



# Project Elevate

By Jake Simpson and Jeph Bonsu aka Kwakz

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# What is Project Elevate

Project Elevate is a 4 week programme taking place over the school summer holidays aimed at boys between 10 – 18 years of age. The intention of the project is to provide constructive, beneficial activity for the participants. During the project a wide range of experimental workshops are developed each seeking to engage with project candidates and encourage development of latent skills and talents. Personal responsibility, communication and planning skills are sought and encouraged. Where possible activity is given community focus with participants (reputed to be socially dysfunctional) encouraged to take lead roles in a managed but not restrictive model. The model attempts to forge links between the participants and the wider community by demonstrating that positive behaviour can enhance life potentials.

Because the participants are drawn from a cohort that has demonstrated a problematic and even fractious relationship with authority it is not possible to impose a fixed methodology on the group. Each element of the project be it activities or respect for others has to be the result of informed consent and discussion. Management can therefore be a complex operation and may require a flexible approach to goal attainment based on mutual respect and agreement. Informal sessions to review and revise project performance serves to reinforce the benefits of positive behaviour and highlight the disruption caused by negative behaviour.

Project elevate was held at Eastside youth club situated at Highcrest Academy, Hatters Lane, High Wycombe. The youth club had access to a table tennis table, two pool tables and a small kitchen area, it also had an extra seating area, which was transformed into a music studio, performance area and motivational speaking stage. We also took full advantage of the other accessible areas such as the astro turf, sports hall and field. The range of facilities made available to us contributed greatly to the project being able to offer a varied and enjoyable range of activities.

All the boys consented to being a part of this project report and really want the project to run again.

# Ethos of Project Elevate



The ethos of the Elevate Project has developed from observation of current methodology of dealing with difficult children and asking the question “but what about those for whom the system does not work?” No criticism of current methodology or its practitioners is intended. The diagram on p.5 gives an indication of the complexity of the factors to be considered and balanced. Trust is key. We understand that we begin with a deficit of trust from a cohort that, in some cases feels betrayed by authority, the system even their families. There is an abundance of deficiencies, in literacy, numeracy, ability to communicate etc, that has to be overcome.

Some children present to the system with such a complex set of factors acting upon them that standard approaches cannot deal with them. The project leaders have experience of those factors and the effects of them. Due to good fortune the project leaders did not follow the same path as the participants in Elevate but could easily have done so. Recognition of the elements that brought about positive change for the project leaders has resulted in the design of the project. Elevate begins with understanding the individuals and analysing their strengths and weaknesses in a non-judgemental way. We start from where we are with a goal set not as some monolithic statement of progress but as any step away from that initial position.

Thus, for example, some children may have a weakness of communication skills leading to frustration, anger and anti-social behaviour which can be tackled by approaching from an oblique angle. Where the anger of an individual is targeted toward ‘authority’ a formal approach - classrooms, lessons, order - will become the object to be resisted. Elevate places the young person in a bespoke situation where they are given trust and authority i.e. as a referee in a football match. The target for the exercise is for the individual to operate within a set of rules and to manage people very like themselves. Advice is offered throughout the process but failures are expected. For the project the target is to bring the individual to analyse why the failure occurred and examine their part in that failure. By focussing on elements within the individual game that worked, for instance a refereeing decision they made that was disputed and handled without violence or aggression is offered as a potential model for wider application.

Over the time that the project ran we noted an increased use of verbal communication that was non-confrontational as the individuals concentrated on producing a ‘good game’ rather than demonstrating their authority. It is a small step and would require repeated exercise for habituation to happen but it is an advance. A collateral benefit is that as the improvements



