

COACHING IN PRACTICE: grassroots initiative

Seeds of change



Carolyn Mumby talks to three young people, **Una Richards**, **Laura Agnew** and **Finn Carrick Davies**, who have created a grassroots project – SEED (Support, Empower, Equip, Develop) – emerging from their own struggle to remain confident and engaged while looking for work. Their aim is to support, empower, equip and develop other young people as they travel the same road themselves.

What led to the development of the SEED initiative?

We had all lost our jobs due to redundancy and we each felt a combination of confusion, doubt, hopelessness and uncertainty in relation to our situation and the future. Despite knowing that so many people were going through the same thing, we felt isolated. We met at a local co-working space, Hatcham House,¹ a community workspace hub in New Cross, the inner-city area of south-east London, where we all live. The three of us bonded and connected over our shared experiences and feelings. Finn is a 20-year-old Generation Z man; Laura and Una are 24-year-old millennial women. Some of us have gone to university, some of us haven't. We have worked in a variety of different jobs.

What are you aiming to do? What is the need you are trying to meet and how do you work together to do this?

Through talking about our own experiences, we realised we wanted to create a support network for young people in similar circumstances to ourselves who were facing difficulty finding employment, and equip them with the confidence and practical skills to build their future. Through a series of social networking events and workshops teaching personal development and practical skills, we aim to give young people the confidence to pave the way for their future.

How do you work together?

We each have different, unique experiences that have shaped our goals and how we work. We all do a bit of everything; in our weekly planning sessions, we contribute to creating content for social media, contacting potential collaborators and facilitators, and discussing our ideas with each other. Laura successfully applied for funding from Hatch Enterprise² to sponsor our project.

What helped you get the project up and running and how has SEED grown and developed?

Hatcham House supported us initially to run the workshops/online talks from there. We originally planned to hold physical workshops, thinking this would be welcome, having just come out of lockdown and feeling that people needed social interaction again. After our first workshop, the 'rule of six' restrictions came into force so we decided to hold our sessions as online talks on Instagram instead. This works really well because we're able to reach a lot more people, not just locally but globally.

We hadn't thought about funding, but a number of local organisations have shown interest in sponsoring projects that support young people into employment, particularly those affected by the pandemic. We are now working with Hyde Foundation,³ a housing organisation, to engage their young residents who are looking for work, working with their employment team who run the 'Love London Working' programme. We are also a partner with Hatch Enterprise on their 'Rapid Response' programme, providing support to young entrepreneurs starting a business during/after the pandemic. As part of this programme, SEED is hosting a two-part series with a panel of entrepreneurs, where we will discuss their experiences, their inspiration and advice they have for young people looking to start a business.

How do you find your guest speakers?

We post the opportunity on numerous platforms: local Facebook groups and pages like 'Social Fixt' and 'The Other Box' (both jobs platforms with a focus on under-represented groups and creative industries). We look for people under 30 who have experience of redundancy/unemployment and who feel they are able to speak about one of our topics and can offer advice/tips/teach a skill. Our sponsorship from Hatch and Hyde means we can pay them to speak on our live Instagram talks – so they know that their time and experience is valued, because it is.

Why have you chosen to work through Instagram?

We felt Instagram was the best social media platform because it's where most of our

audience is (18–25 year olds). Instagram allows you to film a live video, which anyone can join, and they can drop in and out of it as they please – we find it's hard to get our age group to commit to things and struggled to get people to come to the first session, so this works really well. The video then saves as an 'IGTV episode' to your page so people can go back and watch it again and view it on demand. We are now hosting 'Engaging IG Lives' on a biweekly basis, in which we discuss work-related issues with a facilitator. Remodelling the workshops online has broadened our outreach and engagement.

What are you learning as you go along?

We are learning to trust ourselves, to feel the fear and do it anyway, regardless of what others think. That it's OK to make mistakes; everything is a learning curve and an opportunity to grow. We're developing practical skills: social media, content creation, communications, building a network of contacts/networking. We are learning what we want and what we don't want. With every talk we do, we learn so much about the issue we are discussing.

What is most difficult about the work you are doing together?

