us ZENOBIA SCHOLARS

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CHARITABLE TRUST

ZENOBIA SCHOLARS REPORT 2022

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The **US Charitable Trust** is a registered charity founded in 2012 (CN 1147089). We are based in Harlesden, London and provide regular provision to 450 marginalised 11-18 year olds per year with contact with over 1000 unique participants every year. We run after-school and holiday programmes to enrich our participants lives while at school, improve educational attainment and make sure they are prepared and supported to leave school. Our activities focus on personal development, cultural experiences and introduction to employment/education possibilities and provide responsive, tailored support to individuals.

OVERVIEW

"More 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds are going to university than ever before, but remain three times less likely than those from wealthier backgrounds to do so.

While most applicants have faith in university admissions, it's clear more needs to be done to support and win the confidence of those in underrepresented groups such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants who are less likely than white applicants to describe the system as fair: 62% compared to 73% respectively."

- Universities UK Group (in The Guardian Education Section 17/02/2020)

Zenobia Scholars is a student-designed project to assist 16-18 year old marginalised minority ethnic young women in Brent in pursuing STEM careers in higher education as they leave school. Many of the participants are refugees, and all have learned English as a second language since arriving in the UK. Now, living in Brent, they live in an area in the top 10% of deprivation, with a lack of schemes to provide soft skills training or support in securing their next steps.

Our programme helps to develop soft skills – primarily communication and confidence – as well as providing tailored guidance to help discover career paths and ensure each participant has a primary and backup plan for their future. We work with universities, employers and a team of female-led development coaches through The Bridging Project to make sure specific skills and grades are optimised and university places are secured through UCAS. As well as developing vital employability skills and ambition, Zenobia Scholars looks to encourage young women to commit to education by demonstrating the links between passion, qualification, and career.

The US Charitable Trust has worked with this demographic for a decade and has found through focus groups that many young women speak of their need for practical and emotional support as they plan to leave school. Many are bright and ambitious, but have recent traumatic pasts and are new to this country and our higher education system, placed in an area of high deprivation where support is hard to find. As such they need help and encouragement to fulfil their potential and gain access to higher education.

Zenobia Scholars supports young women by: improving grades; offering academic and emotional support; offering UCAS and finance application support; developing language, public speaking and communication skills through workshops; developing research skills; developing an understanding of self-care, wellbeing and resilience; offering networking opportunities with universities and employers; giving access to cultural capital; providing a safe space to meet likeminded young women.

THE PROGRAMME

This year, Zenobia Scholars has been operating across two schools in Brent – The Crest Academy and Newman Catholic College – to help a group of thirty young women secure their next steps and develop soft skills through workshops, advice and experiences. The programme ran weekly on Wednesday afternoons in The Crest Academy and Thursday afternoons in Newman Catholic College. The programme covered the following:

Workshops Advice Experiences

1 Next Steps Workshops

Both online and in person we delivered a series of five workshops on a variety of next steps options, looking to advise on the range of options available, and the methods to access them. The programme covered: **Week One:** Aspirations for the future, building confidence and understanding others; **Week Two:** Knowing your values, understanding your interests, identifying your strengths and skills; **Week Three:** University, apprenticeships and other possible routes to STEM careers; **Week Four:** Research techniques and individual support finding options; **Week Five:** Career options and an introduction to applications, CVs and cover letters.

2 Tailored Support with The Bridging Project

In association with The Bridging Project, we brought in a team of female-led development coaches who are current students or graduates in STEM subjects to give academic and emotional support to the participants. The purpose of the support was to affirm a strong link between aspiration and the qualifications the participants are studying to generate a renewed interest in their studies and a motivation to commit themselves to their education. Throughout and after lockdown, we saw motivation drop in all of our students as they were disconnected from their school and friends. The support helped rebuild this motivation and we saw 70% of our students go up at least one predicted grade as they engaged with the coaches.

3 Soft Skills Workshops

Throughout the year, we ran soft skills workshops to engage participants in developing their communication, confidence and public speaking skills through a range of activities. Each participant engaged in workshops involving debating, drama and psychology persuasion on a regular basis. They also engaged in specific sessions around elevator pitches, interview techniques, networking, online branding and articulating their aims and aspirations for the future. These workshops helped develop those vital soft skills to succeed in their applications, interviews and, ultimately, their time in higher education and beyond.

