

BRITISH HORSERACING'S

ETHNIC & CULTURAL DIVERSITY RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2026



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BACKGROUND

In recent years, widespread global conversations for racial justice have opened new opportunities for industries everywhere to reflect and evolve, including British horseracing. Within the sport, **The Uncomfortable Race**, a programme led by Josh Apiafi featuring Kanane Francis, Callum Helliwell, and Elijah Michael – three talented young Black professionals building careers in racing, carried an inspiring message: by embracing racial equity and visibly supporting inclusion, the industry can unlock fresh perspectives, attract new voices, and strengthen its future.



The 'Our People, Racing's Future' Workforce Strategy reinforced the importance of investing in racing's people, highlighting both the challenges and the opportunities ahead. With vacancy rates in racing and breeding yards averaging 24%, and almost half of training staff considering leaving within two years, action is needed to strengthen workforce stability and create an environment where talent can thrive. Addressing these issues offers racing the chance to build a more resilient, trusted, and relevant industry for the future.

The British Horseracing Authority has recognised the importance of listening to and understanding the lived experiences of people from Black, Asian and other underrepresented ethnic and cultural backgrounds in racing. This research was commissioned to build a robust evidence base that has directly contributed to the development of the sport's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. These real experiences have provided credible data that will also guide a specific and measurable cultural diversity action plan, as outlined in the Strategy, helping us to focus our efforts where they will make the greatest impact ensuring everyone in racing feels valued, supported and able to succeed.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This executive summary draws on findings from three distinct, but complementary pieces of research conducted between 2023 and 2025:



Independent Review (commissioned by the BHA, funded by the Racing Foundation, and delivered by Plan4Sport and Inside Inclusion): A multi-phase study including surveys, interviews, and focus groups generating 237 responses from industry employees and leaders, focused on the experiences of ethnically and culturally diverse employees in British horseracing.



Ethnicity Focus Groups (arranged by the BHA - facilitated by Josh Apiafi with independent researcher and Diversity in Racing Advisory Group Chair present): A targeted series of discussions with eight ethnically diverse employees working across multiple roles and organisation in racing, designed to reach voices that may not have been captured in the Independent Review.



Urban Equestrian Academy Report (independently commissioned and funded): A grassroots study capturing the lived experiences of 20 Global Majority individuals working across the equestrian sector, including racing, breeding, and showjumping.

Together, these reports offer a rich and credible evidence base, highlighting both challenges and opportunities for improvement.

COMMON THEMES

The research identified five recurring themes that, while highlighting industry-wide challenges, also demonstrate clear opportunities for change. Although the number of participants across the three research reports may seem modest compared to the size of the horseracing industry, the consistency of their experiences offer powerful insight. We know that these voices do not represent the entire industry. Many people have positive experiences working in British racing, but even one instance of discrimination signals an opportunity to strengthen our culture. The difficulty in engaging ethnically diverse participants is itself revealing and points to where we can focus efforts to break down barriers and build trust.

These studies were designed to explore lived experiences in depth, using qualitative methods that prioritise insight over scale. Across all three, participants described strikingly similar patterns of discrimination, exclusion, and emotional strain regardless of role, background, or sector. These consistent themes not only signal deep issues but also provides a clear direction for action. When people from different parts of the sport, in different roles, from different backgrounds, and across different research projects are all saying the same thing, it becomes a collective call to listen, learn, and improve.

People may not recognise these behaviours in their own workplace, and that's a positive sign. However, it does not mean they aren't happening elsewhere, and it certainly does not mean we can be complacent. Every organisation should continually interrogate its systems, structures, and culture to ensure they are as inclusive, safe and welcoming as possible.

Outlined below are the core themes identified in the research, each explored in detail in the upcoming section. Please note: these slides include sensitive content, including references to racism and mental health - topics that, while difficult, present us with the chance to create lasting positive change.

**PATTERNS OF
DISCRIMINATION AND
EXCLUSION**

**BARRIERS TO
ENTRY,
PROGRESSION,
AND BELONGING**

**REPORTING AND
SAFEGUARDING
CHALLENGES**

**EMOTIONAL AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL
IMPACT**

**PASSION,
RESILIENCE, AND
THE CASE FOR
CHANGE**

PATTERNS OF DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION

Across all three reports participants described a consistent pattern of racial discrimination, microaggressions, and exclusionary behaviour. These ranged from overt racial slurs to subtle but persistent microaggressions, often from individuals in positions of authority.