## Ethos of Project Elevate cont.

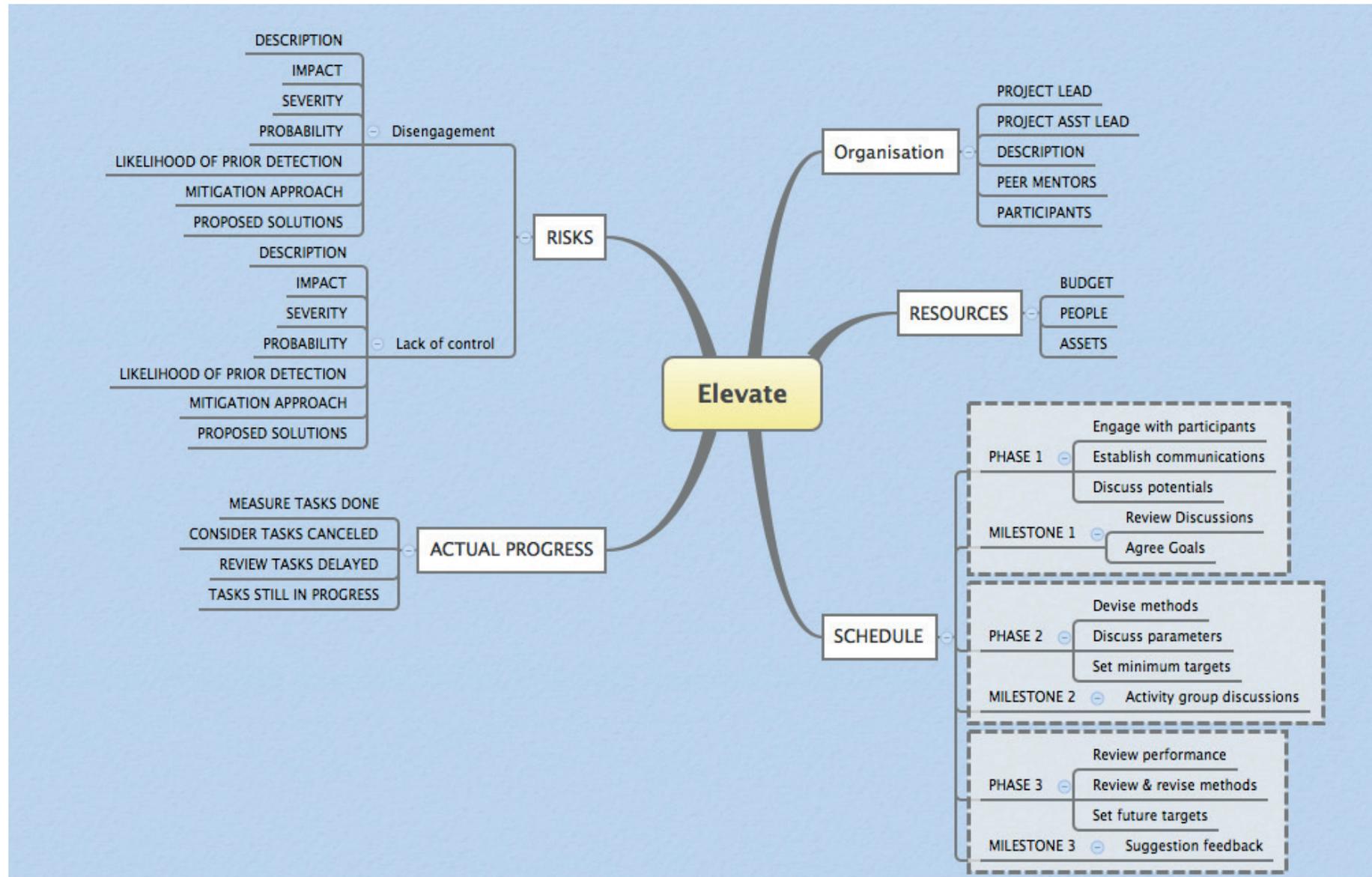
in performance become a personal ambition the individual does spend their summer holiday from school in productive, positive activity with no negative impact on society around them.

Some of the participants have a lack of social and communication skills because of deprivation or absence of normal social interaction. For these the oblique approach may be through cooking. The interaction between those taking this route results in banter, friendly competition and sharing. The discussions between the participants, their mentors and project leaders as the food produced is shared around a table is an experience some of the participants will find unique.

