

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2023-05-YO20	Rising Stars Support CIC
Visit Date	Visited By
25 th July 2023	Victoria Southwell
Overall aim of the funding	
To provide personalised progression support to young people referred from the Youth Offending Team in Croydon in the form of mentoring, employability support, therapy and mixed martial arts sessions.	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Rising Stars Support CIC (RSS) is a Community Interest Company that was established in 2014. RSS is currently in the process of changing status to a CIO, and this would potentially form a project that could be supported via the Spark Programme. RSS employs 5 staff and a number of sessional workers and volunteers.</p> <p>The CEO is one of the founders and sits on the board alongside his Co-founder and four unpaid Trustees and another paid member of staff. The Trustees meet quarterly and bring a range of skills and expertise to RSS including finance, employability, mentoring, the charity sector, looked after young people, social media, and marketing. One Trustee sits on the board as a Youth Ambassador.</p> <p>RSS has a very basic and top line set of strategic objectives that are not tied to specific time lines and are very general. They do have a good Impact Report document for 2019-21 and show within this some intentionality to grow and develop their services. Therefore, the foundations are definitely there to be able to develop a strategic plan that can be used as a guiding document for the future. This would be another area where support from the Cranfield Trust via the Spark Programme would be welcomed.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>At the assessment I met with Shane Bakare (Co-founder) and Omari Faria (Co-founder).</p> <p>Shane is born and raised in the borough of Croydon and uses his lived and professional experience to offer support to young people whose circumstances and situations he closely recognises. Shane is qualified in Business and accounting at degree level and possesses Level 3 in Personal Training and nutrition. Shane is also an ex-professional kickboxer and lifelong martial artist who has acted as a coach and youth worker since 2010. Shane is also spearheading the current conversations taking place with Croydon senior officials re the development of systems and structures affecting young offenders in Croydon.</p> <p>Omari was also born and raised in Croydon and has a background in business which he uses to support the development of employment and business skills in the young people RSS supports.</p>	
Aims and Activities	
Rising Stars Support aim to empower young people and equip them with the confidence, knowledge, and skills they need to thrive in life and work.	

They do this through a combination of mixed martial arts sessions, 1:1 mentoring/progression support and by providing training and employment opportunities to young people aged 11-25 across London. They run four key programmes;

1. Martial arts programme which combines mixed martial arts sessions with personal development, 1:1 mentoring, and progression support designed to take a holistic approach to supporting young people to achieve their career goals;
2. Mentoring and personal development whereby 1:1 mentoring, and group sessions are provided to young people. This is designed to provide young people with support from role models with lived experience relating to the career aspirations and past experiences of participants;
3. Employability workshops provide theoretical and practical support to young people who have had little or no work experience. Workshops fall under four categories – personal branding, job search, CV writing and entrepreneurship; and
4. Fight for your Future which combines mixed martial arts sessions with personal development, 1:1 mentoring and progression support.

Each year RSS works with around 900 young people across their four programmes.

Safeguarding

RSS has a clear Safeguarding policy that has been developed in alignment with the NSPCC's framework and guidelines. The policy was updated over the pandemic to incorporate a different delivery model. The Safeguarding Officer is the Fundraiser who is also the Company Secretary and safeguarding is discussed at every Trustee meeting. Basic child protection awareness training is undertaken by all staff no matter what their role. For staff with direct roles working with young people relevant child protection training is undertaken with an external provider. This is refreshed annually.

The team are currently looking at building their expertise around trauma informed approaches and bringing in some training for staff around this. Identifying signs of exploitation is another area that has been identified for further training. There is currently no budget for this in place though.

Each year there tend to be a couple of concerns that need to be raised externally and this is usually done via a young person's social worker.

At the assessment it was flagged that the policy doesn't contain the contact details of the Safeguarding Officer and it was agreed that RSS would add in a named person who was staff member and a Trustee. This was done immediately after the assessment meeting and the revised version sent over.

Finances

Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ending 30th April 2022 show income of £147,309 against expenditure of £144,343 resulting in a small surplus of £2,966. Net current assets amount to £49,641 and a reserve figure of £50,061 all of which is unrestricted. RSS does not have a formal reserves policy and will be developing this as part of their converting to a CIO. However, as part of their approach to good financial management they aim to hold at least three months operating costs in member's funds, and this is currently being met. RSS is entitled to exception from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show a small increase in income but expenditure remains relatively stable. 100% of expenditure has been secured for the current financial year and over £280k worth of applications that RSS have been shortlisted for are currently being reviewed (including this application). RSS has just received a three-year grant from Paul Hamlyn Foundation towards core costs. Other funding comes from Lambeth Council, Walcott Foundation, Laureus Sport for Good and Sport England.

