

Culture Exchange Programme 2023

social|ARK



FOUNDATION
FOR FUTURE
LONDON

WESTFIELD | EAST BANK
CREATIVE
FUTURES FUND





A report by Social Ark

About Social Ark

Set up in 2015, Social Ark is a multi-award-winning charity that empowers young people from under-resourced communities to develop social businesses- guided by their own lived experiences. We also run youth programs enabling school-age children to take part in meaningful social action. We provide a standout programme of workshops, mentoring and personalised support that enables the young people we work with to focus on their assets and talents. In addition to this, we provide training and consultancy services to organisations that share our values.

We've created the #SocialArkFamily, which consists of our mentors, supporters and young people who have been through our programmes.

Our Mission

Our mission is to start a ripple effect of positive change by building on young people's lived experience and talent with the skills, confidence, and support to own and run their own social enterprises.

Our Vision

Our vision is for an equal and equitable society where young people are celebrated and championed for what they want to achieve in life.

Our Values

Our values are at the heart of everything we do. Inclusiveness, equality, equity, trust, respect, and empowerment for all, regardless of race, religion, class, or social barriers.

Learn.

Love.

Live.

social **ARK**

BACKGROUND

In 2022, the Foundation for Future London (FFL) announced a tender for a Culture Exchange Project, as part of its Westfield East Bank Creative Futures Fund, backed by Westfield Stratford City (WSC). Part of the brief was that they wanted to work with an applicant to co-design and facilitate a pilot aimed at connecting young people, arts, cultural and innovation organisations, and communities in East London and two or three other places in the UK, to create a new dialogue for learning, training and employment.

Foundation for Future London is an independent charity with a strategic focus on arts, culture, and heritage, working as a catalyst for equitable regeneration of the East London boroughs of Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. The Foundation supports local people and communities to benefit from learning, training and employment opportunities delivered by our fundraising and grant-making operations.

Working with Westfield Stratford City, who generously donated £10 million, the five-year programme 'Westfield East Bank Creative Futures Fund' (WEBCFF) was developed to do exactly this. Westfield Stratford City has been a catalyst for the regeneration of East London. As one of the first investors within the London 2012 Olympic legacies, by 2027 it's estimated that £25bn will be invested in the area, and the continued commitment has been shown through this programme.

THE PILOT PROJECT

The pilot was inspired by and responded to the UK Levelling Up agenda, making the case that East London is in need of continued boosting in terms of job opportunities, skills development, and infrastructure investment. FFL was looking for inclusive, innovative and creative proposals that could create a learning programme focusing on education, training and employment in the arts, culture and placemaking. The Social Ark team felt that this project and working with FFL and WSC really spoke to them. We knew that this could be a massive opportunity for Social Ark and young East London social entrepreneurs. Working collaboratively with five alumni social enterprises, we came up with a plan.



Underpinned by our shared values around equity, equality, respect, empowerment and lived experience, we wanted to explore culture, heritage, and the arts through the lens of working-class communities. As social entrepreneurs, we wanted to use the social enterprise business model within our exploration and journey. From experience, we know the power of young people using lived experience to address inequality and what that can lead to in terms of employment opportunities for young people from underrepresented backgrounds. We were confident that our partners, who had all been through the Social Ark award-winning social enterprise learning programmes and had also developed their own organisations through other WEBCFF funding and support, were ready to make an impact both locally and nationally. Social Ark and the alumni partners were thrilled to win the tender and set out to work with three working-class, lived experience-led organizations across Birmingham, Sheffield and Preston. To ensure the young participants were best supported, we designed the project with FFL to ensure partners worked with their own small groups and were able to offer support, guidance, encouragement and mentoring outside of the programme sessions. To ensure equal participation, every young person received an iPad and £500 paid work experience.

socialARK

PARTNERS

Consortium lead partner, Social Ark is a charity that helps young people set up social enterprises guided by their lived experience. Lisa Stepanovic MBE– CEO, Tiwa King – Project Manager, Moses Adeyemi – Lead Facilitator www.socialark.co.uk

Calling4Gr8ness is a social enterprise focused on supporting care-experienced young people. Founded by Johanan Walker, guided by her experience of the foster care system. www.calling4gr8ness.org Joined by young people Fatima, Aliasha, and Shawn.

Sirlute is a creative charity that delivers free creative learning, mentoring and training to at-risk East London youth. Led by lived experience leader CEO JR Josephs and team leader Shamuna. www.sirlute.com Joined by young people Jae, Tapuwa and Mohammed.

