

Be the Best Version of Yourself



Karrol-Ann Brown is many things. The daughter of Jamaican migrants, Karrol-Ann is an attorney, an advocate, a youth mentor, and active in the NAACP of Connecticut. She was an Assistant Attorney General, Director of the Racial Justice Project at the Center for Children's Advocacy, and currently serves as Chief of Staff to the DCF Commissioner. On top of that, she leads the department's initiatives on racial justice.

Karrol-Ann's approach to her personal and professional endeavors, and her outlook on life, is always through a racial equity lens. That is something that was instilled in her from a young age.

"Coming from a predominately white high school, yes I had White friends, but I also had Black friends who didn't really understand the [African American] struggle. My parents really encouraged me to study my culture - as a young Black girl but also as a Caribbean American. I got the best of both worlds when it came to understanding my ancestry," said Karrol-Ann.

Karrol-Ann gets her motivation from being able to make a meaningful difference in others' lives by always striving to do the right thing. That first spark to change the world for the better was ignited at Penn State where she attended college.

"I have to make sure I'm walking and working with a purpose. Whatever [I'm engaged in], it has to be meaningful, and it has to bring me some joy. If it doesn't do those things then maybe it's not for me."

"While Penn State is not a HBCU, I learned there to find my voice and walk with purpose. It's where I became very active in the NAACP as well as the couple of other Black organizations."

Karrol-Ann reflected on one particular demonstration which she participated in and was one of the catalysts for her future work around racial justice and equality.

"We did a sit in because we wanted to have Black Studies as an actual course and not just an elective. Around that time, that's where I really found my voice because I was surrounded by very passionate students, White and Black, that wanted to see this happen and it just kind of started from there."

Karrol-Ann's path was also shaped by her early involvement in civic work, particularly volunteering with youth back home in Connecticut after graduation. That transitional stage of



her life, taken together with her college experience and volunteerism, revealed that not only did she have a natural affinity for working with young people, but it was also energizing.

Harkening back to those post-undergraduate years before she entered law school, Karrol-Ann said she knew she was excited by the work.



Karrol-Ann with NAACP youth council members and CT State Treasurer Erick Russell (center).

"When I graduated, I didn't immediately go to law school, so I did a lot of community service, working with young students with literacy issues, read to them, worked with them on their phonics and volunteered with my church."

"I love children, teenagers, but especially children because there's a lot you can do in those years when it comes to educating them and shaping them to be young adults."

Fast forward to 2000, Karrol-Ann's journey continued to evolve in interesting ways. That was the year she met Connecticut's NAACP statewide president Scot X. Esdaile and he asked Karrol-Ann to be the organization's legal redress attorney for the CT NAACP State Conference. A pivotal moment for her, both professionally and personally, the role opened many doors, not just within the legal arena but also within the field of social justice.

Karrol-Ann's passion for community work, particularly with youth, caught the attention of the NAACP leadership and she was tapped to be advisor to the organization's Greater New Haven NAACP Youth Council and subsequently the CT NAACP State Advisor overseeing a total of 14 NAACP Youth Councils and College Chapters across the state. With this opportunity, Karrol-Ann continued to steer her way toward a profession in child protection services and well-being.

The combination of her legal expertise with her desire for working with and on behalf of youth made the Office of the Attorney General the logical next step. When she decided to pursue a position as an Assistant Attorney General, Karrol-Ann recognized it was an opportunity to take her work to the next level and could be a platform for real systemic change.

"I was already a panel attorney working at a private firm that had tapped me when I was a working Temporary Assistant Clerk (TAC) at the New Haven New Haven Superior Court. When I did the interview



Karrol-Ann with her former boss, and former CT Attorney General, now U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal.



with then Attorney General Blumenthal, you have three options on the application for [which field] you want to focus on as an AAG. AG Blumenthal said, 'you put down child protection three times!'"

"I said 'yes!' because that's where I believe I can make the most difference and I can also grow personally and professionally because it's something that I'm passionate about already," Karrol-Ann laughed as she remembered that conversation.