In all of the workshops the cohort were encouraged to understand that failures are part of the process and that these can be overcome by determination, discussion, teamwork, skill acquisition etc. They were shown a quid pro quo (over a short period) that they held to be personally valid. This became the basis for the argument that longer term and bigger benefits accrue from greater effort. The intention was to bring about a compromise in non-conformist attitudes in return for achievable benefit that the participants defined for themselves. Reinforcement of the argument in different workshops and different situations with different combinations of individuals was intended to produce a small change in mindset, to begin to reconstruct the stereotypes of society that had built up.

It will be seen from the two examples above that there can be no standard approaches. The metrics of progress will be determined entirely by the individual, the achievement of one child is not measured by a comparison with those of another child or a recognised norm but by comparison with where they started from. The nearest similar analogy might that of the progress of the Olympic cycling team, a long list of small, incremental advances. Our approach is non-conformist because our participants are anti-conformist. We can provide no detailed template since any plan devised at the outset will probably change from the first practical engagement with the project. The Elevate approach involves intensive vigilance and early intervention light touch management. The leader/participant ratio is high, the interaction is personal. Our intention is to help the participants acquire the trust and desire to re-engage with a society that is broader than the participants have previously experienced and the tools with which to do so. The mentors who succeed will produce, hopefully, the next generation of project leaders and they will draw on other successful participants to verify how lives can be changed.

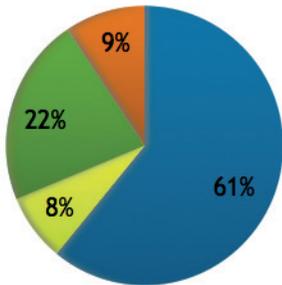
## Structure of Project Elevate



## Ethnicity of Participants attending Evevate

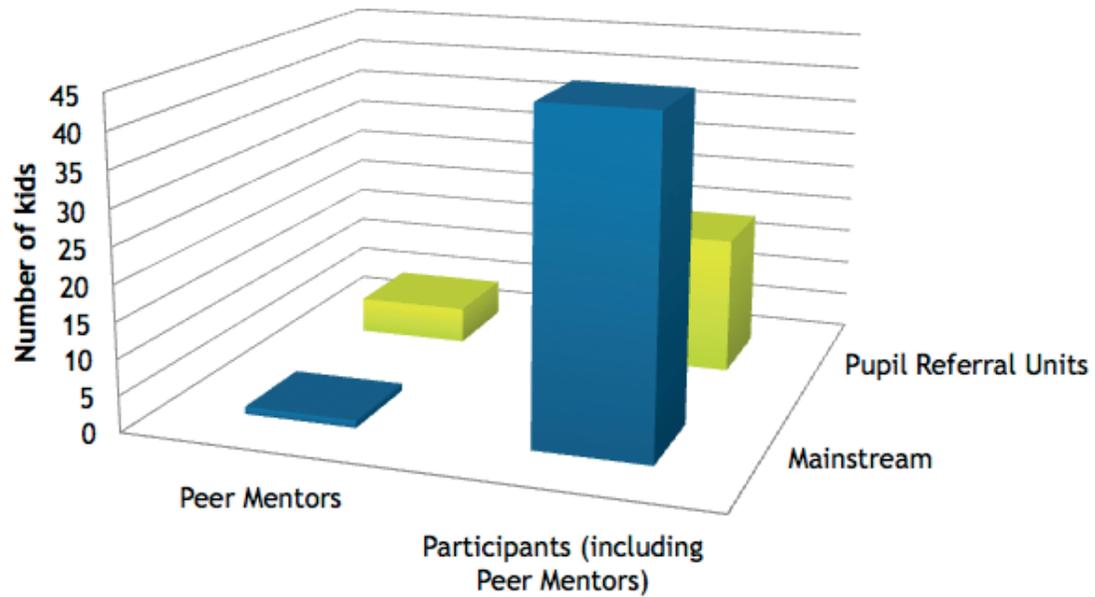
### ethnicity

■ Mixed Race ■ White ■ Black ■ Asiar



## Educational Establishments Participants Attend

### Education



	Peer Mentors	Participants (including Peer Mentors)
■ Mainstream	1	45
■ Pupil Referral Units	5	19