Skaped is an activist charity that works with young people to educate them about community building and human rights through the creative arts. Led by CEO Sandy AbdelRahman and team leader Erin. www.skaped.org Joined by young people Lydia, Ioana and Bza.

Truce N Train is an inclusive fitness and mentoring programme that supports at-risk young people in East London. @TruceNTrain Headed up by Brogan Nathaniel Brooks. Joined by young people Omaree, Cherome and Sway.

XConversation is a podcast platform that champions ex-offenders, providing creative work experience opportunities to at-risk youth. Led by lived experienced CEO Zak and team leader Rony. Joined by young people Daniella, Nigel and Mo, as well as David, Dejohn, Aritas and Gianni. www.xconversation.co.uk/

ALFY is a Sheffield-based social enterprise that delivers learning experiences for young people. Led by Ahmed Al-Aagam and MCNige, who worked with Reach Up Youth @reachupyouth. Headed up by Safiya Saeed. Joined by young people, Shareen, Sami, Tyrone, Adbul-Malik, Najiah and Larayab. <https://aalfy.org/>

Birmingham Says No is one of Birmingham's biggest platforms against knife crime & youth violence. Led by Rachel Warren and Dee Kelly. Joined by young people Aaliyah, Raine, Tia-Jade, William and Avneet. @birminghamsaysno

Strive to Thrive is a Preston-based social enterprise that empowers, inspires and supports young people to address issues that directly impact them. Led by criminal justice professional Tasha Cowperthwaite. @s2tlancs Joined by young people Chloe, Mercedes and Ray.

THE PROGRAMME

For the project to be successful and to guarantee engagement, it had to be underpinned by codesign. Through our early interactions and Zoom sessions, it became clear that the young people were curious about social change and inspired by the Social Ark team and lived experience partners, and they related to the young leaders. The mantra soon became “*if they can do it, so can I!*”.

In the spirit of true codesign, we went back to the drawing board and came up with the idea of weekly social enterprise and self-development Zoom sessions. This was delivered by Social Ark and notable leaders, including Dr Neil Prem, David McQueen, and Marissa McCallam.



We introduced bid and proposal writing, and the young people learned how to align their projects with the funders' outcomes. Participants submitted applications and were awarded £1000 grants to test their ideas.



VISITS

It was important for the project visits to be designed and led by the young people. They decided what was important for the group to see and what they wanted us to learn, know and feel about their city. Young people worked with their lead partner to host the incoming groups.

PRESTON

Our first exchange visit was to Preston. Hosted by Strive 2 Thrive, Preston lead partner Tasha Cowperthwaite and Chloe, Ray and Mercedes designed a memorable day. We arrived at Preston Mainland Station, and it was non-stop from the moment we got there. We stopped by Red Rose Recovery and learned about their work supporting people overcoming addiction. The young people quickly picked up the difference in accents and dialect, and they had fun learning the different word meanings and traditional food favourites, including 'butter pies'. We went to the annual cultural mela, where a diverse range of arts and cultures was on display. The young people compared the event to similar events in London. What really stood out to them was the lack of police presence, and that was so different to anything they'd experienced. They said that Preston felt much safer compared to London.

After a coach tour of the city, we visited local allotments and learned about other social enterprises and community organising. We were treated to outdoor pizza making at the community hub and listened to inspirational stories from local social entrepreneurs who, despite a lack of funding and opportunities, had gone on to set up successful enterprises, including Mandela Yoga, Soundskill, Beanstalk and Let's Grow Preston. We had the privilege of meeting community champion Dot, who is an award-winning community leader with a track record spanning decades. Mayor Yakub Patel also joined us. Let's Grow Preston and Preston young people created goodie bags for us – inside was a booklet for us to keep along with real Lancashire Eccles Cakes.



social ARK

PRESTON

We heard first-hand about the lack of opportunities for working-class people in Preston. Many of the London cohort reflected on this because even though they were from under-resourced and unequal communities, they were able to access opportunities in the creative and learning sectors.

“I loved this trip and getting to know other people from the cohort. I’ve never been to this part of England before; today has really brought the Zoom sessions to life” – East London participant



Everyone loved the Preston trip; the group built deeper connections, and the other partners were able to learn what it takes to host such a large group. Everyone was exhausted (in a good way), so a massive takeaway for the other partners was to plan overnight trips.