Intersectional discrimination was also evident, affecting people in more than one way, with women of colour and international workers facing multiple disadvantages at once. Language barriers, cultural insensitivity, and exclusion from informal networks further reinforced feelings of being “othered.” Yard environments in particular cited discriminatory language, poor accommodation, and lack of oversight. Spectator abuse directed at racially minoritised hospitality staff was also reported.

Whilst these behaviours are harmful to individuals, they also present the industry with a clear opportunity to build a stronger, more inclusive culture. According to a [Race Equality Matters](#) study, racial microaggressions often lead to anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. By addressing these issues proactively, organisations can unlock improvements in wellbeing, productivity, and retention, and build a safer, more inclusive, and sustainable racing industry.

KEY EVIDENCE

Independent Review:

40% (67) of survey respondents said they had experienced, witnessed, or had reported to them inappropriate or poor behaviour because of ethnicity or cultural background.

Some reported verbal abuse including aggressive and illegal racist language such as "F**k off back to [country of origin]"; "Why are you here?"; "Dirty refugee, dirty [nationality], better off if you had been bombed".

"Early on in career - remember traders being referred to as "The Taliban" as a result of their ethnicity."

"Some managers treat [people] whose first language is not English sometimes differently and lack patience with their English skills. "

Ethnicity Focus Group (8 participants):

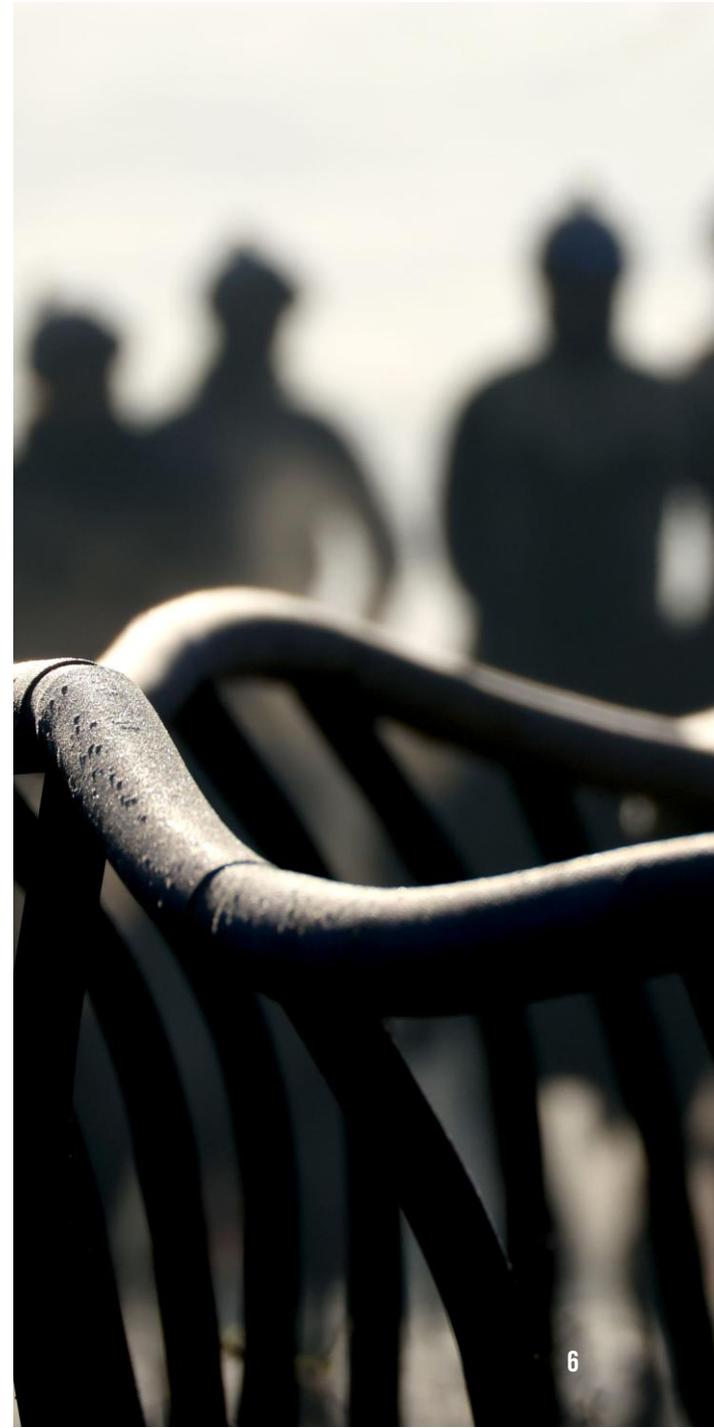
"One of the directors... took me to one side and said, 'You're very young, your skin is not white, and I don't think you're appropriate for this job.'"

