



# Rise Up – the story of year 1

## Evaluation summary

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Above: Rise Up 2021 alumni, left to right, Thuto, Jo, Matt, Arnaud, Ryan, Ali and Mitchell © Kid Circus

## About Rise Up

*'I am from inner-city London; I learnt it is okay to be myself and speak as myself...and feel my own experience is relevant.'*

Rise Up is a leadership development programme for London-based youth workers. It is a partnership between London Youth, Leap Confronting Conflict and Clore Social Leadership, and funded by London's

Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The programme recognises the fact that whilst many frontline youth workers bring significant lived experience, passion and commitment to their roles, the work they do is not always sufficiently recognised or valued. This makes it harder for practitioners – particularly those who are unqualified or who have lived experience to engage at a more strategic level or to take up more senior positions within their organisation or elsewhere.

Rise Up aims to build upon youth workers' skills, confidence and experience in order to better support vulnerable young people in London. This is achieved through strengthened youth work practice, more effective organisations and a more connected sector.

Rise Up supports youth workers to:

- > Deepen their youth work practice, especially in relation to addressing conflict and violence;
- > Develop a wider set of skills to use within their organisations;
- > Strengthen their understanding of the broader political and social context for youth work.

The first phase of Rise Up took place from September 2020 to August 2021. It offered participants:

- > 25 modules covering a wide range of practice-based issues, including working with challenging behaviours; cultural sensitivity; understanding and addressing conflict; and system change;
- > 4 coaching sessions;
- > Access to a mentor;
- > The opportunity to apply for an innovation grant.

Participants attended training sessions twice a week. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic all training, coaching, and mentoring was carried out online.

Four cohorts took part, with a total of 84 participants completing the course<sup>1</sup>. 221 people applied to the programme, suggesting that Rise Up has identified an unmet need. Participants were recruited from across London, with participants' organisations located in 28 of the 32 London Boroughs.

The majority (37) of participants were aged 26-35, with 21 aged 36-45, 17 aged 18-25 and 5 aged over 45. The majority were Black (42), followed by White (21), Asian (8), Multiple/mixed (7); Prefer not to say (3) and any other ethnic group (1).

<sup>1</sup> Rise Up committed to delivering 80 places; given the fact this was a new programme and in the midst of Covid-19 the team over-recruited to compensate. 94 people began the course, with 12 dropping out – mostly citing work pressure.

<sup>2</sup> The full methodology is available on request from m2. We interviewed 23 out of 84 participants, 3 managers, 3 trainers and 2 coaches along with all

## Methodology

m2 was appointed as learning partner to Rise Up. This paper is a summary of the first phase evaluation conducted by m2. It brings together data from:

- > interviews with participants, their managers and trainers and coaches on the programme
- > interviews and ongoing conversations with the Rise Up partners
- > baseline and final surveys completed by participants
- > monitoring data and surveys collected by the Rise Up team<sup>2</sup>.

## The difference Rise Up made

*'I want to rise up and actually become a leader as I think that this is something that I'm very capable of.'*

### The difference for participants

Rise Up increased participants' confidence and skills in six key ways:

1. **77% of participants said that they were able to apply the learning from Rise Up to their youth work;** this deepened their practice with young people. They noted that they had gained practical tools; better listening and questioning techniques; and greater empathy with the young people they worked with. This helped them to build stronger connections with young people and support them more effectively: *'I have learnt how to have conversations, start conversations and listen more. Also, how to have sympathy, empathy, and compassion for their situation.'*

Rise Up partners. The baseline survey was completed by 94 participants; and the final by 57. We were able to track 52 of these over time as they identified themselves by name.

2. **27% of participants felt better equipped to address conflict** – rising from 63% who felt they had this skill in the baseline survey to 90% in the final survey. In the baseline, 17% disagreed or strongly disagreed; by the final survey 0% did: *‘I am better equipped to handle conflict – I have been able to remain calm when conflict occurs and focus on asking questions.’*
3. **Participants increased their ability and confidence to take part in strategic conversations:** 70% agreed or strongly agreed that they now have better understanding of the policy context; and there was a 22% increase in people feeling they could contribute to internal or external discussions.: *‘I have more confidence because I have more knowledge and resources to draw on.’*
4. **Rise Up enabled many participants to feel more fulfilled in their careers** in four main ways: 1) feeling more effective in their existing roles; 2) moving to more senior roles; 3) developing additional skills to use at work; and 4) setting up their own projects. The focus on both youth work practice and more strategic skills helped youth workers to develop their careers. The coaching and mentoring support was particularly useful in relation to career development: *‘I am more confident to get on with things rather than checking things first with others. I have gained a sense of more responsibility for the work I am doing.’*
5. **Rise Up helped youth workers to recognise their own potential as leaders.** The percentage describing themselves as leaders rose from 50% to 73%, with participants feeling that they understood more about their own unique strengths and abilities: *‘It has brought out my own strength and I’m more aware of the leader in me.’*
6. **Increased personal and professional confidence was the most commonly cited benefit.** 86% said they now had confidence in their professional roles. Participants felt this enabled them to work more effectively with young people; speak out about their own experiences; make changes to their circumstances; and build strong networks:

