



Impact Report 2018 - 2019

**social** **ARK** cic

Building resilient and cohesive communities through social entrepreneurship

Learn • Love • Live

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## A WORD FROM OUR FOUNDER



LISA STEPANOVIC

2018 was an incredible year for us. We've worked with a brand new group of passionate young entrepreneurs, and continued to support our founding members. The Social Ark family is growing, and their commitment to each other is stronger than ever – together, we continue to fight against inequality, both locally and nationally.

It's been great getting to know our 2018 cohort; every single one of them is passionate and determined to make a difference. They have attended learning and development workshops, they've tested ideas with their mentors, and learnt the skills needed to establish proof of concept. I'm extremely proud of the progress they've made.

To date, through our Continued Personal Development programme, 92% of the young entrepreneurs that we've worked with have remained part of the Social Ark family, accessing ongoing guidance and peer-mentoring newcomers. They have told us that our reliable support is vital to their personal development, and wellbeing.

Against the odds, our young entrepreneurs have continued to learn and grow, developing a real commitment to social responsibility. They are role models who are invested in their own communities, and are determined to be the change that they want to see.

Reflecting back to when we started in 2015, we identified a lack of relatable, hands-on support available to young entrepreneurs from tough backgrounds. Social Ark has worked to bridge that gap. We continue to try and influence organisations through our work, hoping that those in positions of power get behind us, and recognise the long-term value of nurturing grassroots leaders. We've made an outstanding impact, and great connections, but there's still lots of work to do.

I find that I'm constantly reiterating this: there are several entrepreneur programmes across London that attract well-meaning, educated individuals from right across the UK, all determined to fix and cure our deprived communities' toughest problems. Our entrepreneurs constantly tell us that they don't want to be 'cured or fixed' by people that have 'never walked a day in their shoes'; they want the tools and support to fix themselves.

This type of grassroots social entrepreneurship cannot be underestimated! It instils hope and aspiration in the 'hardest to reach'. Sharing one vision with local people, Social Ark is determined to create a more level playing field, and make our communities safer and more inclusive for all.

I'd love to say huge thank you to all of our young people, who have worked so hard and for trusting me, and Social Ark, allowing us to be a part of your journey. Massive thanks also to our funders, expert mentors, volunteers and supporters. None of our work would be possible without you. It's been an honour to work with you all.

## INTRODUCTION

Social Ark CIC is a social enterprise, based in Tower Hamlets, that supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to use their lived experiences in order to develop social businesses. Many of them have experienced poverty, a lack of education, disability, immigration, homelessness and the criminal justice system. Social Ark was set up with seed funding from Barclays, and has also been supported by UnLtd, The Big Lottery Fund, the Postcode Lottery, the East End Community Foundation and the Canary Wharf Group. We work with expert mentors, corporate volunteers and the local community - who all contribute to the success of our programme.

### OUR VISION

Our vision is for an equal and inclusive society, where young people are judged for where they want to go, and not where they've been.

### OUR MISSION

Our mission is to equip young people from tough backgrounds with the skills, know-how and support to transform their lives, and the communities around them.

### OUR VALUES

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

### WHY WE'RE UNIQUE

We understand the value of empowering young people who may have otherwise been overlooked or 'written off'. Many lack self-belief and often tell us they've had doors shut on them due to their backgrounds. Social Ark recognises the struggles of 'hard to reach' youth, and the wrap-around care that we provide sets us apart from other organisations. We value lived experience over formal qualifications, and welcome all entrepreneurial ideas that are in line with our values.

We have made our mark in the local community by insisting on our inclusive values. People from different cultural and social backgrounds are getting to know each other and having fun. We are determined to create a resilient community where individuals are defined by how they empower and champion each other, rather than personal wealth or social backgrounds. Residents have grown to trust us - they get involved in our various projects and are keen to support our work.

*"Social Ark teaches young people from our area the importance of taking responsibility for their community. As a family originally from eastern Europe, my children struggled to fit in and felt isolated and wary of integrating. Social Ark has supported us, helping my son to find his place in the community. Now? He's more confident, and can't wait to apply to be part of Social Ark."  
- Miriana, Local Resident*

*THIS REPORT OUTLINES SOME OF WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED, 2018 - 2019, AND OUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.*

