

**TAWANDA KAJAWU M727588**

**YOUTH INNOVATION FELLOWSHIP REPORT**

**Organisation Name:** Policy Centre for African Peoples

Website: [www.pcap.org.uk](http://www.pcap.org.uk)

**Introduction**

In January 2020 I started a placement as a Youth Innovation Fellow for the Policy Centre for African Peoples. The Organization is a youth-based charity based in Brixton, London which aims to support African and disadvantaged minority communities with avenues to improve their lives through education and engagement. I signed a six-month contract to work with the organisation in order to gain meaningful work experience in fulfilment of my Work-based Unit Module. I was able to commence the placement after going through the verification process of applying for screening with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and having the necessary paperwork completed between the organization and Middlesex University.

Upon arrival I went through an intensive induction program to familiarise myself with the organization's working processes and protocols. I was given an access card and key to the organization and allocated a desk and working space. I was also given access to the computer and electronic systems and given an organizational email address. I had to report to the organization every Wednesday for a full day and would engage in briefings with the Director and my supervisor weekly every Monday.

My role as a Youth Innovation Fellow entailed familiarising myself with different projects that were running and gaining a working knowledge of their functions and target groups. The building I worked also houses many other youth organisations in all its 6 Floors. Every Wednesday a multi-team networking platform would meet for discussions around joint working and cooperation. This is a networking initiative which creates a space to interact with various professionals in the Lambeth Youth Sector stakeholders. I found this to be great opportunity to learn and understand the different youth programs being carried out in the City of London and to gain a good understanding of the challenges, successes and future goals. These meetings promote an environment where different organizations have successfully engaged in project partnerships and coalitions to deliver excellent ventures in the youth sector.

## **Context of Locality**

The young people accessing this project mainly come from areas within Lambeth and Wandsworth. Many of these young people reported a history of multiple social problems which include involvement in crime, gang activity, depravation and high levels of unemployment. Previous involvement with the criminal justice systems and forensics histories hindered some with perceived unemployability. Most came from low income households and reported they lacked role models, mentorship, guidance, or the skills and confidence essential to access mainstream opportunities and employment. They also reported personal experiences of marginalisation and felt affected by stereotypes.

## **Organizational focus areas**

Education is a key focus area of the organization as many recipients left school without formal qualifications or do not progress to tertiary education. Help is offered in identifying places that can offer them relevant formal training. In-house workshops also offer training with assertiveness and public speaking; and identify resources required to upskill and offer personal development opportunities.

Leadership development is another key priority. Role modelling and mentoring opportunities are identified so recipients are offered practical work experience to experience leadership roles and opportunities.

Social engagement is paramount and the organisation nurtures and encourage young people to become agents of positive social change. Participation in community ventures is encouraged making participants feel valued and included.

## **Project Involvement**

I participated in the planning and setting up of a programme called *BeFit4Life*, a venture that promotes fitness and wellbeing. It exists in other parts of the country, offering extracurricular activities such as personal training, healthy eating and nutrition, exercise and weight loss programmes, stress management, life coaching and yoga. It also offers wellbeing courses for people experiencing low level symptoms for common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. The project has secured funding for three years and will imminently launch in the local area. It expects to cater

for 150 local young people aged between 16-21 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), or who are at risk of becoming NEET; by providing a safe space to go to during the day that offers meaningful activities and structure and encourages them to keep them off streets or getting involved in crime.

The other project I was included in was *Lead4Hope*, a training and coaching programme for young Londoners aged 16-26 which was implemented locally in 2018. It offers mentoring and training projects, helping disadvantaged young people fulfil their potential by offering learning and gaining skills in public speaking, leadership, small business start-ups and finding solutions for local community challenges.

### **Placement Learning Outcomes**

I learnt how to provide social and educational opportunities to young people through coaching, mentoring and empowering them to make appropriate life choices.

I also wanted to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by disadvantaged young people living in the diaspora and the learn the sort of resources and ideas I can apply and implement in my own community in Zimbabwe.

The project also gave me a practical experience of how local initiatives can support recommendations related to the Police and Crime Plan 2017-21 (A Safer City for All London) published by Greater London Authority, to specifically safeguard and protect children and young people in London who are at risk of knife crime and offending or are vulnerable to exploitation, peer pressure or being drawn to a life of crime or antisocial behaviour.

### **PLACEMENT**

#### **Orientation aims:**

The orientation was an in-depth introduction to the Policy Centre for African Peoples Organisation and the work they do. I got a comprehensive understanding of the day to day work activities to ensure a comfortable integration into the organization. I also had opportunities to meet and interact with other co-workers and ask questions about the operations and running of the organisation. Meeting other stakeholder

organizations working in the same building was key because a lot of joint working happens in the sector. I was treated as a co-worker and allocated a desk for my own working space. I was also given the relevant entry access card and organization email address. In the first month of the placement I mainly shadowed other professionals and took time to identify areas of interest for my learning. At the end of the first month I had an informal evaluation exercise with my supervisor to review my learning and grasp of the organisational processes. I received constructive feedback of my participation and also got to give my own feedback of how I found my first month of placement.