4 Women's Conference

Participants had the opportunity to attend a curated conference for young women held at Newman Catholic College. Participants had the opportunity to listen, ask questions and network with successful women from a range of occupations. The speakers were leading architect Tanvir Hasan, dance and technology innovator Joumana Mourad, head of strategy and partnerships at Brent council Lorna Hughes, professional photographer Brunel Johnson and our own COO, Tiffany Li. One of our participants gave a speech to open the conference, and another was due to speak about her experience as a refugee but was sadly ill on the day. All participants engaged in asking questions and networking with the speakers.

Photographs from the Women's Conference

5 Self-Care, Mental Health and Resilience Workshops

Throughout the year, each participant engaged in workshops to enable them to be more aware of their mental health, develop a self-care routine and develop an understanding of resilience. Initially, these covered sessions focusing around the topics of empathy and resilience and highlighting how these concepts would be helpful in the modern workplace. In October this was compounded by a day-long conference which focused strongly on self-care, mental health and wellbeing to help participants explore these concepts and become familiar with discussing them in an open and sensitive manner.

6 One-on-One Support with Applications

Each participant spent regular one-on-one time with our practitioners to create a clear plan for the next steps they uncovered with their development coaches. Through these sessions, each participant was supported through the UCAS and Student Finance process and developed a range of materials including a personal statement, CV and cover letter. This helped each student set manageable goals to progress through the UCAS process with good time management to ensure a considered, well-rounded application. This time was also extremely valuable for students without a British passport to assist them with exploring the requirements for their circumstances and collating the necessary documentation to prove their eligibility for the scheme.

7 Higher Education Contacts

While students were focused on their university choices, a number of talks with universities were arranged virtually to help give an insight into university life and the factors to consider when choosing a university. This was further compounded by a visit to UAL's London College of Communication to explore a university physically and network with academics. To explore alternative routes, participants also had a workshop with Westminster College to hear more about their range of Level 4, 5 and 6 apprenticeships on offer. Participants had the opportunity to give the employers their CVs for feedback or to apply for one of the jobs available.

8 Enrichment Opportunities

Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, we worked hard to ensure all participants had space to relax, socialise and have fun throughout the programme. Participants had the opportunity to engage with regular social, wellbeing sessions in school as well as a photography programme and film club. Additionally, participants had access to our Summer Camp which was two weeks of art, dance and sports for free throughout the summer, based in Newman Catholic College. Enrichment opportunities are ongoing at Crest Academy, with a women's football club starting up in February 2022.

Photographs from workshops and enrichment opportunities

OUTCOMES & DATA

As a result of Zenobia Scholars, participants see improved attainment of places at university, improved spoken and written English language skills, improved soft skills such as confidence and communication, improved academic attainment in their academic work and improved emotional resilience and self-regulation.

When we first designed Zenobia scholars we found:

95% of young women respondents felt they needed help with UCAS

90% were worried about achieving sufficient grades for a university offer

At the start of this year's programme, participants completed a questionnaire designed to measure the increase of aspirations and mental health. We found:

start 10% end 100% of participants feel confident in their future

start 57% end 100% of participants find their school interesting

start 60% end 97% of participants are sure about the field they want to pursue

start 20% end 97% of participants say they are proud of themselves

end 100% of participants have accepted or hold an offer relevant to their next steps

TESTIMONIALS

"I've been working at The Crest Academy for seven years. In those years we've had several different organisations which have come through the school. I can see that The US Charitable Trust and their team is unique to others which have come and given up on us. They have not given up and have made a great impact on our students and staff. They have been the most successful and forthcoming. In doing so, they have organised a structured framework to help in our careers provision. Such as, different events for the students, workshops, mental health focussed sessions, alongside UCAS support for students and CV building. Most of all they have helped connect the community and their companies to our students, in return forming skills in our students to find work experience and future jobs when they leave a school. The latest impressive impact is that they rescued our previous year 13s who have been left behind by the school system and arranged placements for all of them. No one left behind. There has been trust built from the school, teachers and students with US Trust. With the charity, I know that all of our students are safe for their futures.