# Jeph Bonsu (KWAKZ) Lead of Project Elevate



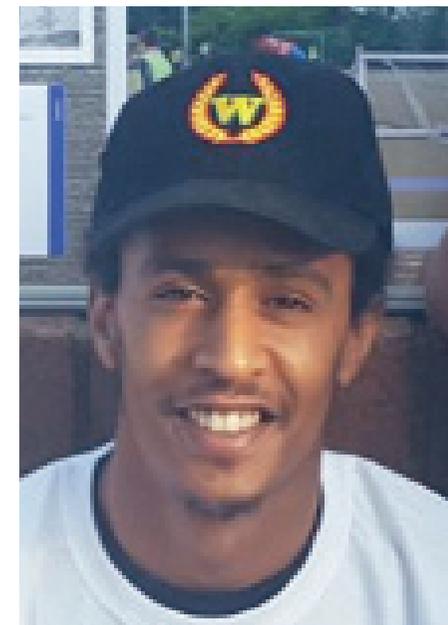
Aged 15-21 I had a very negative lifestyle I was involved in both robberies and selling drugs, and was not happy. My life changed when I met a probation officer who told me I was much more than the person I was choosing to be. He saw something in me that nobody else had and told me " *I was capable of going to university, and if I did it would broaden my horizon.*" He had the insight and belief in me that gave me the confidence to change the direction of my life.

I got into University and moved out of my local area which was Croydon to High Wycombe. By 2012 I wanted to work with troubled youths to inspire them as I had been inspired to make the best of themselves. I believed that many of them were heading down the same road as I was, which had wasted 7 years of my life. I wanted to be like the person that helped me change my life.

I mentored youths on the GMAP project through Wycombe Youth Action on a one-to-one basis. I realized the benefits after our engagement with these boys, their attitudes began to change and the offending stopped. However after a period of nine months the funding to work with these boy was cut which proved to have a detrimental effect on these boys. They regressed to offending and were exposed again to the risks of negative influences.

Consistency appears to be key when working with these young people that have no positive role models in their life that they can relate to. Prior to this summer however funding became available through the social services, and Prestwood Lodge Academy is now working with these young boys. Three of the boys were successfully part of Elevate. They did not get into trouble with the community once throughout the summer. Local police officers in Micklefield have actually stated: "*it was one of the quietest summers they have had for years in terms of absence of negative behaviour from the youngsters within the community.*"

I continue to work with Wycombe Youth Action who gave me the initial chance to start mentoring young people. I work with them on various projects including training other mentors within the community. These mentors can then provide positive engagement to these youths making them feel valued, encouraging them to be the best that they can be if they put their mind to it.



Last year I graduated from Buckinghamshire New University with a First Class Honours degree in Fine Art. I am now employed as a teaching assistant at Chiltern Way Academy on the Prestwood campus. The campus operates as a pupil referral unit. It is a challenging but often satisfying role. I have had to gain experience in behaviour management, vigilance and maintaining engagement with a sometimes resistant subject. My ambition is to find new ways of applying these skills.

Five or six years ago my prospects were set to follow a different path. I was the child of a single mother and an absent father. I struggled at school in many subjects. I found my status among a group that followed a destructive, anti-social lifestyle. My sense of self worth was being defined by an environment that contained many negatives and few positives. I was being defined by my inabilities and disabilities instead of my capabilities and ambitions.