Imposter syndrome: are we qualified to be doing the work we're doing? Will our work have a positive impact? Will we be able to help people? While we are working on this project, we are also still very much going through the process of looking for work ourselves and struggling to feel happy and confident, and it can be a challenge balancing SEED with other life commitments.

What is most rewarding?

Feedback from participants during and after sessions – people can relate and find our talks helpful. The process of making mistakes and learning how to improve for next time. Refining our work and seeing results. Representatives from big organisations have been impressed and recognise the value in our work and business model, ie young people running talks for other young people.

How does what you are doing link with the world of professional coaching?

Although our aim was always to support and teach a range of skills that would help young people, we have never viewed our work as 'coaching'; we never felt qualified enough to call ourselves coaches. We're not professionals who have years of experience we can speak from, we're very much in the process of going through these issues now, which is why we think we have a special and unique model. It's engaging to other young people because it's relatable.

There's definitely an assumption/stereotype among young people about what a coach is – they are 'middle aged' and 'highly educated' – like the careers advice session we had in school, which felt completely impersonal and unhelpful. That was everything we were trying not to be!

So, you don't see yourselves as professional coaches, but I know you have been reading *Coaching Today* in preparation for our conversation. In what ways do you think your work does resonate with a coaching approach?

Although we don't see ourselves as coaches, our talks are informed by real-life experiences that can help young people. We're empowering people to realise their existing skills and supporting them in realising their potential; essentially, we are helping people to help themselves. We're not here to find people jobs. We're here to provide the support, empowerment and skills that people need to find or make work for themselves.

You mentioned coming from both the millennial and Generation Z demographics. Why do you think that is significant?

The world of work is changing, so a big focus of our 'model' is looking at what's changing and what we need to do to adapt and survive. We know how huge the problems we face are: how competitive the jobs market is, youth unemployment numbers, the lack of opportunities available. The idea of looking online and applying for hundreds of jobs until you get one, doesn't work. Many people are overworked and overpaid while many have no work at all. We're challenging ourselves to think about what can actually be done to bridge this gap and have a real impact on unemployment figures. One of the things we feel strongly about is **creating opportunities for yourself**. Our generation is resilient, creative, ambitious and highly adaptable – we have seen young people bounce back from the pandemic/recession in some really exciting ways. A few of our sessions will be focused on teaching young people to be entrepreneurial and make opportunities for themselves. Read *Don't Get a Job, Make a Job*⁴ – it's a brilliant book!

I notice that you speak a lot about mental health on your channel. How do you see the link between mental health and work?

For some of us, work represents our passion, what inspires us in life; but for others, work is purely a means of survival – a way to ensure there is food on the table and the bills are paid. Given that the average person spends a third of their

lives working, it's easy for it to start to feel like work is heavily tied in to our personal identity. The daily responsibilities, familiarity of colleagues and financial reward associated with work can provide us with a sense of value and a feeling of belonging. And for many, the structure and routine of the working day develops purpose and a feeling of security.

We strongly believe you can't talk about the issues young people face around jobs and unemployment without talking about personal impact. Lots of people feel defined by the work they do, that's why when a young person is in low-paid employment, gets made redundant or is unemployed, or doesn't know what work they want to do, they can feel undervalued and it can be a huge knock to their self-esteem and affect their mental health. There's a huge correlation between the two.

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years about the impact of social media on the mental and emotional health of young people. What's your view on this?

Social media can be a toxic environment for many. We are able to carefully and meticulously curate a perfect version of who we are, only revealing our 'highlights reel'. This one-dimensional projection distorts reality and has a knock-on effect of creating unrealistic expectations. With SEED's platform on Instagram, we want to challenge this and create a more open and honest environment. Through our platform, we express vulnerability, discuss mistakes we've made, the challenges we face and our own insecurities. By opening up about our own experiences, we hope to cultivate a more accepting and supportive platform where others feel empowered to do the same. We believe that no one should feel isolated in their struggles. There is strength in vulnerability; and through acknowledging it, we open ourselves up to positive change. ■

Find SEED on Instagram at [@seed.workshops](https://www.instagram.com/seed.workshops)

REFERENCES

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- 3 www.hyde-housing.co.uk/corporate/our-social-purpose/hyde-foundation
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