



>> Film director and screenwriter Segun Oguntola arrived in Milton Keynes in 2007 after growing up in Greenwich South East London and spending five years developing a film industry in The Gambia, West Africa.

>> He was immediately struck by how so many backgrounds and cultures were represented in the new city's population – and set out to find why so many people come here to make a new start, and become part of the MK mix.

>> The people Segun meets feature in this regular Citizen First focus.



The MK Mix is supported by the Ramada Encore Milton Keynes in Midsummer Boulevard, CMK. Find out more about the hotel at www.encoremiltonkeynes.co.uk or calling 0870 428 1438

>> Would you like to put yourself in the MK Mix hotseat? All you have to do is ask – email your request to first@mkcitizen.co.uk and we'll take it from there

the mk mix

>> What's your background?

I was born in Kenya in a town called Mombasa but my ancestral roots are in Zanzibar. I came to the UK when I was two and was raised in the north of England before moving to Milton Keynes in 1997. I am the chairman of MK Islamic Arts Heritage and Culture Organisation, but before that I enjoyed a varied career in hotel management.

>> What attracted to you come to MK in the first place?

While working at Heathrow Costa Coffee I was given the opportunity to look at different locations to open and expand the business.

I know it is a bit of a cliché, but the roundabouts got me in a bit of a spin, but then the green and the fresh, outward looking and young city caught my imagination and reminded me a bit of Holland when I lived there.

Everyone says it, but it's a great place to raise a young family. It has a get-up-and-go attitude, and sees opportunities rather than challenges.

I set up the Costa Coffee next to John Lewis. I studied for my PhD in business management at De Montfort University and Milton Keynes College, and after graduating, I decided to teach business studies at the college.

I was fortunate because having lived in Holland, Denmark, Spain, Germany and Saudi Arabia, and enjoying various experiences, I was able to add a different perspective to business management practice in my teaching.

>> Tell us about the ways in which you are involved in MK life.

I am involved in various charity works and I take part in delivering presentations on Islamic spirituality at school assemblies, and other community work with InterFaith Milton Keynes Organisation.

I have been organising and facilitating successful community events for several years.

Typically these events bring people from different cultures together to support integration and build bridges to enhance understanding and improve dialogue.

I also do a lot of work promoting and representing the 'Middle Way' in Muslim life and faith which is all about tolerance, understanding and balance.

I think this is important work, particularly with all the world events happening around us – we all need to be more bal-

anced.

The MK Islamic Arts Heritage & Culture organisation aims to promote the study of Islamic art and culture through education. Traditionally in Islamic cultures various art forms have been used as a medium of self discovery and social integration.

Islamic art is an important area for me. I have been promoting and educating people about its richness, beauty, colour and its contribution to the wider artistic styles.

Islamic art was a catalyst, amongst others, contributing to the bringing about the Italian Renaissance. 'Arts of Fire' dealing with glass and ceramics from the Iberian Peninsula and 'Al Andalus' are all heavily influenced by Islamic art.

The principal vehicles for Islamic artistic expression are Arabesque architecture and calligraphy. We are in a unique position to promote the understanding and tolerance between cultures and build bridges through the understanding of art.

>> How easy have you found it to settle here?

I have seen MK grow and develop into what it is today, but I do believe there is a way to go to develop a grass roots art culture in Milton Keynes.

Such a culture could create a regional art hub for the city, and contribute to its development.

There are a lot of talented artists and art organisations here trying to do make a difference and do something, but they struggle with a lack of resources, venues and support.

It is extremely difficult to reach people and make them aware of what is going on and also to hold on to their interest or capture their imaginations. People seem to get deflated quickly and give up. I suppose this might be the challenge for any developing city.

I am fortunate because through my role I have been exposed to a variety of cultures such as Chinese and African art, and the college has facilitated several art exhibitions that showcase world art. We recently held a successful Fusion of Islamic Arts workshop and exhibition in partnership with the college which was supported by the Milton Keynes Arts Association at Middleton Hall which was fantastic.

>> We're interesting in highlighting ways in which MK's diversity is working in practice, so how far have you spread your net so far?

Through Interfaith MK and the Commu-



>> Anouar Kassim, pictured above reading the Qur'an to pupils at Merebrook Infant School, is chairman of The Milton Keynes Islamic Arts, Heritage and Culture Organisation, and is focussed on promoting social integration and understanding through art and culture.

nity Foundation, I have had the opportunity to meet and build bridges with various communities and I have made a lot of good life-long friends here, but my main challenge with MK is that there is nowhere for families to go.

I would like to see the late evening café culture such as in Europe develop here more. I and many others like me are simply not catered for, and have to keep looking outside the city which is a bit of a letdown.

I have a dream of a late evening culture of late café bars with great art work in MK for families. Think of the diversity that would bring.

>> Are you planning to stay in MK for a fixed time for work or family reasons, or do you think you're here for good?

What attracts me to stay in MK has always been my family and friends, I think MK is a nice place to live but could do more to develop activities for young children.

Activity areas and play centres which are innovative, educational and creative and reasonably priced would make it an even greater centre for families.

>> If someone who had never been to

MK before was considering moving here to make a new life, what's the best piece of advice you could give them?

Recently my wife and I were invited to meet the Queen at Buckingham Palace due to my community and charity work.

When I was introduced to the Queen I was nervous and tongue tied, and when she questioned me about where I came from I could only think of saying Milton Keynes: "You know, stony cows and roundabouts, Ma'am." What a disservice that was! But now I would say it's a good place, though you have to be prepared to ride through the challenges or try and make things happen.

You need patience and lots of it – and it would help if you are able to drive. It's a great city for bringing up a new family.

>> You're probably aware that MK has a mixed reputation in the rest of the UK because it's so new and so different. What would you say to people who can't find anything good to say about the city?

It is a safe environment for children, plenty of open green spaces and great schools, good leisure facilities and places to eat, but I believe the best is yet to come.

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