Thanks to people offering non-judgemental advice and encouragement I changed the course of my life. My dyslexia was diagnosed and assistance supplied, my art which had until then had been a coping mechanism took on purpose. This led to interaction with a wide social demographic leading to improved skills. My communication, critical analysis, social abilities improved and developed. I was able to deploy these skills with the pupils at Prestwood.

Kwakz had noticed some of the relationships I had developed with some pupils. He explained his ideas for the Elevate project and asked if I would be interested in being a part of it. I jumped at the chance. The project provided the space to provide a bespoke programme of assistance to children and young adults who struggle with the rigid structure of formal programmes. The group was able to explore their creativity and I was able to study how a creative approach produced positive results.



# Benefits of Peer Mentors to project



Six boys were involved as peer mentors to encourage greater attendance and involvement in the project. Progress on the project could be seen daily with peer mentors developing from apprehension about enforcing standards of behaviour to full engagement with assisting in the various workshops. They attended almost every day and travelled independently. Even during bad weather they walked or cycled each day. They chose to make inputs to the basic workshop design at first assisting project leaders but later leading workshops themselves. We were able to note improvements in the younger participants. The 'street' pecking order was suspended and with the older boys giving encouragement the 10 -12 boys aged between ten and thirteen engaged with the workshop groups in an enthusiastic manner. They felt no threat, enjoyed themselves and that was a gratifying response.

The project highlighted their potential and abilities and demonstrated to them what can be achieved by team work. They also learned the positive impact they can have on their own community.

*"My sons woke up everyday excited and came home knackered, he's explained his job and his roles. He's so proud of himself and we're proud of him. Things like this will change my son's life, my life and my whole families."*

Peer Mentor's Mum

*"He's been a joy to watch, telling his friends, getting up on time and even catching the bus when its raining ! Its been peaceful for me, but most importantly his attitudes improved. He even said he finally feels apart of a team, apart of something good. This summers been the best one ever."*

Peer Mentor's Mum

*"he's gone on from this and gained employment doing labouring for a family friend."*

Peer Mentor's Mum

*"it was one of the quietest summers they have had for years in terms of absence of negative behaviour from the youngsters within the community."*

Local police officers in Micklefield

## Benefits of Workshops to project



The workshops were the main vehicle in the project. Initially we had an outline plan of what they should be like. It was understood from the outset that the goals of the project would drive content and that it would have to be flexible to meet the needs of such a diverse non-conformist group. We knew we would have to deliver this within a structure that whilst being low profile ensured that safety and vigilance was maintained.

We learnt rapidly the importance of physical activities coinciding with mental activities. Following physical activity (football/athletics) the group were in a receptive mind frame to contribute to the mental activities. The workshops encouraged a range of positive behaviours through teamwork, sportsmanship, contribution, good manners etc. However most importantly they focused on and sought to show the benefits of considered actions. Setting a goal, planning a way to achieve it, discussing individual responsibilities, analysing performance and revision of the plan are all transferable skills the project aims to develop.



# Football Workshop



Throughout the project, football was a constant reminder of how much energy is stored in a teenage male. It was a powerful tool to physically exert the boys which made their behaviour more manageable. We noted it produced a massive improvement in their mental capability and focus. We chose football workshops to concentrate on developing and showing the benefits of team work and sportsmanship.

Peer mentor's all played their part with the football, organising tournaments, acting as unbiased referees and handling conduct control. We maintained a 3 swear word rule which would if exceeded resulted in 1 minute out of the game. This worked exceptionally well, peer mentors appreciated the rule and enforced it, even the peer mentors had to take time out, to set the correct example. As a team we recognised the positives of football for these young boys. Kwakz invited Wycombe Wanderers scouts down on the final day to watch a football tournament, resulting in two boys getting called up and receiving feedback.



# Art Workshops



The art workshop was popular attracting half of the cohorts attendance. We ocused on t-shirt design, street art and general drawing skills. I believe this workshop was successful in maintaining engagement because it drew on an inherent interest. This allowed the introduction of understanding of context and function of art in a positive way. It drew on the principles of project elevate to demonstrate that art and self expression does not need to follow an anti-social route such as graffiti. One of our peer mentors in particular, was a great addition to the workshop. he applied his talents, provided focus and delivered assistance and guidance to other younger peers.



