots to running three businesses.

She is one of the thousands of black women and families that the Runnymede Trust said have been ignored by successive government budgets and austerity measures.

King-Sam was determined to prove that neither ethnic background nor difficult economic circumstances can hold anyone back from following their ambitions.

Despite growing up in a part of Hackney where three gangs are still active, she used the obstacles she faced to fuel her entrepreneurial ambitions.

During a period of unemployment after graduating, King-Sam ran into an old friend who offered her a 'managerial' job at a takeaway restaurant.

Upon starting the job, she soon realised that the role consisted of serving food, cleaning the front of house, and washing the large pots that were used to cook the various dishes.

One evening, as King-Sam was scrubbing the pots, she felt overwhelmed and frustrated with life.

TEARS

The entrepreneur told *The Voice*: "As tears ran down my face, I thought to myself 'this



AUSTERITY: Chancellor Philip Hammond departs No 11 to deliver the Budget last week. Analysis shows that spending cuts have harmed black communities

is not what I went through university for."

While working at the restaurant, she also started assisting interior stylist and art directors, to get more experience in the sector.

She later found a sales assistant role at a leading furniture retailer, where she pitched her personal interior design ser-



SUCCESS: Medina King-Sam has launched three successful companies

vice. It was rejected, but this experience gave her the motivation to start planning her own business, MK Kids Interiors.

She took a leap of faith, left her sales assistant role to work night shifts on a zero hours contract to work on her business idea and launched the company in 2010. She said: "I

had to go on benefits because I couldn't support myself on the savings I had. I remember going to interviews and the staff there just treating me like I was a statistic, like I was there to waste their time. I hated it. I remember having to run to the job centre just to sign on in time."

The decision to set up MK Kids Interiors transformed her life.

"As a young black woman in business, I'm determined to make a difference by showing that neither race nor gender should hold anyone back from following their dreams" she said.

ADVERSITY

Williams said: "Adversity drives people to think creatively. Medina is a good example of someone who's come up with and unleashed the drive that she had because of the

circumstances she was in. It forced her to do things for herself.

"One of the ways you can challenge limited economic circumstances is to ask yourself the question 'have I got any skills that will translate into a business? And can you go through official channels to get the funding and help you need?'"

"There's a whole range of advice that can help people in lower socio-economic groups to get up the ladder, start businesses, have access to training and apprenticeships, to have access to funding for workshops. There is a whole plethora of things that are there to help you escape the poverty trap. Part of the problem of coming from a lower socio-economic group is that compared to people from middle-class backgrounds, not enough take advantage of what is available."