

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-11-YO38	Open Lens Media CIC
Visit Date	Visited By
26 <sup>th</sup> February 2023	Victoria Southwell (Zoom)
Overall aim of the funding	
To provide engaging employability pathway support and employment opportunities to Black and Mixed Heritage young men within the criminal justice system in the West Midlands.	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Open Lens Media CIC (OLM) is a Community Interest Company that was established in 2013. It employs five staff and three freelance facilitators. The CEO is supported by a board of four Directors, the CEO is also a Director. The skills that Directors bring to OLM include education and SEN expertise, community engagement, behavioural management, safeguarding, GDPR and finance. Directors meet quarterly and receive regular training to ensure that the board is continually upskilled. An external consultant recently supported board development and undertook an audit to ensure that there was the right mix of knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>OLM developed a business plan that ran from 2021-24 but this needed to be rewritten due to the impact of the pandemic on the work of the organisation. The new business plan breaks down activity into three phases and still runs until the end of 2024 but has significantly revised targets that much more realistically match the current position of the organisation. OLM is currently in phase 2 of the plan which breaks key operational objectives into five areas; growth and development, partnerships and contracts, marketing, recruitment and products and services. Beneath these five objectives sit eight strategic goals. The plan has been developed with the support of the Directors.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>At the assessment I met with Daina Anderson (CEO and Founder), Valerie Spence (Director/Chair) and Phil Rutherford (Strategic Lead for Walsall Youth Justice Service).</p> <p>Daina set up OLM in 2013 after a career in tv production. After moving back to Birmingham to work for the BBC she came to the realisation that she was void of purpose and wanted to pursue something meaningful that would combine her desire to do something linked to community development and production. She was linked to UnLtd to do some work for them and ended up receiving funding to set up OLM. Much of her approach is influenced from having been a BBC mentor and paired with a young Black girl from an estate in west London. In 2011 she ran her first programme, it coincidentally ran at the same time as riots that were sweeping across the country, and she managed to engage 20 young people for six weeks on a course in creative production skills. She quickly became aware though that the programme provided them with an opportunity to talk about how they felt about themselves and OLM was borne. Daina is a leader who believes in empowering all of those around her and she applies this approach as passionately to staff as she does to beneficiaries. She is aware of her limitations and the need to bring people into OLM, especially at Director level, to help her run the organisation. She has a clear vision though and challenges herself to always make sure that the offer OLM provides is relevant and appropriate.</p>	

Valerie joined OLM as a Director in 2021 and is a Director of Finance for Barnardo's. She has previously worked for Birmingham City Council in senior finance roles and brings to OLM a high degree of financial oversight and deep levels of understanding about contracts and financial planning.

### **Aims and Activities**

Open Lens Media aims to improve the lives of children and young people in the West Midlands by providing opportunities, activities, mentoring and support to further their interests by working with their families, other agencies and relevant professionals.

They deliver activities and projects in five key areas;

- Educational courses
- Community engagement projects that are often bespoke and designed as per the needs of participants – often commissioned by schools
- School holiday programmes
- Training and consultancy – delivering sessions for staff teams who are engaging with communities that are hard to reach' and,
- Employability Pathway Programmes.

Over the course of a year OLM tend to work with between 80-100 young people.

### **Safeguarding**

OLM has a clear Safeguarding policy that covers both children and vulnerable adults and applies to both face to face and online work with beneficiaries. It is reviewed annually and was last done in January 2023 and some amendments made to strengthen the policy. Clear processes are outlined in terms of highlighting definitions of abuse and steps that need to be taken to take action. Concerns that need to be externally escalated are raised through a referral to Children's Advice and Support Services or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

There are four Designated Safeguarding Leads within OLM, the CEO, Lead Facilitator, a senior Facilitator and a Director. All have received enhanced Safeguarding training. All staff and Directors are DBS checked and staff receive both induction and annual refresher training. Risk assessments for events and projects are undertaken and where required for working with specific individuals. As most referrals are from other agencies though risk assessments have usually been done elsewhere prior to OLM working with a young person.

A Learning Management System that was installed during the pandemic tracks concerns and actions that have been taken as a result.