The financial systems that are in place are appropriate for an organisation the size of RSS. The Chief of Operations oversees day to day management and is supported by the Treasurer who works for Deutsch Bank. The Treasurer provides help with forecasting and numbers, financial planning and strategy and has acted as a mentor to the Chief of Operations as RSS has grown.

Current Situation and need

Croydon is experiencing extreme economic strain and Croydon Council has been declared bankrupt for the third time, affecting provisions for young people and young people at risk of offending or who are already offending. This means that the borough lacks the resources to create appropriate structures in the third sector, leaving it incredibly compromised when compared to neighbouring boroughs like Lambeth, where RSS do similar work.

This grave situation has affected the environment, opportunities, and support structures for marginalized young people in Croydon. As a result of continued lobbying and networking, RSS now meet regularly, with the mayor of the borough Jason Perry, Roisin Madden - Head of Social Services and Emma Carter - Head of Croydon Youth Offending Team to raise issues and provide some ideas and solutions to help solve the huge issues that Croydon face. It is acknowledged that systematic changes have to happen within the third sector so youth/BAME led groups are not made to feel so excluded from important conversations that are usually facilitated by middle aged and middle-class people. It is recognised that there are a very low level of ethnic minorities participating at senior levels of large organizations. This is combined with the lack of male social workers and support staff, highlighting the lack of men from BAME backgrounds, participating in professional youth support at a senior level. This is despite men from BAME backgrounds, being the largest group of users of the YOT and support services for marginalized young people in Croydon. This situation magnifies issues affecting young offenders and deprives them of services that are user-focused and reflective of their needs and values.

RSS conducted research and reviewed learning from previous work with the Croydon YOT that gave insight into the huge differences between engagement, employment, educational aspirations, and behaviour of people from African and Caribbean backgrounds. As a support group led by multi-ethnic and black Afro-Caribbean men/women, RSS are very familiar with the differences that society overlooks and lazily groups together. This knowledge and insight helps to inform the projects that they deliver and ensures that key target groups, such as offenders and ex-offenders receive support that is informed and prioritises the needs of users. This has led to RSS creating support that might be considered unconventional. For example, when RSS introduced MMA as a means of development and engagement in 2014, they were amongst the first to do it and many conventional support agencies and funders questioned their approach. However, this has proved to be an effective way of both bringing young offenders into their programmes and keeping them engaged.

The Youth Offending team and courts lack resources to provide developmental programmes for the young people they come across and since 2018 RSS has been

working closely with Croydon Youth Offending Team. This relationship forms the basis of the application which proposes building on this and providing a formal support programme to referred young people.

RSS will support young offenders in groups and on a 1 -2-1 basis depending on the needs of the young person and information received from the referrer. Support offered will fall into four key areas;

- Personalised progression support and mentoring will be provided through expert 1:1 mentoring (and employment support if applicable) over a prolonged period of time to help create rapport. Despite the aims or outcomes of the support being very dependent on needs and the situation of the young person, overall outcomes will focus on ensuring that they are happier, healthier, and living a more fulfilling life. This will likely involve career support, creating prospects and purpose and ensuring young people have alternative incomes to criminality, making them less likely to reoffend. Mentors are young male professionals with lived experience and/or awareness of the challenges young people face. As well as acting as a good role model, mentors are also people that users feel comfortable speaking to and naturally build long term relationships with (unlike the YOT referral partners who young people know work closely with the police).

-Group/1-2-1 mixed martial arts classes will be provided by leading MMA athletes, coaches and gyms offering sessions in boxing, kickboxing, wrestling and Brazillian Jiu Jitsu. This will develop important transferable skills and increase fitness. Coaches have lived experiences of the challenges young people are experiencing and the young people often receive this tough disciplinary approach very well from martial arts coaches unlike other authorities in their life. Development of martial arts is very dependent on hard work, dedication, discipline and consistency - key components for life (especially for young men who otherwise may lack structure).

-Employability workshops will be run focusing on 4 different areas (Personal branding, C.V writing, job search and entrepreneurship) in order to increase the likelihood of obtaining and sustaining fulfilling careers.

