



Trust.
CHARITABLE
TRUST

ZENOBIASCHOLARS
REPORT
2023

The word "Trust." is written in a bold, sans-serif font. "Trust" is in white and the period is in blue. The text is set against a solid pink rectangular background.

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 per year. We run in-school, 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 advice to help discover career paths, interests and small group support to ensure each participant has a primary and backup plan for their future. We work with universities, employers and facilitators to make sure specific skills and grades are optimised and participants are truly prepared for their future.. 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 mentor 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, mentoring and experiences. The programme ran weekly in after school sessions in both schools.

1 Next Steps Workshops

We delivered a series of workshops covering various aspects of researching and planning your future. 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 Skills and Knowledge Workshops

Throughout the year, we ran workshops to help develop skills and knowledge participants felt are particularly important for their future. For example, this year participants requested specific work on teamwork and resilience as well as knowledge in finance and interview preparation. 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.

3 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. Over time, the workshops developed into a regular safe space to check in and discuss any issues or doubts they are encountering as a group.

4 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 mentor. 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.

5 Enrichment Opportunities

Participants have had regular opportunities to engage in trips to support their wellbeing and provide vital enrichment opportunities including trips to GoApe in Alexandra Palace and Escape Rooms in Central London. Whilst these visits were excellent opportunities to utilise their improved soft skills, it also provided a valuable space for socialising and relaxing with friends.

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

Data collected during this year's programme demonstrated:

100% of participants feel they have successfully developed skills relevant to their future

100% of participants feel their confidence has noticeably grown

100% of participants feel they are able to manage their mental health more effectively

100% of participants say they feel more driven and motivated to pursue their goals

95% of participants say they understand where to access resources to support their mental health and wellbeing

100% of participants say the programme is well organised

100% of participants say the programme is consistently interesting and engaging

CASE STUDIES

Student A

Student A took part in the Zenobia programme in the 2021-22 academic year. She took part in regular sessions, trips and activities to build her soft skills and secure her next steps. However, at the end of the academic year, she faced an issue applying for Student Finance: she found she did not have enough immigration documents to prove her eligibility. Despite working so hard to secure her place in university, she was unable to attend and deferred her place to the following year. However, the resilience and employability skills gained throughout the Zenobia programme helped her to overcome this huge barrier. The team at the Us Charitable Trust provided emotional and practical support for her to re-evaluate her next steps. Together, we build a range of employability materials and reflected on the soft skills and experiences she had gained over the year. Soon after, she secured a part time job to fill her year away from university. Meanwhile the team from the Us Charitable Trust kept in regular contact to support her wellbeing and advise on her fresh application to Student Finance in 2023.

Student B

Student B took part in the Zenobia programme throughout the 2021-22 academic year. She is a highly ambitious young person, applying for medicine at university. Throughout the year she took part in a range of sessions to support her wellbeing and enhance her soft skills. She also received tailored advice and support in the construction of her medical application. Despite pushing Student B to be ambitious in her application, the Zenobia Scholars programme also emphasised the importance of a well-constructed backup plan, and being logistically and emotionally prepared for a variety of outcomes. Although it was something she was initially resistant to, the Us Charitable Trust team assisted her with curating a backup plan which she still found challenging and interesting, and she submitted one of her university choices in accordance with this plan. As offers came in, the student got a mixture of interviews and rejections but ultimately failed to secure a place on a medicine course. But with her considered backup plan, she gained an offer for Biomedical Science. Whilst Student B was understandably disappointed to not be accepted on a medicine course, she remained excited about her future and felt she could still be ambitious and successful with this alternative course. The Us Charitable Trust team checked in with the student frequently, through weekly Zenobia sessions and tailored one-on-ones to ensure her wellbeing during this time. She has now successfully made the transition from school to university and is enjoying her time on the Biomedical Science course.

“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.

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.

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, KS5 Pastoral Lead, The Crest Academy