

"I shouldn't have to prove I am British": A Preston mum describes the moment she was told she was not a British citizen

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Sekeena Kydd is fighting for justice

It was a phone call that Sekeena Kydd will remember, word for word, for the rest of her days . . .

"You're not a British citizen," said the Passport Office official in a matter-of-fact sort of way.

"What do you mean I'm not a British citizen?" snapped the startled Preston mum. "I was born here for goodness sake!"



Sekeena with Sir Mark Hendrick MP

It was only a few weeks ago that Sekeena, 34, discovered to her horror she was yet another victim of the Windrush Scandal.

Each month more and more UK residents of Caribbean descent are also finding out they are not who they think they are.

And, despite an avalanche of publicity surrounding Windrush over the past 16 months, many still remain blissfully unaware of their official status in Britain.

“It’s appalling,” said Sekeena who was hoping to get clearance this week to finally apply for a British passport. “I was born in Preston. My dad is white British. Yet until a few weeks ago I didn’t know I had a problem.

“Born in Britain means you’re British - or so I thought.”

Not so. And, as thousands of descendants of the Windrush Generation are angrily discovering, birthplace can be irrelevant if your parents don’t have the correct paperwork. So Sekeena has teamed up with friend Glenda Andrew to launch the campaign group Preston Windrush Generation and Descendants UK.

Already the organisation has assisted 10 residents in the city with citizenship applications.

Many more are expected to seek help following a successful public meeting at the Plungington Community Centre last weekend.

Sekeena, who lives in Ribbleton, only realised her situation a few weeks ago when she applied for a passport for her 13-year-old daughter Lynette to go on a school trip to Barcelona.

The application was rejected. And when she telephoned the Passport Office to ask why, she learned the awful truth. Lynette didn't have British citizenship - and neither did she.

"I was shocked, absolutely shocked," she said. "I've grown up thinking I'm British. I AM British and so too is Lynette. How could they say otherwise?"

"I've never been out of the country and so I've never had cause to apply for a passport. It was only when I needed to get one for Lynette to go on her school trip this July that the whole thing came out.

"If this had been a couple of years ago, before the scandal over the Windrush Generation became public, who knows what would have happened? We might even have been deported."

Sekeena's story began back in 1958 when her grandfather Lester Bertram Kydd came to the UK from St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Like thousands of West Indians, the 30-year-old was attracted by British government recruitment campaigns across the Caribbean for workers to come over to help address labour shortages in the UK.

A year later his wife Mercil Onetha Kydd, 27, joined him. And three years after that, in 1962, their seven-year-old daughter - Sekeena's mother and also called Lynette - travelled over.

"My mum came here to England on her uncle's passport," explained Sekeena. "But by 1976 she had her own British passport because she returned to St Vincent for a six-week holiday that year.

"But somewhere along the line she lost that passport and has never applied for one since.

"When I was born in 1985 my birth certificate only had my mum's name on it. My dad was white and English, but his name isn't on the form because he didn't attend when mum registered my birth.

"I gather he was out celebrating with the lads and didn't realise the dad had to be at the registry office to be named on the certificate.

"That proved crucial because when it came to my nationality, I took mum's and not his. So all these years I've been officially from St Vincent and the Grenadines, even though I've never even been there.

"It's even more puzzling because I have since found out that my grandparents, who came here long before St Vincent and the Grenadines became independent in 1979, became naturalised in the eighties, before I was born. So they were automatically British citizens and that meant I should have been."

Sekeena, who is a mother of four, linked up with Glenda Andrew with the aim of raising awareness of the Windrush Scandal and helping other victims secure the British citizenship they should have had years ago.

The two organised their first public meeting last Friday and invited a host of speakers including Preston MP Sir Mark Hendrick and Anthony Brown from the Windrush Crusade.

“It went really well,” said Sekeena. “There were at least 30 or 40 people who turned up to find out more information. The message which we tried to get across is that people must check their parents’ status and that of their children.

“Only this week my mum received a letter saying her application (for British citizenship) has been successful and within the next few days she should be receiving her citizenship certificate. I admit I was having a bit of a wobble, but now it’s resolved. So that’s one success for us already.

“I’m hoping to get my paperwork back anytime now and that will mean my daughter Lynette can then apply for her passport. The school trip is on July 9, so I’m hoping that gives us enough time to get it sorted out.

“As a group we have helped around 10 people in Preston with their applications and we expect there will be quite a few more applying as a result of our public meeting.

“Not every application is going to be as straightforward as ours. There are going to be some more complex cases. But hopefully we now have the contacts to resolve any issues that come up.”

The Windrush Generation was named after the HMT Empire Windrush, the cruise ship which brought the first Caribbean migrant workers over to Britain in 1948. It brought hundreds heading for a new life in the UK with a promise of British citizenship.

But last year the scandal of what happened to some of those migrants was made public. Many had been wrongly detained, denied legal rights, lost their jobs, homes and denied benefits and medical care. In at least 83 cases, people were wrongly deported by the Home Office. The scandal was linked by politicians to the “hostile environment policy” brought in by Theresa May during her time as the Home Secretary.

“I’d never heard of that policy until I started researching the scandal,” admitted Sekeena.

“Now I see it was a planned operation to deport people. It was shameful and scandal is the right word for it.

“I feel dreadful that we have had to go through this to get something which should have been ours by right. I’ve had sleepless nights over this. It’s like we’ve been in limbo waiting for that certificate which will prove we are British citizens. Some have been scared of coming forward in case it identifies them.

“The whole of the Caribbean community feels rejected. The thing is their grandparents were invited over in the first place to do jobs. Once those jobs were done it seems the Government just wanted to get rid of them.

“I spoke to one woman last week who thought I was joking when I told her about it. I advised her to go off and check her parents have the right paperwork. Goodness knows how many more there are.”