“I feel like we don’t get enough recognition for what we do up North, unlike the bigger communities in London” – Preston Participant

SHEFFIELD

Our Sheffield weekender was co-designed by the entire Culture Exchange cohort. The weekend allowed us to truly experience the richness of Sheffield's community spirit and diverse culture.

On arrival, we explored the Sheffield Museum, Botanic Garden and the annual exhibition that consisted of portraits of diverse cultural leaders within Sheffield. It was clear that this event was something locals were proud of, from Polish costumes to traditional African dress, the exhibitors told stories of heritage and culture and the belonging they felt to Sheffield, the place they call home.

We visited Reach Up Youth (RUY), run by Safia Saeed. RUY has leadership programmes, a brotherhood for boys and a sisterhood for girls. The young people work their way up and peer mentor the newer members. Leadership comes with status and responsibility, and the newcomers work towards being young leaders and role models themselves. We all enjoyed traditional Yemeni food. On our walk to the restaurant, young people noticed that the area differed from Sheffield City Centre. One RUY participant told us that on the same road, there are gang wars, stabbings and shootings, showing how the area is similar to under-resourced London neighbourhoods – “A bit like the difference between the Olympic Park and a council estate in Newham”. It was an eye-opening moment for many, who reflected on the need for social businesses and lived experienced leaders.



The community street party is an annual event. Ahmed shared that a group of neighbours get together to run a community ‘potluck’, whereby everyone contributes food, plays games, listens to music, runs activities, and socialises. We took part in a t-shirt-making workshop and listened to live folk music. What stood out was how friendly people were. With no public toilets, locals allowed us to come into their homes – many of the London young people told us that this “[could never happen in East London.](#)”

SHEFFIELD

Next stop was the Aalfy headquarters, for a panel discussion and food. The panellists talked about the lived experiences that led them to do the work they do, which, on reflection, was very similar to the challenges grassroots East London community leaders have. On hearing about the impact of knife crime, a young person from East London commented, “In my local area, a knife drop-off bin was overflowing with knives as they have not been collected in years”.

Panellists explained how much of a struggle it was to secure funding, and our young people started to see a pattern in the Northern organisations not having access to the opportunities they had in East London. Over Caribbean food, the group danced it off, listening to and enjoying old-school hip-hop. We stayed in a local IBIS hotel.



On Day 2, we had a walking tour of the city. We also took a tram ride, something we don't have in East London. We learnt so much from snooker at the legendary Crucible Theatre to the world-famous sports centre, The English Institute of Sport Sheffield, and street art along the way. The day ended nicely at Mums United, where we were greeted with cake and music to celebrate the upcoming Eid; some young people enjoyed Henna hand painting.

“Two days in Sheffield was a real eye-opener. I don't think I've walked up so many hills in my life. The people are warm and friendly. I've loved learning about local heritage and culture and how regeneration impacts communities, just like it is in East London”.



BIRMINGHAM

The Culture Exchange days in Birmingham saw us tour the city. Birmingham Says No (BSN) founders Rachell Warren and Dee Kelly, along with Will, Tia, Aaliyah and Raine, introduced us to local life. We visited the Lighthouse Young People's Centre, where we met other young entrepreneurs making and selling products. One entrepreneur talked about how his business helped him stay on the right track after a troubled youth. Our young people resonated with his relatable story. We also had the opportunity to speak with Simon Foster, who is the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner. We learned that his role is elected and chosen by the community. We talked about police accountability when things go wrong and asked some tough questions. It was good to learn from the commissioner, who sees himself as the bridge between the police and the community. BBC Radio Birmingham interviewed the Social Ark team to learn more about London life and our way of dealing with community challenges.



We visited the Legacy Centre of Excellence to view the late Mark Carroll's Blue Series exhibition, featuring faces who were key players in the civil rights movement. Mark Carroll was a local Birmingham artist.
[@markcarrollarts](https://www.instagram.com/markcarrollarts)



Our trip to Birmingham ended with us attending the annual Black Talent Awards, celebrating Black talent from multiple industries across the UK. One of our own East London social entrepreneurs was also up for an award. Evening dresses, bow ties and tuxedos were the evening's dress code. The group partied the night away, bonding and strengthening friendships.

"It's the first time I've ever been to anything like this. I've loved getting to know the group and building friendships, and my confidence is sky-high right now".