On top of everything, here are extra events they have organised for the students which have inspired so many. We have gone to seminars at other schools, a Women's Conference in Brent. We've visited LCC University in London with Sixth Form students, we've done a photography session at the academy, encouraged the students to focus on their future and offered them summer schools. From there, many of our students were inspired to become Youth Ambassadors for the charity. US Trust have given the students so many more opportunities.

The students will always remember US Trust was the reason why they are successful in the future. As they have imprinted such a powerful impact upon their skills and all of our hearts. The support that the US Trust gives to students and staff is forever welcome at The Crest Academy, and throughout Brent, working together to build the community as a whole.

We are with the US Charitable Trust all the way! The future is looking great."

Lorna Jules, Head of Pastoral, The Crest Academy

My daughter has been working with the US Trust since September last year. We have noticed a difference in the grades she has received and the motivation she has made to get those grades. With her behaviour at home, we have noticed a change in the way she thinks about her future. She was feeling really down about her future during lockdown and at one point she did not want to pursue her own career after getting good grades from school. She convinced herself that good grades was something she cannot achieve as she could not catch up to work during lockdown and her mock exam papers came back not as expected. She comes home every week on a Wednesday telling us about her next steps and what she will do to motivate herself forward. She has got 4 conditional offers so far to London universities. We are so proud of her achievements and the steps she has taken so far. Thank you to US Charity who took the time and energy to sit down with her every week and made sure she was ok and was on track. We can tell by the change of her behaviour, that she will be ok after leaving school. This is the kind of support which I have never experienced before in my time, it is truly a gift. We as parents feel that with the charity's help all students will be able to leave school with not only confidence but with a smile. Knowing that they had the support and someone there even in their darkest moments.

Parent of a Year 13 Zenobia Scholars Participant

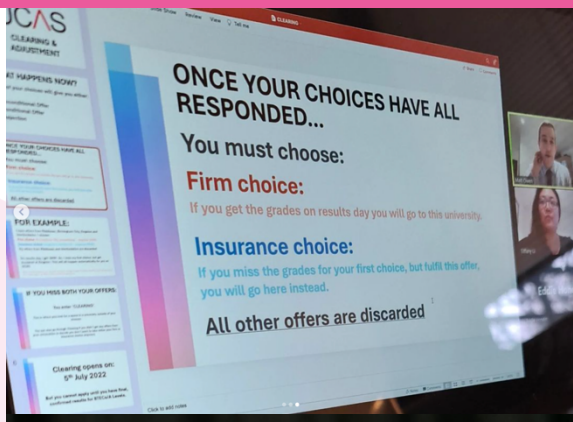
Miss, I am where I am today because of you. Some people did not believe I could do it. I also felt like I could not do it. But now, look at me! I am so proud of myself, and I thank God every day for bringing you to me. You have changed my life."