# Bike & Debates/Documentaries Workshops



As a team we knew we would have to incorporate some activity involving bikes. As with art, there was an inherent interest to provide a foundation. On the first day we had at least 15 bikes lined up outside the youth club. We knew one boy had an interest in fixing bikes, so we started running a pop in bike shop, which this boy ran along with assistance from anyone else who wanted to extend their knowledge of bike repairs and modification.

We noticed a strong bond form between two boys They both had good knowledge, and showed great enthusiasm and enjoyment. In total they fixed 10 bikes. Some of the bikes were in a sorry state of repair but with patience and perseverance the bikes were returned to roadworthy condition. The sense of satisfaction was palpable and helped to reinforce the underlying principles of Project Elevate and boost self confidence.

The debates and documentaries offered immense potential to respond to a thirst for knowledge. We arranged debates about, politics, business, sexual health, education, gang culture and many varied topics. We allowed the debates to flow but discretely directed the conversations. We built on the debates and introduced documentaries and feature films which supplied background research and evidence on the topics discussed. Over the 4 weeks we watched 3 documentaries, 2 BBC real stories, 'My Murder', which focused on on gang violence, and, Murdered by my Boyfriend, which focused on domestic violence. Lastly we watched a documentary focusing on successful people who had overcome multiple challenges. This part of the project was the most surprising. Due to our preconceptions we could not have anticipated the level of interest and the participants really did shine and contribute. It is an area that provides food for thought and possible expansion on any future running of the project.



## Music & Cooking Workshops

The music workshop consisted of music production, writing lyrics and recording songs. It was very popular over the Summer with various boys coming regularly just to record music they had written. By the end of the project the demand was so high the facilities couldn't meet everyone's needs, which highlights the demand for such facilities locally

At least 8 original songs were written and recorded by the young people over the 3 weeks the music workshop was on. With more facilities and funding for more staff the work rate would have been a lot higher. Sound studio in Wycombe Town Centre has reduced the availability of their facilities. Which means the need to fund a suitable place for these boys to have access to utilise and make the most of their talents has become much more urgent.

Music is a great outlet for these young boys it is a medium that they use to express their thoughts, feelings and anxieties. It encourages them to use and improve their writing and language skills and challenges them to get better and better. Listening over and over again to a completed song encourages constructive criticism and gives them the opportunity to listen to and reflect on it without it being regarded as disrespect. Making changes following such an exchange is a mark of progress in a basic social skill, accepting criticism.



Cooking was the workshop we wanted to expand on because of the fundamental life skills it taught. We improvised, starting with very simple processes, such as the use of microwave and making Jamaican patty's. We progressed to creating our own pizza's and how to use a cooker correctly and safely. The boys reacted very positively to the outcome of the food workshops partially because they got a little snack at the end of the process. With cooking we also focused on health and safety, hygiene and good manners. The boys were taught that if they were given food they had to tidy up afterwards clearing and putting their dirty dishes and cutlery into the sink.

Two boys took roles within the kitchen, Boy1's role was to keep an eye on quantity and distribution. He also shopped for food when our provisions were low with a member of staff. Boy2 took the role of cleaning (washing the dishes cutlery and cups) also wiping down the sides. These boys kept the kitchen very clean and tidy and remained within budget when it came to provisions. Boy1 was also involved in organising the provisions within budget.

# Motivational Speakers & Performers



We had four main speakers and performers:

Dwayne Jack - Motivational speaker

Marvin Taylor – Motivational speaker.