Urban Equestrian Academy (20 participants in grassroots study):

100% of participants reported experiencing racism.

75% experienced microaggressions and unequal treatment compared to white colleagues.

One participant felt "People seemed to be more emboldened to say racist or Islamophobic things." (After 2024 UK riots)



BARRIERS TO ENTRY, PROGRESSION, AND BELONGING

Participants reported structural barriers that can be transformed into opportunities for growth. Perceptions of advantage for those with family ties or yard connections highlight the need to broaden entry routes and ensure fair progression.

Many described being given more challenging or unreasonable tasks than their peers, and a lack of visible role models contributed to feelings of imposter syndrome and exclusion.

Language barriers and lack of contract literacy were significant issues for international staff, while the absence of inclusive onboarding and career development pathways offer an opportunity to replace feelings of exclusion with belonging and growth.

By addressing these barriers, diversity efforts become sustainable and underrepresented talent can be recruited, retained, and empowered to thrive.

KEY EVIDENCE

Independent Review:

A lack of progression and visibility was a recurring theme in focus groups and interviews, where nearly 60% (32) of participants were from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

“Your name or face needs to fit in.”

Some participants found that banter sometimes crossed the line into racial microaggressions, for example: “Send the Black out [to do a job]”.

Participants highlighted that English-only materials can create barriers for some international staff.

Ethnicity Focus Group (8 participants):

“I have to convince people continuously that my input in the industry is valuable.”

“If you don’t speak good English, you are a target for backhanded jokes and comments.”

Urban Equestrian Academy (20 participants in grassroots study):

100% of respondents said race had impacted their career progression.

75% reported underrepresentation in leadership and lack of development opportunities.



REPORTING AND SAFEGUARDING CHALLENGES

All three reports highlighted widespread mistrust, lack of awareness or confidence in reporting. In some cases, the person responsible for discrimination was also the designated reporting contact. By addressing fears of retaliation, breaches of confidentiality, and inaction, the sport can create transparent processes that empower individuals to speak up with confidence.

Safeguarding and Human Welfare concerns were reinforced particularly in yards, with reports of inappropriate accommodation and lack of protective policies. In some cases, the absence of external oversight and inconsistent HR practices (such as employment contracts and standards) exacerbated these risks.

Far from being challenges alone, these insights point to opportunities to protect participants, enhance trust, and secure the long-term sustainability of the sport as a whole.

KEY EVIDENCE

Independent Review:

25% of survey respondents who experienced discrimination took no action.

Only 15% reported incidents formally.

“I have tried to positively challenge negative banter for many years when I hear it. Often people roll their eyes.”