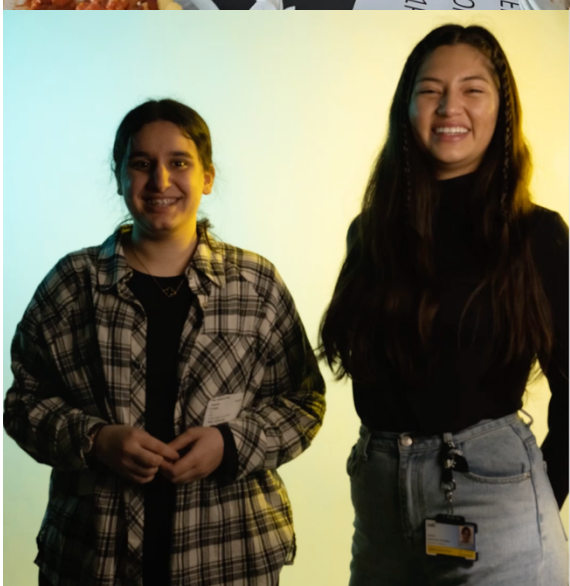
Zenobia Scholars Participant 2020-21

CASE STUDIES

Student A

This particular student is a bright student. Studying all STEM subjects at A level and aiming to pursue medicine at first, as that is what was expected from her family. Her family are all from medical backgrounds. She had only arrived in the UK five years ago from Syria. The pressure was on during the pandemic, and she felt her interest in medicine slipping. She wanted to pursue psychology instead. However, the family disagreed. She did not have the confidence, skills or information to argue her point and persuade her family. Throughout the workshops we had delivered, she was intrigued and asked many questions regarding psychology topics, such as communication, persuasion, self-motivation, initiative and research skills. With the one-on-one meetings she had with the US Team every week and the group workshops, she was able to motivate herself and prepare to deliver a persuasive talk to her parents. She resulted in successfully persuading her parents of a change of career plan and in return persuaded herself that she had tremendous passion and dedication to it. She is now asking to volunteer in out of school activities and cannot wait until the end of the academic year to say goodbye to one stage of her life and start another. Her confidence has really shone above all others, she voluntarily tries to motivate her peers and comfort her peers. She is known in the sixth form as the go to mother. We are very proud of her.





Student B

This particular student is bright, but with a limited written English having arrived in the UK four years ago and receiving no formal education until arriving in the UK aged 16. She was keen to continue studying upon leaving school, but wasn't sure what area to go into and was opting to pursue a degree in Art and Design, although we suspected it was due to her friend pursuing that course. We worked with her extensively in one-on-ones to help her understand where her passions truly lay as she built up her soft skills, confidence and understanding of higher education through the workshops. After three months on Zenobia Scholars, she decided her true passion was to pursue teaching, and committed herself to her studies with a renewed passion to pass her Maths and English, which she previously considered impossible. She also overcame a huge hurdle in terms of her own confidence, previously finding the idea of university without a friend impossible to handle, she now felt confident in following her passions alone. In August, her results came out and she passed both Maths and English GCSE as well as a four other GCSEs and a Level 3 Extended Diploma. We then worked with her and the school to secure her a place to study GCSE Science the following year, despite her being over 18, to enable her to be eligible for degrees in Education. She is now on track to easily pass her Science GCSEs and holds university offers having gone through Zenobia Scholars' support for completing her UCAS and Student Finance applications. We're proud of everything she's achieved so far and are excited to see where she goes next!

Student C (Alumni)

One of our very promising students, was a popular figure within the sixth form. She is known to volunteer, give her time to help others and love to try any activity. As we made sure to see her once a week, we got to know well. We got to know her advantages, disadvantages, fears, worries, her mental state of mind. Although seemingly a confident girl to others, she disliked herself quite a bit. She aims please others, especially her family. Who arrived in the UK from India only four years ago. Language not being her strong suit, she pushed herself to achieve a pass in her English Level 2 and at least a pass in her other subjects. Her goal was to go to university or take on an apprenticeship. She had doubts with university however, as it was an unknown factor in her parents' lives. If she had applied to university and got in, she would be the very first in her family. Her parents thought it be a waste of money, being in debt before education ends.

She was conflicted as her teachers told her time and time again that she could get into university with her predicted grades. The US Charity Team made sure that she understood the workshops which were held regarding skills development and mental health. We also made sure to deliver some workshops on psychology, motivation, and wellbeing. After six months of working with her, and several days of one-on-one crying and letting go of emotional baggage, she was able to apply for UCAS and apprenticeships at the same time. Her dream was to become a teacher for young children.

When results day came, she did not get the pass she was hoping for in her English Level 2. However, she was resilient and pushed herself to apply for more apprenticeships. The US Team helped her apply for supply teaching as a short-term solution, just to get her into paid work and to try the sector a little more before she was accepted full time.

However, once she started, she found she loved supply work. She was so good at it, the school which had taken her on for supply for several months, offered her a full-time role and a sponsored Teach First programme. She has now passed her Level 2 English and already successfully passed her first term of the Teach First programme. She came into school and gave us a huge hug and gave out presents to the US Team. "Miss, I am where I am today because of you. Some people did not believe I could do it. I also felt like I could not do it. But now, look at me! I am so proud of myself, and I thank God every day for bringing you to me. You have changed my life."

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