



iRock!UK - General Report

2012 - 2015

Introduction

The need for iROCK became evident when the economic crisis that started in 2007 revealed worrying levels of youth unemployment and discontentment amongst the under 25 year olds in the UK. This culminated in the countrywide youth demonstrations that took place in 2011. Since then, the rates of unemployment amongst the under 25s has continued to climb, increasing the risk of further social unrest in the future. Sadly, the highest levels of unemployment were amongst young people from ethnic backgrounds who had finished high school or university and were struggling to get into employment. The main reason for them not getting employed was three fold: a) a lack of employability skills; b) a lack of relevant work experience and c) a lack of suitable role models within their community for them to emulate.

Founded in 2011, iRock!UK was set up to address the issue of youth unemployment in London through empowerment, educational, mentoring and employment programmes for young people, especially focused on young women of African-Caribbean origin.

Facilitated through a network of professionals, iRock!UK is a grassroots organisation with a focus to provide a place where these young people can gain the skills they need, get access to work experience opportunities and meet inspirational people from their communities or background.

iRock!UK is run by a group of volunteers who come from different disciplines and backgrounds, with a passion helping young people to become more competitive in the labour market place. With youth unemployment in the UK well past the 1million mark in the UK since Nov 2011, there is a real neesugar creative and innovative ideas to engage this "lost generation". Without intervention, along with other

poverty derivatives continuing to burden young people, the prevalence of teenage pregnancies, delinquent behaviour and drop outs from education will continue to rise.

iRock aims to inspire, challenge, and positively influence a generation of young people into a belief system that challenges the impossible, overcomes barriers, and provides a gateway for aspirations to become tangible. We believe that anyone make the most of their lives, if they are willing to take the right steps and seek guidance.

Programmes

iRock!'s program goal is to establish a sustainable enterprise that provides mentoring, workshops and employability skills programmes to all boroughs in London as well as comprehensive career skills assessment, job search assistance and graduate employment placements for vulnerable young people from minority backgrounds. We also have a long term goal to set up a programmes that will provide assistance to academic and health education in poverty stricken communities in Africa.

Until 2016, Rock!UK ran the Sister2Sister and FutureMe programs.

Sister2Sister offers young women (16 to 25yrs) the opportunity to be mentored by professionals in industry, who are coordinated by iRock!.

FutureMe offered on site tailored workshop to students in univerisities, where inspirational speakers, come in and spend time with students advising them on their career plans. Our programmes have been designed to uplift empower and uplift young people by providing them with employability skills for career growth, career and business opportunities.

Successes to Date

To date, iROCK has implemented the following programmes and events:

- **Sister2Sister** – women only monthly mentoring program ran on an annual basis for a group of young women under the age of 25, looking at both employability opportunities and how to start a business. The programme comprised of both 1:1 mentoring and group mentoring sessions,
 - **Programs have run monthly ran from October 2011 to October 2015**
 - **Yearly mentoring program has averaged 10 young women**

- **Tools ForLife Workshops:** These workshops were designed to help young women with life skills. 3 workshops were held a year and they were attended by an average 25 people discussing topics such as interview skills, personal budgeting, marketing, seed capital, and business plans

- Example - On the 26th of October 2012, iRock!UK hosted a Black History Month workshop '*Do Black Girls Have it Harder?*' which attracted NEETS, students and professionals from companies such as Deliottes, Fab Magazine, The House of Commons etc . This workshop addressed personal issues faced by the youth of today such as personal relationship, self-esteem issues, personal relationships, identity issues, facts, stereotypes and reality of been of ethnic minority in the UK.

- **Fund Raising - Tribes of Africa: 2012** was a very successful year for iRock!UK in terms of raising awareness. On May the 26th 2012, iRock!UK hosted Tribes of Africa event, a fashion show and dinner at the Grange Hotel which attracted 250 people. Major designers and makeup artists contributed their time and talent in creating a successful event and unique event that saw iRock! featured in a number of media publications. As part of our Sister2Sister programme, iRock!UK mentees worked alongside the management team, volunteering their time to help with the

running of the event. All the mentees gained experience in event management and networking.

Beneficiaries

Students and young women aged between 16 and 25 years old, mainly of ethnic minority origin, who are in tertiary education, or unemployed.

Internships - Mentees have received internships with organisations such as Eco-Bank London, London Fashion Week, Bank of America, Grange Hotels, FAB Magazine, World Travel Market – ZTA, Africa Fashion week to name a few

In addition, iRock! offered full time internships to 2 young women to offer them an opportunity to gain skills, experience and confidence. Both interns had to also attend workshops and meetings as iRock! representatives and both have since been offered gainful employment with international organisations.

Funding

To date, iRock has been funded by the by the director's own capital as well as our flagship fundraising event in 2012, Tribes of Africa. We are currently looking to apply for grants, corporate sponsorship and carry out more fundraising activities to fund our activities

Challenges

Cultural attitudes

The target market of African diaspora under the ages of 25 did not appear to value the concept of mentoring. At the onset of each Sister2Sister program, an average of 30 prospective mentees would sign up, but the attrition rates would always be high, resulting in only a handful completing the 6 month programme. This was the same with the 1:1 mentoring programme where mentees were matched with high level

executive and were required to meet with them monthly. Only 3 out of 10 successfully completed the 6 month program, with failing to attending meetings with no explanation.

Financial

Since its inception in 2011, iROCK has been funded solely by its founder, Viola Ncube. As such, iROCK constantly faced challenges such as

- Funding meeting space
- Funding workshops
- Funding fundraiser event
- Paying expenses for volunteers and part-time assistance

Human capacity

As the organization had no money to pay salaries, it was reliant on graduate volunteers to undertake administrative tasks. But due to their own financial pressures, their commitment was short-term and sporadic which had an impact on the organisation's growth.

Future plans 2016

2016 is a critical year for iRock! as a lack of external funding is stifling the growth of the company. We are therefore seeking to apply for funding with key funding bodies as well as establishing a more robust enterprise arm of the organisation through an annual Youth award/event and selling branded merchandise.

We are also seeking to recruit more young women and professionals to the Sister2Sister programme as intern for the iRock Class of 2016 when we organise for our main fundraising event. This organisation of the event will create 20 internships for young people therefore offering young people a chance to gain knowledge and experience for career growth. Each mentee will be paired with a mentor from relevant industries to host this event. The program ensures that at the end of the internship, the mentee not only has relevant work-experience to move onto fully paid employment, but has been exposed to an international corporate and business network that automatically elevates their status and mindset.

Our next event will be on the April 2017.

Recruitment for internships is opened from 15th January to 15th March 2016.