THE LONDON EXCHANGE WEEKEND

The Culture Exchange in London saw cities come together for a weekend of creative learning and activities. Designed by the East London partners and young people, we wanted to make sure the group saw East London through our eyes and experiences. Our base for the weekend was the DoveTail Community Centre on the Carpenters Estate, a stone's throw from the hotel where other partners and young people were staying. We commissioned Ioana from Artizine, part of the East London cohort, to deliver her specialist zine-making workshop focused on culture. Through the online Zoom sessions and one-to-one mentoring, the young people had been practising their presentations in preparation for the London weekend. They would give their presentations in front of the whole group and guests Maria Adebawale-Schwarte, former CEO of Foundation for Future London, Alyson Hodgkinson, Head of Sustainability Westfield, Dr Joy White, academic and author, and Social Ark CEO Lisa Stepanovic MBE. The young people presented their business ideas and received encouraging feedback.

Dr Joy White facilitated a thought-provoking workshop that explored the ever-changing East End, with a particular focus on how those changes impact young people from less privileged backgrounds. Thanks go to Dr Joy White, who signed copies of her latest book, *Terraformed: Young Black Lives in the Inner City*, for the whole group. The group then headed over to Hackney Bridge for an evening of local food and dancing.



THE LONDON EXCHANGE WEEKEND

Day two of the weekend saw the young people split into smaller groups and go on a 'culture hunt' through Brick Lane's Sunday market. We used East London cockney slang and dialect to find related items. The groups had fun as they showcased their interpretations of each word.

"I've loved getting to know everyone, I've made friends, and these two days have shown me what's possible. I'm determined to use the skills I've learnt to set up my own youth organisation in East London"

We finished the hot, sunny day on the Go Boats in Canary Wharf, having fun on the water. The young people also got to see the surrounding area, including under-resourced social housing estates, opposite and literally metres away from the wealth of Canary Wharf. The young people described the weekend as 'one to remember', with many thinking about how they could keep these friendships alive. They seemed determined to ensure the legacy of the programme continues.



THE IMPACT



As a result of the programme, **three** young people have re-started further education, and **one** has gone on to university. **Five** have gained sustainable employment. The remainder are exploring their own creative development. **Five** have secured places on the award-winning Social Ark Step Up entrepreneur programme. All participants have raised aspirations for their futures.

WHAT SOME OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAID



"Saturday was magic! How nice that you all embraced little old Preston and didn't see it as a step-down from London being the bigger city."



"My confidence has increased so much. I have never pitched in my life. I feel so much more able to meet new people and talk about my ideas."



"This programme has taught me lots about culture and helped my confidence. Now, with the support that I've got, I'm able to speak to other people, ask for feedback, and improve in so many areas."



"Having the iPad was great – it made it easier to attend the Zoom meetings."

"Getting this grant is life-changing, I am now setting up my own social enterprise."

"I'm inspired by the learning, I have now gone back to education".

"I'm excited by the legacy of this project and my future connections with East London".



"I've accessed opportunities I've not had before. Now I feel like I have a family. I haven't experienced anything like this before."



"I've built on my personal development. I'm now more confident. Making friends gets harder as you get older – I've now got new friends from this programme."



The session with David McQueen stood out most – I left that session with the feeling that I can do whatever I want."



"It's a huge life-changing opportunity to explore culture, that you don't want to miss. You can gain ideas to change your life."

"I have met so many great people, I'm now being supported to make my own music EP".

"Getting the 5k and learning support has really taken my business to the next step."

"It was great to have some feedback from a big organisation like Westfield".

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER



“This project met many of the fund’s outcomes, including increased diversity in the creative and entrepreneurial sectors, increased employment, gaining technical and creative skills, growing networks and awareness of opportunities, and gaining confidence in their potential. The young people are now able and equipped to act as agents of change across their communities.

We’d like to say a massive and heartfelt thanks to the Foundation for Future London and Westfield Stratford City for supporting us and believing in our young people and what we set out to achieve. Also, thanks go to the consortium partners and all the exchange day hosts, facilitators, and contributors who embraced this truly special project. Thanks also to filmmaker Marlon Rouse Tavares, who captured the wonderful moments we shared. This project would not have been possible without our brilliant young participants. We appreciate you all; thank you for trusting us and sharing your experiences with us. We look forward to staying connected with you.

– Lisa Stepanovic MBE, Social Ark.

2023



Culture



Exchange



2023