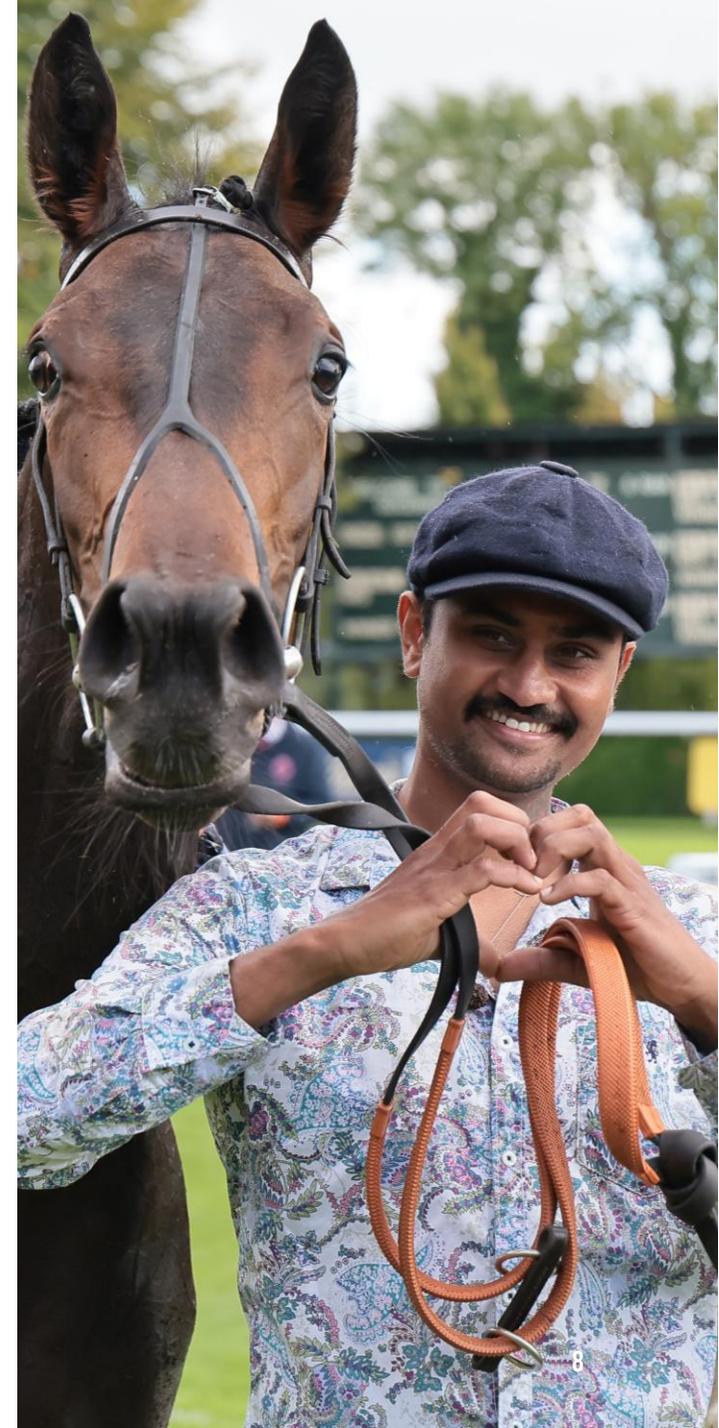
A fear of retaliation or losing employment and accommodation discourages workers from reporting discriminatory behaviour – a situation which is particularly precarious for international workers who rely on their work visa to remain in the UK. Racing is also considered a small industry and therefore people do not call things out as they don't want to be seen as “a troublemaker”.

Ethnicity Focus Group (8 participants):

Some participants described negative experiences with reporting, while others did not engage with the system at all: “You don't know who you're speaking to. You don't know whether they've got the lived experience. And the one time I did report it, it was horrific, and I'll never do it again. To be honest, it was a complete waste of time and confidentiality got lost within it. So my name was brought out. You know, it was just awful.”

Urban Equestrian Academy (20 participants in grassroots study):

50% of participants rated incident handling as “Very Poor”; 20% didn't report at all.



EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

Participants highlighted the emotional toll that discrimination, exclusion, and structural barriers can create, underscoring the importance of building a more supportive environment. They spoke candidly about the psychological impact of working in the industry, including burnout, imposter syndrome, isolation, and frustration. Some questioned whether they could continue in the sport, despite their deep love for horses and racing.

Many described the emotional burden of being “the first” or “the only one” in their space, often expected to represent their entire community without adequate support. Despite their passion, they felt unsupported and undervalued.

Addressing emotional strain is not only vital for individuals, but also both a risk and a strategic opportunity for the industry. When wellbeing is prioritised, people are more likely to thrive, contribute, and remain in the sport. Investing in inclusive practices will build a racing culture that is resilient, productive, and future-facing.

KEY EVIDENCE

Independent Review:

96% of survey respondents said incidents had a negative emotional impact.

Emotional responses included: Angry (26%), Unhappy (16%), Depressed (9%), Excluded (9%), Isolated (8%).