## 10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SOCIAL ARK



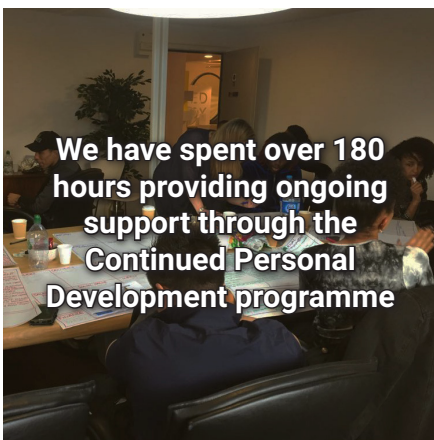
**Social Ark has directly nurtured the development of 21 social enterprises**



**Over 1,000 local people have directly benefited from our entrepreneurs' businesses**



**We've delivered our Grassroots Empower Programmes to 30 inmates at HMP Brixton**



**We have spent over 180 hours providing ongoing support through the Continued Personal Development programme**



**We have worked with 38 mentors & volunteers, ensuring our young people have access to expert & professional support**



**We provided over 1,400 hours of learning, including 4-hour weekly workshops & over 1,200 hours of personalised 1:1 support**



**While establishing proof of concept, Social Ark entrepreneurs' have hosted over 120 free & inclusive community activities in Tower Hamlets**



**We have introduced what it means to be socially conscious and the concept of social entrepreneurship to over 500 local people**



**All of our young people have completed safeguarding training, have excellent proposals & an in-depth knowledge of monitoring & evaluation**



**Ensuring that our entrepreneurs have access to continuous wrap-around care and support, we have assisted our young people with funding applications, HMRC and tax issues, business planning, impact measurement, event planning, and ongoing training as well as any personal issues and challenges they may have**

## OUR ENTREPRENEURS

### SYDERITA VAKA - FOUNDER OF KIDSUGYM



Syderita came to the UK from Albania when she was 5 years old. It was tough at first, as she struggled with the English language and this made it difficult to integrate and make friends. Syderita found her love for fitness at the age of 15, and she soon realised that she wasn't the only one facing these issues. Experiencing the impact of exercise first-hand inspired her to set up KidsUGym, which is specifically for 10 – 15 year olds and is designed to reach children that are inactive, unengaged and need extra support to make friends in their local areas.

Syderita has worked hard learning business skills, and has been supported with training and obtaining the right qualifications. She has been matched with peer-mentor Moses Adeyemi, one of the Social Ark founding members who also set up a fitness programme. Moses supported Syderita, helped her to become more confident, and to test and pilot her idea.

*"It's been great being part of Social Ark. I never thought this idea would come to light, and although I've still got a long way to go, I'm willing to put that work in and make it happen. I really appreciate the ongoing support and guidance that I know is there for me, and I look forward to being part of the Continued Personal Development programme and Social Ark family."*

### TIERSHA WILSON - FOUNDER OF THEIR VOICES

Tiersha is a young mother and community champion, who was born and raised in East London. Growing up, she witnessed, first-hand, the struggles of marginalised people whose voices were not being heard or taken seriously. Tiersha came to Social Ark determined to set up a platform that supports the development of under-represented communities, addressing many unspoken and 'taboo' issues. 'Their Voices' was born, and Tiersha's "Let's Talk" events have provoked passionate debate, resulting in community groups coming up with solutions to our most prevalent problems, like mental health, sexual exploitation and youth violence. Tiersha's mentor Jeanie has helped her to establish proof of concept, and we're really excited to find out what's next for 'Their Voices' and the "Let's Talk" events.



*"When I joined Social Ark I knew what I wanted to do, I wanted to spark emotive and passionate conversations with people from underrepresented backgrounds, but I didn't know how to do it. Social Ark gave me not only the tools, confidence and networks to be able to put my idea into action but also the support from the Social Ark family!"*

## REUBEN BRAITHWAITE - FOUNDER OF W.A.T.C.H



Reuben told Social Ark that his inspiration had been drawn from personal experience of growing up in London, where crime was seen as a natural progression. He was impacted by his surroundings, where you were either in a gang, respected by gang members, or an outsider and a victim. Cultural pressures caused Reuben to coast through the education system as an introvert with low self-esteem and identity issues.

Through urban music, Reuben followed his passion and discovered a natural talent for creative writing, storytelling and performance. He used these talents to create the WATCH (We Are The Culture Happening) programme, a series of creative writing and poetry workshops which draw on Reuben's own life experiences. Reuben now delivers his tried and tested WATCH workshops to young people across London.

*"Social Ark has given me the unconditional support needed to take my enterprise to the next plateau. I came to them with a messy business model and found the structure and the professional etiquette that my enterprise needed. Social Ark helped me to grow and become a competent social entrepreneur that can not only deliver impact, I can measure and prove it too. As an entrepreneur, I've realised that my industry is all about building genuine relationships, which I have found at Social Ark; so much so that the conversations I have with everyone there go way beyond business. The programme will end but the family won't."*

## SARAH CASTRO MBE FRSA



"Having spent many years working in Community Safety, Youth Violence and Gang Exit programmes, I've become frustrated by the lack of opportunities for disadvantaged young people. There is no point telling a young person with a criminal record for drug dealing to just "go and get a job". It's not that simple!

With a criminal record and no formal qualifications, they'd struggle to secure employment. These young people have life experience, they have handled and managed money and people – they have an intuitive understanding of business. In order for them to turn their lives around, they need real pathways out; that's precisely what Social Ark provides.

Social Ark refrains from the usual one-size-fits-all approach and works with members as individuals. They identify each entrepreneur's unique talents and qualities, supporting them to test ideas and come up with realistic business plans.

In my view, supporting people to help themselves become independent and self-sufficient has to be the greatest and purest form of giving, and that's why I give my time to Social Ark."



## CONTINUED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) PROGRAMME



Providing continued support for our young entrepreneurs is a vital part of our business model. We've learned that they need this reliable source in order to give their businesses the best chance of success. Our CPD programme is hands-on and individually tailored. It is also an opportunity for members to support their peers, and through peer mentoring they give back to the Social Ark family. We support members development and collaborate with our entrepreneurs at every opportunity. For example, founding members Moses Adeyemi

and Sandy Abdel-Rahman have worked together with Social Ark to design a programme, which we deliver as a group to prison inmates and 'hard-to-reach' groups.

*"Social Ark is very special to me. They have supported me through tough times, and now my business is in a better place. I access continued support and have collaborated with them on co-designed projects. I also wholeheartedly believe in giving back and championing the organisation that has been there for me. I peer-mentor new members and am a proud member of the Youth Advisory Board."* - Moses Adeyemi

*"Being part of the Social Ark family and accessing the Continued Personal Development programme has given me the confidence to grow my business. Doors have been opened to me and I've connected with some great people. With Social Ark, there is no 'them and us', they're always looking for ways to help us develop and collaborate. In addition to collaborative work, I've also facilitated Social Ark 'Step Up' workshops to the new cohort of entrepreneurs. These opportunities have enabled me to gain experience and earn while I learn. I know I can always rely Social Ark, they're embedded in our community and go above and beyond to empower young people - and I love that!"* - Sandy Abdel-Rahman

### SHAJNA BEGUM - FOUNDER OF THE FILM BUNCH

Shajna set up The Film Bunch using her own lived experience of being partially deaf. She knew first-hand just how people with hearing loss can feel excluded. Shajna was determined to create inclusive film screenings and networking events which were accessible to all - The Film Bunch was born!

Since 2016, The Film Bunch hosted 25 monthly events with captioned films and sign language interpreters. They have attracted filmmakers from across the world and reached over 2,000 people. The Film Bunch are constantly growing and have now added sell-out British Sign Language courses to their portfolio.

*"I'm so grateful to have continued support from Social Ark, they helped me launch The Film Bunch 3 years ago and are still there for us 100%. I've got lots out of the ongoing guidance and workshops. Social Ark really is a one-of-a-kind organisation!"*



## WHAT'S NEXT? 2019

Starting off the year as we mean to go on! The Social Ark celebration event will enable us to bring the magic of grassroots social entrepreneurship to Level 39, One Canada Square. Kindly sponsored by the Canary Wharf Group, this exciting opportunity will allow us to showcase our work so far and share our plans for the future.

We are excited about new partnerships, and especially to be exploring the possibility of working with the brilliant 'Drivers for Change' charity. Their flagship project takes young people from all across the UK on a one-of-a-kind learning journey. With shared values, both organisations are committed to social change and passionate about empowering aspiring young leaders.

The 'Step Up' programme will make its mark again; this September, another group of 10 exceptional young people will join the Social Ark family. They'll be supported to put their lived experiences to use as they come up with enterprising solutions for the daily problems their communities face.

As a social enterprise, sustainability is extremely important to us. We're determined to explore ways to increase our impact and be less reliant on grant funding. During 2018, we piloted our learning workshops with at-risk young people, and inmates at HMP Brixton. This year, we plan to build on that work and package the Social Ark experience, delivering it to prisons, schools, and other non-profits.

Over the last year, we have worked with over 40 volunteers and mentors. This year, we want to build on that work. We've learnt that ensuring our young people have access to ongoing, high-level and expert support gives them the best possible chance of success.

### JAYNE CHACE - SOCIAL ARK STRATEGIC ADVISOR



"Spending years driving corporate growth and profit meant I lost touch with young people whose aspirations were short circuited by their social circumstances. Thus, it was inspiring to meet Lisa Stepanovic, founder/CEO of Social Ark, who is committed to motivating young people to leverage their life experiences and transform business dreams into reality. So much raw talent exists and it is inspiring to help Social Ark assist these new entrepreneurs whose values of inclusion and equality will make London and the world a better place."

## HEAR FROM OUR FUNDERS & SUPPORTERS!



### Lauren Roberts - Social Ark Board Member and Barclays Vice President

“Social Ark CIC is an innovative enterprise, breaking down barriers and fostering sustainable change in Tower Hamlets. Social Ark empowers disadvantaged young people to come up with solutions to their own communities’ toughest problems. In a challenging borough with significant wealth disparity, Social Ark’s achievements to date clearly show the progress that can be made when entire communities come together to drive change. As both a corporate employee and a board member, it has been extremely rewarding to utilize my corporate expertise to provide the tools and support to enable the grassroots young entrepreneurs and the wider community to prosper.”

### Unmesh Desai - GLA Assembly Member for the City & East London

“I’m really proud to keep lending my support to Social Ark. They are an extraordinary organisation that nurtures young people from tough backgrounds to become grassroots community leaders. They recognise the value of young people’s lived experiences and their ‘no qualifications needed’ policy is testament to that. With Social Ark, there is no ‘hard to reach’ and they’ve successfully engaged the ‘unreachable’. The innovative social businesses created by the young people are needed now more than ever – professionally delivered and positively impacting the communities they serve. Failure to support organisations like Social Ark will further marginalise our most disadvantaged young people, resulting in them feeling ‘pushed out’ and excluded. Social Ark is passionate about equality, community cohesion, and proving that London is open for everyone. Their inclusive values underpin everything they do, and I am extremely proud to support this life-changing organisation in East London.”



### Peter Holbrook - CEO, Social Enterprise UK

“It’s a sad fact, but opportunities for people living in poorer communities are scarcer than ever. We need organisations like Social Ark CIC to challenge that and to change that. Their tireless approach to equipping people and communities with the skills and ambition to change lives and whole communities is vitally important. Congratulations on a great year.”



### Babu Bhattacharjee – Director of Development, Poplar Harca

“The work of Social Ark has always been important – and ahead of its time – but I think its relevance to young people and the broader community has never been greater. Like any successful organisation, it needs talented and committed people at its heart. The success that Lisa and her team have had with limited resources is amazing and I have nothing but admiration for their work.”

### Anil Panda - Chief Technology Officer, Blockchain Warehouse

“The work done at Social Ark is truly outstanding. Young people, who may have unfortunately had a less than ideal start in life, are given direction, inspiration and a vision to change their future and improve their local communities. The passion these young entrepreneurs display is energising, and I would definitely recommend being an expert mentor. I look forward to doing more with Social Ark, and supporting these driven individuals to achieve their goals and develop their businesses.”

### Jon Crook - Director of Digital Design, Barclays

“I have worked with Lisa, the Social Ark team and their young entrepreneurs for a number of years on a range of initiatives, including building websites and mentoring the young people they work with on digital technology. The benefits for myself and the team at Barclays have been hugely positive. It’s extremely humbling to witness the skills that our design team has developed for Barclays’ initiatives over the years equally benefit young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds. We’ve also been given the opportunity to improve our own skills – coaching and mentoring these passionate young people has taken us out of our comfort zone and provided an insight into the communities on our doorstep. It’s been amazing to watch their journey unfold, and I would definitely recommend working with Social Ark.”

### Jeanie Harrison - Mentor and Community Manager

“I felt privileged to be asked to be a mentor on the Social Ark programme. I’d seen previous young people go through the process and was immediately attracted to getting involved. I was apprehensive at first and not sure whether I could give Tiersha, my mentee, what she needed. I soon realised that I just had to be myself and let Tiersha set the pace.

I was blown away by the ‘Their Voices’ workshops that she held at the Teviot Centre. One particular session brought me to tears, it was ‘real talk’ from passionate people, sharing their personal experiences so openly and honestly. Tiersha was brilliant to work with, I was blown away by her dedication and professionalism. I got so much out of mentoring, it definitely made me rethink my own journey in life. I absolutely admire what Lisa and the Social Ark team put into making this a great experience for our young people.”





YOU have made this a very special year for us!

THANK YOU



## Impact Report 2018 - 2019

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