Kwaks (Jeph Bonsu) – Rapper,

Jake Simpson – Street poet and artist



Dwayne Jack has created a non profit organisation called Road Lights which aims to raise awareness of gang culture. They run workshops and interventions for young people who may be getting involved in that culture. Dwayne's son was in regular attendance, came almost everyday, his opinion of his dad was very negative. He has changed his life massively in a short period of time, he has aimed to use his own life experience to influence, educate and elevate young people in a similar position. His speech included video and was very interactive, the boys responded very positively and it was positive for his son to see another positive side to his dad.

Marvin Taylor is an experienced youth worker, he has worked with Wycombe Youth Action and is now employed at Cresex secondary school. Marvins speech was informal with a lot of questions, he focused on reflecting on behaviour, consequences and who's ultimately affected. The boys really contributed to the questions, One boy said *"ultimately people are afraid when they act out, they just feel alone, like I've made decisions, that gives people a certain picture of me, so people think a certain way about me, then they give up and you're just sat there thinking your not good enough so you give up."*

Kwakz and Jake approached from a performance angle aiming to show the young people alternative ways to express your anger and your pain. Jake performed poetry focusing on fatherlessness and learning difficulties and Kwakz performed some of his positive rap tunes about moving away from drugs and gang violence.

Illustrated below are just two cases where the Elevate programme benefited two of the boys that attended. Both of these boys gained positive insights into how much can be gained by interacting socially in non aggressive ways both with their mentors and their peers.

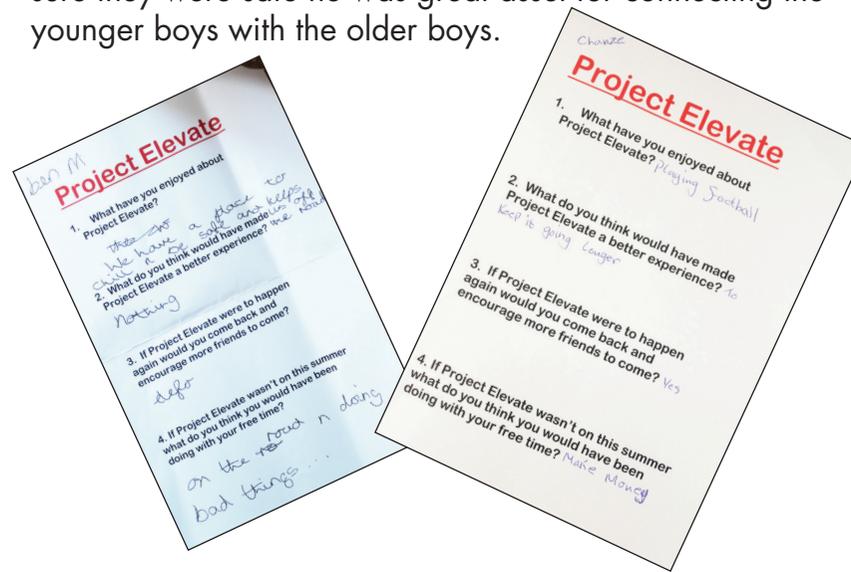
Boy A is a delightful 10 year old young boy who came to almost every session. He has issues with anger when things don't go his way but his behaviour was good whilst with us. He also displayed a very gentle and caring behaviour towards members of his peer group.

He comes from a dysfunctional family his father has been to jail numerous times and his mother is related to local drug dealers

Boy B is 13 from High Wycombe he attends Chiltern Way Academy Prestwood campus. He proved to be the most difficult pupil throughout the project he did however have minimal conflicts. We did expect that we would have interventions with him throughout the project but we wanted to focus on his positives.

He loves social approval, he's very loyal to his peer group and can be very friendly, polite and caring. So we focused on giving him responsibilities to help the peer mentors, by reinforcing the the positive status Louis already possesses.

Boy B, overall was an asset to the project his friendly nature shone through, he looked out for the younger cohort and made sure they were safe he was great asset for connecting the younger boys with the older boys.



# Conclusion



Popularity of the project can be gauged by the fact that demand for places was high and grew through word of mouth recommendation. The first 2 days saw 25 young people attending, by the end of the project this grew to 64. Not only can the success be measured in terms of numbers but also by including the most vulnerable. Boys that had previous experience with the project leaders signed up. These individuals are involved with YOS and Social Care due to their level of risk and need.