“After challenging directly and giving evidence at a disciplinary hearing I was ostracised by many colleagues.”

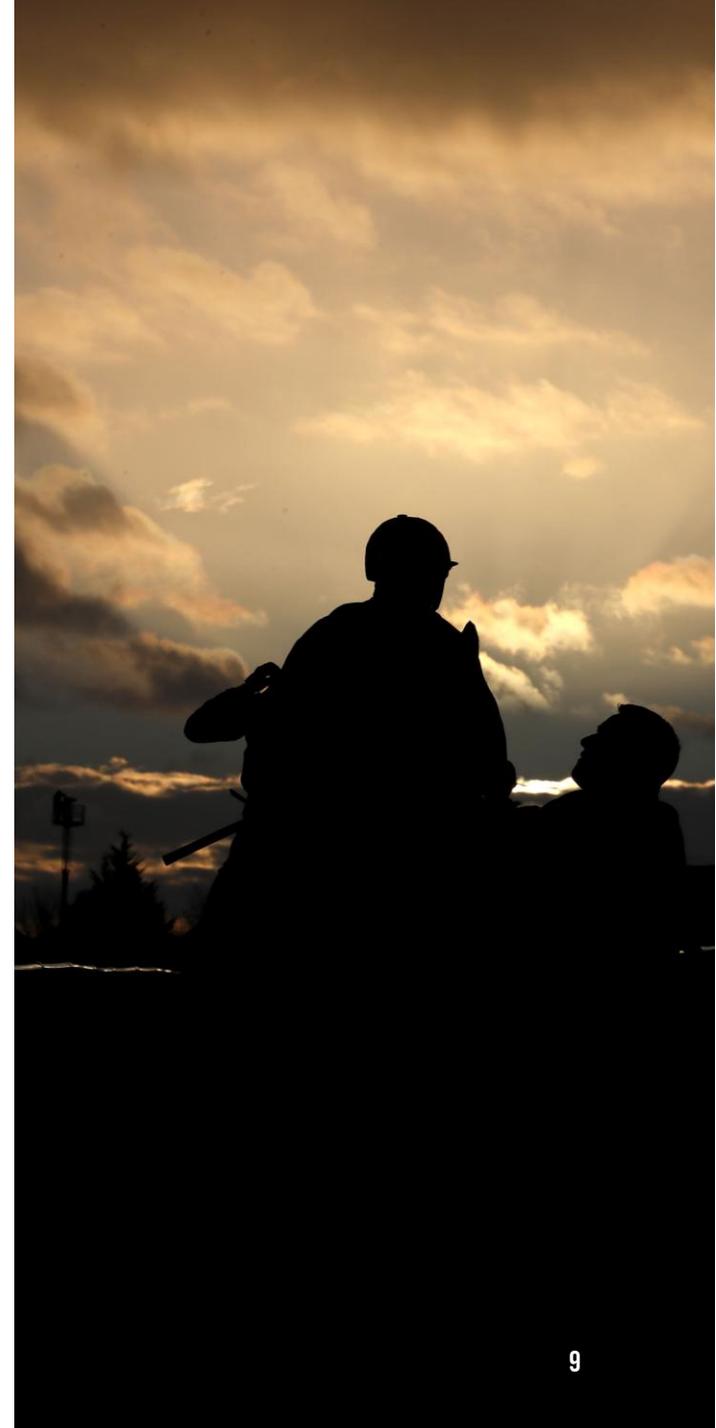
Ethnicity Focus Group (8 participants):

“I’m really frustrated with myself because of what I’ve done... I’ve always been the only Black kid in every situation I’ve been in. And that’s been okay. It’s never been an issue for me at all. But suddenly, the older I get the more ... [I’m] looking back and go, was I true to myself then, or was I just fitting in? Am I being true to myself now, or am I just fitting in?”

Urban Equestrian Academy (20 participants in grassroots study):

One participant shared that they had thought about suicide “on a few occasions because of the way I was treated.”

“I’ve had to endure too much stress to now consider this as a career option.”



PASSION, RESILIENCE, AND THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Despite the challenges, participants consistently expressed a deep and enduring love for horses and for the sport of racing itself. This passion was often the initial draw into the industry, with many describing formative experiences of riding or caring for horses that sparked lifelong commitment. The lifestyle, marked by travel, variety, and a close relationship with nature, was also cited as a unique and valued aspect of working in racing.