*‘I feel more confident and better informed. I am better able to get outside my comfort zone.’*

### **The difference for organisations**

There is evidence that Rise Up is having a positive effect on participants’ organisations as well as upon individual youth workers. Where participants shared their learning with colleagues this meant the wider organisation also benefited from the new thinking. This was particularly the case for smaller organisations with fewer policies and procedures in place:

*‘Everyone got a better understanding of what she was doing – it really opened everyone’s eyes up and they learnt too.’ (Manager).*

Participants noticed that their heightened self-awareness and conflict resolution skills meant they were building stronger relationships with colleagues and felt better able to challenge unfair practice or policies. There was an increase of 37% in participants feeling they were equipped to manage challenging behaviours in the workplace:

*‘I am able to challenge the things I do not believe to be correct – I will try to influence change.’*

### **The difference for the sector**

At this stage, the clearest potential impact Rise Up is having upon the youth work sector in London is through the development of stronger networks amongst participants. Participants felt that they had developed a valuable network through their participation in Rise Up, and the survey show that this has had a positive impact upon the number of close working relationships with external partners.



## What worked

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Six aspects of the programme particularly contributed to its success:

### 1. Relevance and expert delivery of the training

The range of topics was welcomed by participants, who appreciated the balance between practice-based, reflective approaches and more practical issues. The weekly feedback forms show consistently high averages for both relevance (8.3 out of 10) and delivery (8.2) across the different topics.

### 2. Coaching

Participants found the coaching immensely valuable and an important addition to the training programme. They appreciated the individual focus and the opportunity to reflect. In particular, the coaching was instrumental in helping participants think positively about the skills and experience they bring to their work.

### 3. Peer support

Participants found that the cohort and networking aspect of Rise Up enhanced their experience of the programme. They valued meeting other youth workers from different backgrounds and with different experiences in order to share learning and discuss common challenges.

### 4. The overall package

Rise Up works as a package – a rich mix of skills development; knowledge acquisition; self-reflection; access to coaching; and peer support. It is this mix that enables participants to gain such a rounded experience. In particular, and in common with other leadership development programmes, participants were given time and space to reflect. This enabled them to understand how to build on their own strengths as youth workers and leaders.

### 5. Pastoral support

Participants felt cared for by the team and knew that they could raise issues with them. 80% of people who completed the final survey agreed that they could approach the team with any problems they were having on the programme.



### 6. The partnership

As a delivery and oversight team the partnership worked highly effectively. It was characterised by a willingness to learn and adapt to emerging findings; respect for one another alongside a healthy and constructive ability to challenge; and a clear understanding of what each partner brought to the programme.

This all resulted in a high engagement rate with 75% average attendance at the sessions. 75% of participants would definitely recommend Rise Up, and 21% would 'maybe' recommend it.

It is also important to note that Rise Up took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and had to adapt its delivery accordingly. Despite the fact that participants and trainers all agreed that a hybrid delivery model would be ideal, the team (in particular the trainers) adapted effectively and enabled delivery to take place online.

## Challenges

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Five challenges emerged during the first phase:

### 1. Online working

Participants felt that delivery was largely negatively affected by being online. They said that it was more difficult to form networks and to bond with one another online, with most saying that it would have been good to meet fellow participants face-to-face at least once. Some felt it was strange to have formed these relationships without meeting in person.

### 2. Lack of clarity about the focus upon conflict

Despite the fact that many participants deepened their skills in relation to conflict reduction, some felt that the programme communications suggested that this would be more central in terms of content. Once it became clear that some participants had noticed a gap, the Rise Up team responded quickly and arranged additional sessions with more of a conflict focus. Despite these interventions, the evaluation demonstrates that there is still a desire for a further in-depth focus upon practical approaches for dealing with conflict.

### 3. Intensity of the programme

Two sessions per week was a lot for many of the participants to manage alongside work, particularly later in the programme when Zoom fatigue was setting in.

### 4. Lack of consistency in training approaches

Some participants felt that there was inconsistency in how different trainers delivered their sessions, and that this was exacerbated by not having one key facilitator for the programme. Trainers felt that it would be helpful to have more clarity about the overall aim of the programme. In particular, a sense of which leadership models were being used – and how specific elements of the training related to this – would have been useful.

### 5. Mentoring

In contrast to coaching, the mentoring aspect was the element that participants found least useful. This seems in part due to the purpose and distinction between the two not being sufficiently explained.

## Next steps

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Following the first phase, Rise Up was commissioned to undertake another year of delivery. The programme has been adapted in light of learning emerging from the first year in order to build on its success and to address the challenges:

- > The programme will be delivered with a mix of both face-to-face and online sessions, and there will be just one session a week;
- > There will be an increased focus upon conflict and greater clarity about the programme's aims in communicating this;
- > Trainers will be brought together to run through the programme as a whole in order to increase the consistency of delivery;
- > The distinction between mentoring and coaching will be further clarified, and the mentoring aspect will take place at the end of the programme;
- > The partnership has been widened to include 'Power the Fight'; bringing in their expertise and reach with grassroots organisations.



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