### **Finances**

Draft unaudited Financial Statements for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022 show income of £140,460 against expenditure of £133,744 resulting in a small surplus of £6,716. Net current assets amount to £9,723 and this is the reserve figure all of which is unrestricted. The reserves policy of OLM is to retain between 3-6 months running costs and currently this is not being achieved. In 2021 a significant deficit was recorded due to the impact of the pandemic on several payment by results contracts that OLM held. This caused them to need to use £46,012 of reserves leaving £3,007, which grew in 2022 thanks to a small surplus.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show a small growth in income for 2023 and 2024. For the current financial year 80% of income has been secured and applications have been made for shortfall. It is likely that additional unrestricted income will also be generated through activities and new commissions.

Should this not be needed to cover any deficit then it will be able to be used to grow levels of unrestricted reserves. Secured funding comes from Children in Need, Walsall Youth Justice Team and Walsall Council.

Good financial systems are in place and the CEO manages finances on a day-to-day basis. She is heavily supported by the Chair of the Board of Directors, who is a Finance Director for a large charity. Together they produce an annual budget, cash flow projections and quarterly management accounts. Since joining the Board this additional layer of financial expertise has led to extra layers of scrutiny and information being added to processes. This has been especially important in terms of ensuring that OLM bounces back from the impact of the pandemic on funding and operations.

### **Current Situation and need**

An HM Inspectorate of Probation report released in October 2021 highlights that within the numbers of children and young people involved in the criminal justice system and YOS caseloads, a disproportionate amount are of Black or Mixed Heritage. They are also recognised as having a higher probability of being remanded in custody and receiving longer custodial sentences than their white peers.

When investigating their profile and needs the report also found that considerable numbers of Black and Mixed Heritage boys and young men most probably come from the most deprived areas, surrounded by high levels of violence that impacts their world view from a young age. They will have most likely experienced discrimination or been excluded from school, been affected by criminal exploitation, or have a disability or special education needs that have been unmet.

Walsall has a serious issue of this over representation and for the past year OLM has been working with Black and Mixed Heritage boys and young men referred from Walsall Youth Justice Team, to address their needs and support them into meaningful employment, training or reengagement in education. Working with this group shone a light on the fact that prior to conviction, many of their individual needs were missed or went unmet by mainstream services. These were then exacerbated by their time within the criminal justice system and as such, when they had spent their conviction many, if not all, were not ready for employment or able to hold down a position due to their complex needs. This was further compounded by difficulties in building trusting relationships due to having been let down at every stage in their lives previously.

OMG wants to continue focusing on these specific issues through their Pathways Employability Programme, which will help to secure meaningful jobs and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Support will be targeted in key areas and include literacy, communication and soft skills development, building confidence and aspirations through 1-2-1 personal progression support coaching, supporting behavioural and special education needs and securing and sustaining meaningful employment through placement and employment coaching support. 16 hours of guided 1-2-1 employability learner support over 12 weeks alongside 5 hours of coaching support to support wellbeing needs will take the young person through either an Employability Pathway or a Personal Progression Pathway. Those most ready for employment at assessment will undertake the Employability Pathway and those identified as being furthest away from employment will undertake the Personal Progression Pathway before moving onto the Employability Pathway. Employment opportunities in the creative sector/industries will be sourced and OLM already have links to schemes such as BBC Training Academy and Channel 4 Skills alongside many private businesses. Outside of the five hours of coaching support the young person will also be offered additional support to meet any other needs they present with or which come up whilst they are on the programme.