Focus groups revealed strong peer support networks and a commitment to improving the sport for future generations. Participants called for inclusive storytelling, visible role models, and leadership-driven change.

Harnessing this passion is essential to building a more inclusive and supportive industry. The resilience and commitment shown by underrepresented individuals, even in the face of adversity, offer racing a unique opportunity: to build an industry that honours their love for the sport with the safety, support, and recognition they deserve.

KEY EVIDENCE

Independent Review:

50% agree that Industry Bodies and the BHA demonstrate that they respect people from different backgrounds.

Ethnicity Focus Group (8 participants):

“Horses were always my life. I love horses, I love the thoroughbred. I love the excitement of finding the next superstar. I keep thinking that every season you're going to see another Frankel. It's what makes me smile when I go racing. I enjoy it. I can have the worst time in the world, but when you go on the racecourse and you see the action, I'll absolutely love it. Forget about everything else that's bothering you. So that's why I love racing.”

“Do I recommend working [in] racing to others? Yes, definitely! I'm constantly on a recruitment drive.”

Urban Equestrian Academy (20 participants in grassroots study):

Despite challenges, participants cited love for horses, lifestyle, and emotional fulfilment.

“We need to see people like us at the top.”



NEXT STEPS: TURNING INSIGHT INTO ACTION

The lived experiences outlined in this report not only highlight urgent issues, but also signal deeper, industry-wide challenges that affect fairness, progression, and wellbeing for everyone.

Addressing these barriers requires systemic change. That's why we're not limiting our response to quick fixes. Instead, we're tackling the foundations of how recruitment, progression, and support work across the sport. This includes:

- Working with the Industry People Team to restructure the entire training and development pipeline, embedding inclusive practices from the ground up.
- Creating a formal, transparent framework for recognising skills and experience, reducing reliance on informal networks and making discrimination easier to identify and address.
- Building trust in reporting and safeguarding systems, so people feel safe to speak up.

These actions have already shaped the sport's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and to ensure accountability and lived experience remain central. In addition, BHA CEO Brant Dunshea will be bringing together industry leaders, cross-sector experts, and people with lived-experience to further guide and champion the development of a specific cultural diversity action plan.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Big changes take collective action. Building an inclusive racing industry isn't just the responsibility of leadership, but something every one of us can influence in our day-to-day work. Here's how you can help:

- **Call out inappropriate behaviour:** Speak up when you see discrimination or exclusion. Silence allows harmful behaviour to persist. If you're unsure how, take a look at this video on [how to be an active bystander](#).
- **Promote inclusion in your team:** Make sure everyone feels welcome, heard and valued, regardless of background.
- **Challenge the status quo:** Don't say "this is how it's done." Instead, ask, "can we do this better?" Inclusion takes effort, but it's worth it when you choose better over easier.
- **Support reporting:** Learn the reporting routes and share information about how to report concerns safely and confidentially, including to the Police and BHA.
- **Champion diversity:** Highlight and celebrate diverse role models in your networks and communications.
- **Model inclusive leadership:** If you're in a leadership role, actively demonstrate inclusive behaviours and hold yourself accountable for creating a safe, respectful environment.



BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE FUTURE, TOGETHER

This research has made clear that change is not only necessary, but also possible. We want to thank everyone who shared their experiences – your honesty and insight have provided a powerful foundation for action. The voices captured in these studies reflect real experiences, and they offer us a roadmap for meaningful change.

We now have an opportunity to shape a sport that reflects the passion, talent, and diversity of everyone who contributes to it. Improving the governance of equality, diversity and inclusion across the sport will play a vital role in ensuring that the actions we take are grounded in lived experience and focused on long-term impact.

We are not only seeking quick fixes but are committed to creating systemic change that is measurable, sustainable, and meaningful. That means addressing root causes, not just symptoms, and building structures that support inclusion at every level of the sport.

With the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Industry Workforce Strategies as our foundation, we can take a joined-up approach to inclusion. Together, we can create a racing industry that is safe, inclusive, and welcoming to all, because we're 'All in the Race.'



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