Her experience up to that point was formative to the direction her legal career was taking and helped shape her understanding of the challenges children and families face. Also importantly, how she, in the Attorney General's office, could play a crucial role in protecting and supporting them.

"I started to get more involved with the NAACP and concurrently working with the Attorney General's office. To me, even though you saw a lot as an assistant attorney general representing DCF it didn't take away my purpose, which was to do the best job I could with the facts I have. Even though I didn't have a social work degree I learned so much working so closely with the department sometimes I felt like I was able to look at cases with the same lens as a social worker and balance that with a legal perspective."

Karrol-Ann learned a lot during her time in the Attorney General's office. She grew as a person and as a professional.

"Just the basics of just being a good human being, doing the best job I could as an attorney and following the letter of the law while also being compassionate and being able to meet youth and families where they are. I learned the real basics of being a good attorney, a good litigator and a good listener."

Karrol-Ann believes her racial justice experience and knowledge has evolved since being in this space.

"I'm always going to be that advocate for making sure that there is equity in whatever we do and racial equity when it comes to our black and brown families."

That is because, according to the National Institutes of Health, across the U.S. and in Connecticut, Black children experience foster care placement at higher rates than White children. In her role leading racial justice initiatives for DCF, Karrol-Ann said it is her responsibility to do all she can to help reduce those disparities and inequities.



"I want to identify those disparities and disproportionalities and see what we can do as an agency to reduce and address them head on. That's one of the reasons why the Commissioner wanted me in this role - not just because of my legal acumen, but because of my experience working with the NAACP and National Coalition of 100 Black Women, as assistant attorney general, and in my previous role at the Center for Children's Advocacy as the director of their racial justice project."

She does that, in part, by going into the communities served by DCF to find out what stakeholders and families feel the agency is doing right, what areas need improvement, and what relationships need to be expanded upon. For example, she continues to leverage her relationship with the NAACP to assist with foster parent recruitment, education around mental health and financial literacy, and to achieve greater culture competency as an agency.

Karrol-Ann said wants to bring awareness to the Black struggle and also celebrate the successes of Black Americans. She said she is constantly reminded that there is much more work to do and that means human services' agencies like DCF need to continue to raise awareness and encourage others to join or else true equality will never exist.

"I am very, very proud to be an African American Caribbean woman, and I'm very pleased to see the work that we've done to get to this point. We worked too hard to go backwards. I hope that I can play some part even a small part in making sure that the children who come after me, the next generation, is able to do anything they want because they're inspired by the progress we've made."

Karrol-Ann stresses that you cannot get through the metaphorical door as an adult in a leadership role with an accomplished career, and as a person of color, and then close that door behind forgetting about the younger generations trying to get through that same door. That is why she is proud to mentor young men and women of color and see them achieve success of their own.



Karrol-Ann (center) with Bobbi Brown (far left).

"As a mentor to youth, my job is to advise and open doors but also to help the next generation become not just the leaders of tomorrow but the leaders of today. I just want them to be the best version of themselves because that's the same thing I strive for myself."

One of the "stars" she has mentored is Bobbi Brown, who is also the founder of 100 Girls Leading and was recently installed as the branch president of the Bridgeport NAACP. Bobbi is now a mentor to youth in her own right.

"I've mentored many young people that are now very successful adults. I met Bobbi as a teenager when she was a youth council president for Bridgeport NAACP. When she became the branch president, to see her as an adult in her 30s, it brought me to tears. It really did because I remembered just mentoring her, working with her on public speaking, etiquette. So many people from the NAACP and outside poured into her because they saw something special in her and she was so passionate about civil rights work," said Karrol-Ann.

One of her other "star" former mentees is second term state Representative Derrell Wilson from Norwich who is vice-chair of the legislature's Black and Puerto Rican Caucus.

"To see a young man and young woman who you mentored grow to be successful and prominent individuals in Connecticut just warms my heart. Knowing that I played a part and helped shape them into the leaders that they are today. That's why I do this."



Karrol-Ann, Derrell Wilson (second from left standing) and Bobbi Brown (third from left standing).