<p>Once a young person has achieved a job, they will then be offered three months post-employment support to ensure that the new job is successful and that the young person does well in it. This support will also extend to the employer. OLM plans to work with 20 young men each year via this project which will run alongside a Walsall Youth Justice Team funded project aimed at Black and Mixed Heritage young men who have not received a conviction but are known to be at risk of getting one.</p>
<p><b>Expected Key Achievements in Year 1</b></p>
<p>EKA 1</p>
<p>70% of the 20 young men who take part in the programme will access work experience or volunteering opportunities.</p>
<p>EKA 2</p>
<p>85% of participants will move into education, training or employment at the end of the programme.</p>
<p>EKA 3</p>
<p>Participants will demonstrate a change in their offending behaviour.</p>
<p><b>Request and Budget</b></p>
<p>OLM is requesting <b>£55,666</b> over 2 years to fund an Employment Pathway Project.</p> <p><b>£27,833 in year 1</b> - £11,493 (Project Manager salary), £6,560 (Youth Outreach Worker salary), £3,600 (Admin), £2,880 (Lead Facilitator salary), £1,400 (venue hire), £700 (refreshments), £700 (travel) and £500 (printing and marketing).</p> <p><b>£27,833 in year 2</b> - £11,493 (Project Manager salary), £6,560 (Youth Outreach Worker salary), £3,600 (Admin), £2,880 (Lead Facilitator salary), £1,400 (venue hire), £700 (refreshments), £700 (travel) and £500 (printing and marketing).</p>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>
<p>Open Lens Media is a vibrant and exciting organisation led by an exceptional founder who has built an organisation that has a clear focus and meets a clear need. This is an organic organisation that understand the needs of the young people it supports well and has worked out how to connect with a group of young people who have proved difficult to engage with.</p> <p>This proposal is built out of some initial work with Black and Mixed Heritage young offenders that has seen some impressive results. These range from both the positive end outcomes achieved by the young people to significant achievements linked to getting young people to regularly attend sessions and be willing to open up about their issues and accept support. The delivery team has been grown and nurtured by Daina, the CEO, to give people who may not have been able to naturally achieve them, opportunities to grow and develop. Whilst clearly understanding her role and responsibilities as CEO, I was impressed by how the staffing structure actually felt quite flat and equal. The staff are clearly empowered to share their opinions and ideas, all of which felt valued and listened to. This approach is then replicated with project participants which feels really empowering. As a Black led organisation OLM is leading the way in finding really creative and innovative ways to both build strong relationships with Black young men but also enable them to open up about the issues that are getting in the way of them moving on with their lives and leaving offending behind.</p> <p>At the assessment I also met the Head of Walsall Youth Justice Service and the strength of the relationship between the two organisations was evident. This will be a crucial element to the project and buy in from that team, and from colleagues at Probation and local prisons and YOIs will be likely due to this existing partnership.</p>

Media is an engaging and interesting platform for young people and OLM have skilfully developed projects that tap into this and use different approaches to help young people express themselves, learn new skills and develop their confidence and aspirations. Work that currently takes place with young people at risk of offending that is funded by the Youth Justice Service has shown how effective this kind of project can be. This funding would allow OLM to develop this specifically into the young offender arena and target those who are at risk of reoffending.

OLM is a small organisation but feels very authentic and rooted in the local area. The team are deeply committed to helping young people secure outcomes that go beyond just enabling them to have self-expression, building confidence and raising aspirations. They see this as a vital starting point and the building blocks that will lead to a move away from a life of offending and the carousel of custodial sentences. They understand their young people well and are well placed to deliver a really exciting and innovative project that will provide opportunities for young offenders who are Black or of Mixed Heritage that current don't exist. This would be an interesting project anyway but this focus on BAME communities makes it unique and an absolute priority.

At the assessment meeting we discussed beneficiary numbers as these had not been clear in the application. The initial numbers that were discussed felt a little high and I expressed that I had a concern that it might not be possible to achieve these based on the kind of beneficiary numbers other projects tend to work with. After discussion it was agreed that these would be revised to a slightly more conservative number to ensure that the team are not put under pressure to achieve target numbers that might not be realistic.

Daina was very honest in the assessment about the impact that the pandemic had on OLM and their growth plans. These have had to be scaled back and are realistic for the current climate. There is still ambition to grow though and the support that Daina has identified through the Spark Programme around Board development will certainly help them with their next steps on this journey. The focus on Black and Mixed Heritage young men and their use of media to support them will also bring expertise to the wider grantee cohort that will be of huge value so this will be a good addition to the portfolio.

Therefore, I would recommend support with a grant of £55,666 as requested.

**Recommended Priority Rating**

Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High
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