### **Main duties**

Under the supervision of experienced staff, I co-facilitated some workshops. I learnt skills such as using “Ice-breaking” and trust-building activities that help to create a safe and respectful environment. This also helped participants to feel comfortable establish mutual trust to enable appropriate sharing. These activities encourage the young people to feel comfortable to participate and to talk about some their personal challenges and experiences.

I helped in the delivery of some scheduled training courses and coaching sessions for the young people who had signed up. These included helping with CV writing and interview preparation, as well as writing and presenting business to prospective employers or funders. I also learnt to do referrals to job centres and potential employers. These activities were led by experts from project partners called The Business Launchpad, iProtegé and Generation Success.

I also helped with evaluating some short surveys, questionnaires, and interviews that helped participants to identify their existing skills, employment needs, existing talents, their aspirations and signposting them to available opportunities.

After training was delivered, there were follow-up activities such as catch up phone calls and meetings, to ensure that beneficiaries were coping or adapting well to their new situation as paid employees or self-employed entrepreneurs.

### **COVID 19 Pandemic**

In the week starting 16 March 2020, following the Covid-19 outbreak, Management announced changes to routine working and recommended safety measures which resulted in restrictions to face to face contact. A week later the whole country went into "lockdown". This meant widespread closure of workspaces unless deemed to be an essential service. It took about two weeks for the Organization to formulate and implement remote working and procedures. This was especially challenging to this work setting which is tailored to provide activities that are carried out in schools, public sports facilities, youth hub centres and other community settings.

Most of the organisation's staff worked remotely using telephone contact or video calling facilities. A very skeletal team remained on site to only offer crisis response. A lot of work went into cancelling or rescheduling planned live activities, including a program launch event that had been scheduled for start of April 2020.

The Organisation was able to access some remote working grants for continuity in the lockdown and some employees needed to be furloughed or granted a paid leave of absence.

The changes to working procedures meant I lost out on some interactive work experiences, but I remained closely involved in a wide variety of webinars, teleconferences, web sessions and important meetings. I learnt a whole new way of working with the Organisation adapting remote working and really got to appreciate the power of efficient tele-communications and internet facilities.

I arranged follow-up appointments via online platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Blue Jeans App. There were some initial teething problems such as poor sound quality, poor network quality, drops in connection, delays in starting times as people adapted to using the new systems. The new process entailed a lot of learning such as being aware not to talk at the same time, managing your own background noises, being clearer in your communication.

The lockdown and remote working were rather isolative but there were resources to help with ensuring self-care and checking in with each other. We were reminded to be mindful of taking breaks, eating well and not exceeding working times.

Working remotely, I was allocated other tasks such as helping to review and appropriately amend the Organisation's remote working policy. I was given some

pieces of work related to gathering information and keeping up to date with the Government requirements as well advice coming from NHS England and public health department to ensure we were adhering with safe working regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I also did a small project on formulating a document warning young people of safe online working and online networking and having awareness of their cyber security and internet scams.

### **Special assignment**

I gained a new important skill of proposal writing and making grant applications and pitching these to potential donors. As a special assignment, the Director challenged me to a task of writing a proposal for a project relevant to the situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It needed to reflect my knowledge of the organisation and identify something relevant to organisational values. Reflecting on my own predicament I came up with the idea of proposing a model of how for future placements could be run for students working remotely or with restricted face to face contact. I identified the tasks that I had found meaningful and enjoyable. I identified the resources needed to carry of administrative tasks, data capturing and the secure social media platforms and apps that had been helpful. I reported on how individual supervision was helpful and supportive; and things that made my work experience and valuable.

### **Self-Reflection and Conclusion**

In the last few months I have been part of an organisation that has welcomed me into their working space and has encouraged me to learn, contribute and to think more critically. I have received mentorship, attention, and felt valued and respected. I have met very diverse people in the sector who are all inspired by seeing the betterment and empowerment of young people. The placement period has not only imparted valuable skills and competencies, but it has grown my professional network in the sector. I have learnt to use language that is non-judgemental or stigmatising. I have also learnt to engage young people and communication styles that they respond to.

Most importantly I learnt the importance of strong social support systems for disadvantaged young people in society and how this can bring about positive change.

Despite a very unexpected turn of events due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I have not felt like I missed out on significant learning. I have appreciated the importance of systems that can adapt quickly and efficiently. I have learnt how an organisation can survive through uncertainty adversity. I have learnt the importance team spirit and organisational support.

A lot of young people will have been affected economically and financially and a lot of sectors they work will not return to normal for a while and there is a significant risk of further unemployment and even more limited opportunities for some young people, especially in the already vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. The lockdown has already seen a rise in gang crime and a rise in domestic violence and as cases involving cyber bullying and internet grooming of minors. In the absence of safe space and activities, the Policy Centre for African Peoples and similar organisations will be challenged in finding new ways of keeping young people safe.