



## **Statement from Account following the inquest of Lamont Roper**

**4.12.2021**

Our thoughts and prayers today are with the family of Lamont Roper. Lamont died from drowning in the River Lea on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020 following police pursuit by undercover officers working for Hackney and Tower Hamlets Basic Command Unit (BCU).

A young black man, Lamont was known and loved by many young people in Hackney, including some members of the Account team. An inquest into Lamont's death concluded this Thursday, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021. Several members of the Account team attended the inquest at North London Coroner's court last week and would like to offer the following statement:

We are pleased with some of the clarity that the inquest has brought. We are pleased for example that the police officer's original claim, that Lamont 'jumped' voluntarily into the river has been ruled against.

Despite this however we still believe that we are a long way from finding out the truth of what happened in the context of Lamont's death, and a long way from getting justice for his family. We also are concerned – with the family – that a future incident of similar nature is still in danger of happening again. The police's public statement emphasizing the fact that no 'causative link' has been proved between police actions and Lamont's death we believe is particularly concerning, and shows a lack of willingness to take responsibility, learn and change following the tragedy.

One of the reasons we still have very little proof about exactly how Lamont fell in the river comes from a failure to use Body Worn Camera (BWC) equipment effectively. We would like to emphasise that this is not just a failure of one officer but of the organisation as a whole. For the last two years we have repeatedly complained about frequent ineffective use of body worn cameras by officers, including a public recommendation in our report 'Policing in Hackney: Challenges from Youth in 2020'. Key concerns – all of which were relevant in Lamont's case - include officers not turning on BWC, turning it on too late, or blocking footage with coats and outer clothing. It is for this reason that we continue to advise young people to record encounters with police themselves on personal recording equipment.

We agree with the inquests conclusions that more work is urgently needed in terms of officer safety training, safety equipment and diving team response times. We also would like to suggest that both Hackney and Harringay council need to look into ways that better safety measures can be brought in on the canal, including CCTV.

We also want to emphasise however that training alone will not prevent incidents like this from happening again. The decision to engage in the first place in a high-speed pursuit along the canal in the dark, all for the purposes of a stop and search with weak evidential grounds, we believe amounts to reckless judgement and a lack of safeguarding from the officers involved. We also believe the

incident is not isolated but reflects a wider culture of heavy-handed approaches among undercover officers – often referred to by young people we work with as the ‘Grand Theft Auto’ police.

We agree with Eva Luna Roszykiewicz, of Bhatt Murphy solicitors, legal representation to the family, that the terms of both the Inquest and the investigation of the IOPC have brushed over the role the Lamont’s racial background may have played in police officers decision making on the night of his death. We also believe that there is a lack of understanding why young black men of a similar age to Lamont are often reluctant to comply with officers during Stop and Searches. To assume that the only reason young men like Lamont would run from officers in pursuit is due to ‘guilt’ is to completely ignore the long local history of young Black men experiencing trauma at the hands of police including deaths and serious injury following police contact. With the history behind the cases of Rashan Charles, Edson Da Costa or Mark Duggan, it should not be surprising that many young black men fear for their safety and livelihood in the presence of officers. Unfortunately Lamont’s case – and the inability of the system to get justice for his family – will only make this fear worse in the future.

We have made this case publicly following multiple incidents with local officers and we will make the case again:

Young black men are not a statistic or a ‘suspect profile’, they are brothers, sons, fathers and members of a community. All people – regardless of their background or their situation - deserve to be treated as human, to have their rights protected, and their safety accounted for.

Our thoughts and prayers once again are with the Roper Family. We would like to publicly commit to supporting them in whatever way possible moving forward, as we struggle once again to find healing, truth and justice for our community.