The project did present challenges and the learning curve was steep. There were some confrontations which were all resolved peacefully. These situations did offer some advantages, we would discuss situations and reflect and promote respect and positivity.

Throughout the project the boys went to the local shop and once decided to go into town for food. They received police interaction twice, one was received as a general stop at the shop and the other one whilst in town 2 boys had their bikes confiscated and were nearly arrested for wheeling and attitude. This just demonstrates how important this project was! It gave these boys a safe, fun, learning environment, instead of roaming the streets. That impacts directly on their community, impacts on police time and impacts on them. When they experience negative attention and interactions with different forms of authority it confirms their view of being different, excluded. To break the cycle of negative interactions confirming negative stereotypes (on both sides) the friction being perpetuated has to be removed from the equation.

Running the project gave us insights into the needs of the target group, although the project was effective, we realized that just replicating a day of Elevate would not meet the needs of these boys, as these needs will continue after the end of the project. We would like replicate this pilot again ironing out what we realized didn't work, eventually tailoring the project into a longer running version to meet the needs of the same community of youths to maintain and continue to build that relationship and trust with the boys to guide them in positive direction.

For the future, the hope is, to take all the lessons that have been learnt and develop a creative space that caters to young people within the community that can inspire them. To allow these youths to make the most of their life, to develop their skills, confidence and community engagement. Even perhaps one day replicate Elevate in other areas elsewhere as I feel there is a real need to provide positive role models everywhere there are disadvantaged youths.

We initially received £5000 from the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership and Police & Crime Commissioner which was acquired by Dr Jenny Murray because she had the foresight to see the importance of such a project. We needed an additional £1000 to finish the last week due to provisions, wages and renting out certain facilities such as the sports hall /astro turf. We had a real reality check with this project, and budgeting coinciding with our vision was difficult and corners did need to be cut especially when it came to the workshops. These all required resources such as the bikes, and art, music equipment and materials. Luckily Kwakz bought in all of his music equipment from home and set up a running music studio and Jake brought in his own paint and boards. The boys bought in a lot of the tools we needed so we only had to fund a bike tool kit, and we also found two run down bike that had been thrown away in a skip which the boys managed to restore to road worthy bikes. Everybody who came in to speak did so voluntarily, and we provided provisions everyday and cooked twice a week, provisions included juice cordial, milk, crisps and fruit. The money received was sufficient to run the project, but however if we had, had more disposable funds we could focus and enhance our workshops further to continually elevate and broaden these young peoples horizons.

From the Project Elevate team we would like to thank:

Jenny Murray  
 Catherine Marriot  
 Collin Hingston  
 Kevin Laine  
 Dwayne Jack  
 Marvin Taylor  
 Alicia Duffy  
 Inaam Mansha  
 Hannah Eley  
 Rebecca Dines  
 James Sisk  
 Elizabeth Wood



17/05/16

Name:	Time In:	Time Out:
Tyler	2:00	6:00
Kyle	2:00	6:00
Drewin	2:00	6:00
Josh S	2:15	6:00
Romana	2:15	6:00
Lee	2:20	6:00
Mich		

Michael (Elev)

### Project Elevate

1. What have you enjoyed about Project Elevate?  
*Studio*
2. What do you think would have made Project Elevate a better experience?  
*More time. Something someone*
3. If Project Elevate were to happen again would you come back and encourage more friends to come?  
*Yes of course*
4. If Project Elevate wasn't on this summer what do you think you would have been doing with your free time?  
*Nothing. I'd go to school & work*

Without these people project elevate wouldn't have been so successful, it wouldn't even have been possible, so thank you.

However these boy's need the consistency and support to continually improve, progress and elevate. So from the team of Project Elevate we would like to explore and expand and eventually give these young people more than hope, a real opportunity and chance to succeed.