-Therapy through qualified counsellors providing support to young people who request to speak to a therapist or who are recognised as in need of this service.

Expected changes in Year 1

Social Impact Area 1

Individual Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved social skills • Improved self-discipline • Improved team work
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Social Impact Area 2

Health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved mental wellbeing • Improved physical activity • Improved daily routines
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Social Impact Area 3

Employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced career prospects • Enhanced employability skills • Increase in sustained employment
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Request and Budget

RSS is requesting **£44,780** over 2 years for the costs of a mentoring and employment support project.

£22,390 in year 1 - £9,600 (mentoring), £4,800 (Coaching and hall hire), £3,750 (therapy sessions), £1,800 (employability workshops), £1,440 (management and reporting) and £1,000 (project costs).

£22,390 in year 2 - £9,600 (mentoring), £4,800 (Coaching and hall hire), £3,750 (therapy sessions), £1,800 (employability workshops), £1,440 (management and reporting) and £1,000 (project costs).

Conclusion

Rising Stars CIC is a perfect example of a passion for a sport positively colliding with a deep understanding of the challenges that affect many disadvantaged young people which can often lead to their lives derailing. This project is led by two individuals who are not only from the local area but who authentically have deep connections to the kinds of issues that young people growing up there face. These are numerous but Croydon faces an additional challenge as a borough due to the financial situation of the council. This has led to wide spread cuts to services that have devastated the support landscape. Funding has been slashed from organisations delivering vital work leading to the shutting down of projects and extensive reductions in staff numbers across core statutory teams working with challenging families and young people.

This has left gaps that are not being filled elsewhere, leading to young people who were already vulnerable and at risk quickly moving towards negative outcomes that are increasingly leading to criminal convictions. For this group of young people, who are at a tipping point of either being supported to move away from offending behaviour or fully embracing it, the options to support them are minimal. That is why a project such as the one being proposed by Rising Stars Support is vitally important.

Shane and Omari have recognised that the present situation in Croydon also presents an opportunity to place the needs and views of young people front and centre with key council personnel. And they have built up an impressive set of strategic relationships with high level Council staff and other important stakeholders across the borough.

We have seen in a project that we funded last year in HMP Magilligan in Northern Ireland, that mixed martial arts can be an effective way of engaging with young people who have challenging backgrounds and been involved in the criminal justice system. It can be an attractive hook to getting young people to access services and then used as a way of building a set of key life skills to support the young person's journey towards positive outcomes. RSS have shown through their work to date that they do this really well across a wide group of young people with a range of needs and challenges. In their everyday work they come across young people with criminal convictions who they support to avoid a return to offending behaviour and their previous focused projects on this group highlights both the needs for this work and the difference it can make.

One of the other huge assets that RSS has is that it is a black led organisation. Both Shane and Omari exemplify the concept of positive role models. They are from the local area and embody the possibilities that are open to young people. This enables them to both connect with participants on their projects but also command respect and admiration. Both admit that they had the benefit of stable and supportive parents and families but they still had to resist the pull of a variety of temptations that ultimately led to criminal activity. Their peers often ended up in prison or worse outcomes and this has enabled them to develop a programme of support that is rooted in deep understanding of needs, what works and where the gaps are in the wider eco-system. Whilst they may not be able to plug them all they absolutely do provide a safety net for many young people who engage with Rising Stars Support.

This is an exciting proposal due to the activities being offered and the leadership of the organisation and what they stand for. Already they have been linked with our project in Derry to make some MMA links and connections and this highlighted a real

appetite that they have to grow, learn and develop. This will make for a really interesting addition to the portfolio and I am confident that not only will they bring a lot to the table but go away with deeper knowledge and understanding of what works too.

This is exactly the kind of proposal that I was hoping we would receive through this funding opportunity. Hopefully by funding this work the dialogue that Rising Stars Support are having with key council personnel will lead to a deeper relationship that could result in a more formal relationship. This grant will allow them to build their evidence base more and most importantly provide support to a group of young people who are likely to miss out without this project taking place.

The budget for the project did have some gaps and the capacity to invest in enhancing their safeguarding practices is limited due to funding. With that in mind I would suggest increasing the requested amount to include additional funding of £1,500 each year to cover this and an additional £1,200 in year two to accommodate increased costs of 5%. Therefore, I strongly recommend awarding a grant for the increased amount of £48,980.

Recommended Priority Rating

Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High
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