



MOVING ON UP

Improving employment opportunities
for young black men

Evaluation summary



INTRODUCTION

Moving on Up (MoU) is a special initiative to increase the employment rates for young black men in London. This two-year initiative is funded by Trust for London and City Bridge Trust, in partnership with the Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG), and evaluated by The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP).

Young black men have consistently experienced more unemployment than young men of other ethnicities. In London in 2013, the employment rate for young black men was just 56%, compared to 81% for young white men. Though this disparity improved over the next two years, it has stagnated since March 2016. This disparity does not just reflect educational differences between the two groups – in 2015, young black graduates were also more likely to be unemployed than young white graduates one year after graduating (9.7% vs 4.6%).

The MoU Initiative aims both to directly increase the employment rate amongst young black men in London through supporting targeted interventions; and to generate learning that could influence mainstream employment support providers and funders/commissioners. £1 million was invested and grants were awarded to six organisations: Action West London (formerly Action Acton), Elevation Networks, Hackney CVS and partners, London Youth, Making the Leap and Step Ahead. These organisations use a range of different models to support young black men to transition successfully into employment. