

## Arc Initiative & Yucan – Level Up Programme Evaluation

1<sup>st</sup> July – 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024

### About Arc Initiative

Established in 2021 as a community group and gaining charity status in 2022, Arc Initiative is committed to enhancing personal development and advancing employability for marginalised young people aged 16-25 from underrepresented communities in London. Our free programmes encompass employability coaching, essential skills training, and mentoring, which we believe are fundamental to achieving meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Our focus is empowering young individuals, enabling them to feel engaged and capable of driving positive change in their lives and communities.

Our beneficiaries primarily come from black and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Our mission is to bridge the gap between potential and opportunity for donors. We are a Black-led, lived experience organisation that seeks to provide equity and support to our communities through collaboration and direct involvement from those we serve.

### About Yucan

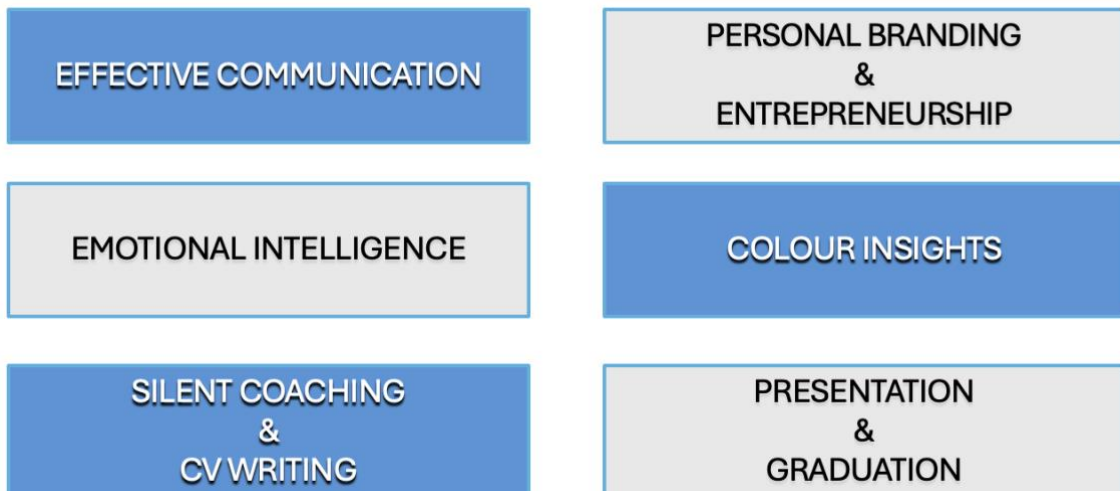
Yucan is a youth-led, lived-experience organisation based in East London that supports young carers and youth with ongoing responsibilities. It provides various services, including school wellbeing programmes, one-to-one mentoring, care packages, and respite opportunities. Yucan also conducts workshops and assemblies to raise awareness of young carers in primary and secondary schools. This ensures these young people are recognised, supported, and championed, particularly those from socially, ethnically, and economically under-resourced communities.

### The Level Up Programme

The Level Up programme emerged from a collaboration between Arc Initiative and Yucan, facilitated by Chidi O’Hanekwu at Sirlute Studios (a long-standing partner). Recognising the synergies between our organisations, we co-designed a unique programme to empower young people aged 16-18 to explore entrepreneurship, secure employment, pursue further education, or focus on personal growth. This timely initiative addressed the pandemic’s social and interpersonal skill gaps. We aim to equip young people with soft and hard skills, baseline industry knowledge, and the ability to maintain a healthy and positive mindset while building on their branding, which is required to thrive professionally and socially.

The programme was delivered twice a week for three weeks. Sessions were three hours long and delivered in person and online to accommodate young people who had caring responsibilities and could not attend in person.

The sessions included:



## Effective Communication

*Session content covered: Body language, listening to understand, nonverbal cues, engagement strategies and practical application.*

We spent a whole session on understanding effective communication. We explored nonverbal communication and reading cues. While exploring the balance between verbal and nonverbal communication, young people showed increased self-awareness and shared that they often found it challenging to interpret body language cues in professional and formal situations but felt more confident when given the strategies to practice and apply.

The session involved practical exercises to enhance understanding, i.e. role-playing good and bad listening scenarios. Participants learned about chronemics, the study of time in communication, body gestures, and proxemics (social space). We noticed from the activity that the participants immediately began to share with the group their references, e.g. relationships and scenarios where they have not best engaged, interviews for further education and employment which had not concluded in their favour, all the way to family scenarios and dynamics.

The session concluded with engagement strategies and role-playing open-ended questioning, probing, reflecting, and positive body language. We noticed that the group dynamics strengthened as participants stepped out of their comfort zones and became more confident in expressing themselves while learning and doing something new.

Tesiwaju: "Chronemics and proxemics were so interesting to hear about, and the impact I make on people just through getting some simple things right, like responding to emails and messages with pace."

Serena: "I loved watching the good and bad listening scenarios. It really got me thinking about how I look in group settings, and 1:1's with people."

## Personal Branding & Entrepreneurship

*Session content covered: Defining Personal brand, understanding impact, entrepreneurship mindset, crafting an elevator pitch, pitch delivery and feedback.*

This session began with discussing well-known personalities, such as established brands and household names in sports, film and music. We used this to help them understand how perceptions are formed. Participants were then asked to consider their brand by reflecting on how they present themselves and creating a personal brand template. The majority of the group shared that this was the first time they had thought about their brand in this way. During the entrepreneurship segment, we covered different business structures, including profitable and non-profit and what they represent for an entrepreneur. During the session, the young people created a list of pros and cons of the different models. This was a good exercise because when reflecting on their list with the group, they discovered things they had missed and could support others. We also had them look into funding options and critical business considerations, such as market research and business planning. At the end of the session, each young person pitched their ideas to the group. Some young people pitched multiple times as they wanted to practice pitching for a job and further education interviews.

Tapiwa: "Building my personal brand using the template and list of words today really made me think about my perceptions and the things I can control about them."

Jawad: "Understanding the different business types and structures helped me set my business up, which I've been waiting to do for a long time"

## Emotional Intelligence

*Session content covered: Self-awareness, emotional intelligence, growth vs fixed mindset, developing a growth mind state, self-awareness in action, practical application and reflection.*

In this session, participants delved into self-awareness and emotional intelligence. They learned about the signs of low emotional intelligence and worked on a self-awareness template to reflect on their personal growth and development. The concept of "mind state" versus "mindset" was introduced, and participants took a quiz to determine if they had a fixed or growth mindset. The discussions helped them understand the benefits and challenges associated with each state. By the end of the session, the young people were able to recognise past experiences where they showed lowness to feeling more confident and emotionally aware that they are better equipped to handle the situations in the future.

Ayo: "It's good to know it's a mind state and not a mindset because I want to stay growth-minded and have to be aware that in some scenarios, I might not be."

YP: "I never knew I had an open mindset. I always thought I was quite fixed-minded. This was a real eye-opener for me."

## Colour Insights

*Session content covered: Intro to colour insights, understanding personality types, interpersonal skills, social skills and group dynamics, insights discovery exercise, and applying colour insights in real life.*

This session was highly insightful in understanding where the young people thought their characteristics were aligned. Some powerful reflections on past experiences shared in the group led to a greater depth of raised self-awareness. We used a questionnaire that categorised participants into four colour groups based on their responses. The exercise created self-reflection and highlighted individuals' impact on others in their interactions. Participants gained a deeper understanding of themselves and others, with reflections on personal relationships, both past and present. When we finished this session, they felt engaged with who they are and how to understand better and communicate with people outside of their own colour characteristics and communication style.

Jerome: "I can see why me and my form tutor used to clash. I just wanted to get on with things and felt he was slowing me down, but he might have thought I was not ready to start because I still had things to understand first."

Junior: "Yeah, red really is my characteristic insight colour; I need to make sure I get close to my development areas in my polar opposite colour because I can already see people who sit there; I just know why now."

## Silent Coaching & CV Writing

*Session content covered: Silent coaching exercise, reflecting on your personal development plan, goal setting, what a good CV looks like, the purpose of your CV, critical elements of a CV, CV creation using a template, peer, group and 1:1 feedback.*

Participants developed their first-ever personal development plans. Using an Arc Initiative template and guidance sheet, they could create a detailed plan about their development areas and set a realistic timeframe they were comfortable with. This was followed by a comprehensive CV writing workshop, where participants received a template and one-to-one support to refine their CVs. This was the first time the whole group could work with an industry professional rather than a teacher in school or college. Before this session, most overlooked extraordinary personal achievements such as leadership roles in community projects, volunteering work, or overcoming significant personal challenges, which demonstrated their resilience, teamwork, and dedication. Because they thought achievements had to be professional accolades, several young people requested additional one-to-one sessions for more in-depth CV feedback.

Aaron: "My CV was from a free template online; there are so many out there; it was good to see what good looks like from an industry expert and keep the template we were given. I opted for the 1:1 session to get more feedback, and it was worth it."

Precious: "That was really interesting being able to write down your thoughts on your development and future goals. Then read them back. I really liked this one"

## Presentation & Graduation

*Session content covered: Reflections and recap on sessions, key takeaways, completed elevator pitch and graduation ceremony.*

In the final session, participants delivered pitches on a business idea or in response to a typical interview question. They applied the skills learned throughout the programme to provide compelling pitches to judges Chidi O'Hanekwu and Sanyu Musoke. At the beginning of the programme, we asked each participant how confident they were in public speaking. Most said they didn't or couldn't do it. Before the pitching started, we asked them again. They all agreed that they are more confident to pitch now because they have more self-awareness and know what they can bring.

The graduation was a proud moment for us all, showcasing each participant's growth and learning. They were ready to significantly impact their chosen paths, supported by their peers' encouragement and constructive challenges. By the end of the Level Up Programme, participants gained essential skills and knowledge and formed a supportive network to aid them in their future endeavours. The programme exemplified the power of collaboration, lived experience, and community-led support in empowering young people to "level up" in their personal and professional lives.





## Arc Initiative 1:1 Support

Following the programme, we continue to support all the participants in some way. We found that the impact of the CV writing session needed additional 1:1 support to ensure participants received all the additional support they needed. Led by Chidi O'Hanekwu, these 1:1 sessions provided tailored support, meeting everyone precisely where they are in their journey. Whether crafting a new CV or refining an existing one, the goal was clear: to provide expert guidance that empowers them to thrive and succeed. This approach has made all the difference, helping our young people build confidence and develop the tools they need for their future careers. One major success was Aaron, who, after the programme, worked with Arc Initiative for a month on social media posts. He then secured an internship through our partnership at Nationwide.

Aaron Quote:

*"Thank you for helping me build my new CV. It looks absolutely amazing and very professional. I'll be sure to use this from now on." Tapiwa.*

## Peer Support: Building connections and confidence

A cornerstone of all our programmes is peer support sessions. The Level Up programme was no different. It was one of the best we'd seen. The difference in this programme was that a participant was appointed the Youth Coordinator at the beginning. Led by our dedicated Youth Coordinator, Aaron, feedback was actively gathered after each learning and peer support session. This allowed us to adapt and refine our approach, ensuring we were constantly monitoring and enhancing the effectiveness of our support. All sessions provided essential wrap-around support for our young people, offering that much-needed "arm around the shoulder" to help them navigate any challenges.

This provided a valuable space for young people to step back from the learning environment, reflect, explore new ideas, and connect. They were calm, re-energising moments filled with open, honest sharing, advice, and genuine bonding.

Together, we're building a community where young people feel supported, heard, and empowered to grow.

## Outcomes

At the outset of this partnered programme, Arc Initiative and Yucan were confident about the positive impact the sessions would have on all 12 young people as they prepared for their following life stages. By the end of the programme, our goals for our young people were to:

- Excel in communication and workplace environments
- Enhance and develop essential skills
- Have a growth mindset
- Craft a solid professional identity and personal brand
- Create a compelling CV ready for immediate use

We are proud to say we achieved these outcomes with great success, evidenced by a 95% attendance rate. Each young person created a CV ready for immediate use, and 90% reported feeling more confident in bringing their whole selves to a professional environment. Additionally, 100% of participants reported having a clear personal brand and understanding how to manage perceptions effectively.

### **During the programme:**

- 16% of the young people secured employment using their new CV.
- 41% chose to pursue further education following the silent coaching exercise.

### **Some remarkable individual successes include:**

- One young person securing an internship at an investment bank, leveraging their newly crafted CV and insights gained from 1:1 support.
- Another young person gained valuable work experience with our partner, Nationwide Building Society, before starting an internship with a similar organisation, gaining an excellent introduction to the field they aspire to join.
- One young person has also begun working with Arc Initiative, contributing to content creation for our social media channels, a fantastic addition to our team!

### **Feedback from Our Young People:**

- 12/12 said the programme exceeded their expectations.
- 11/12 developed essential skills.
- 12/12 feel more confident in professional settings.
- 10/12 have become more self-aware.
- 12/12 would recommend the programme to their peers.

Throughout the programme, we delivered 18 hours of group learning, 9 hours of 1:1 support, and 6 hours of peer support. As a result, our young people completed the programme equipped with the knowledge and enhanced skillsets they need to navigate their next life stages and beyond.

### **Here is some of what our entrepreneurs told us:**

I had an amazing experience, I loved how it had such a welcoming environment and it was a safe space to speak up and be yourself. I also learnt so much about how to develop in your career with things like your CV and effective communication. I also learnt a lot about myself as well.

I feel like this programme has greatly helped me learn more about myself while also getting help with how to communicate effectively in the business world. Overall an amazing experience.

This program is one of the best out there for young people and would 100% recommend to other young people.

***I want to extend my deepest thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the Arc Initiative and Yucan Level Up programme. A special shoutout to our incredible young people for their hard work and dedication and to our unique funders; this journey would not have been possible without you! Chidi O'Hanekwu, Arc Initiative.***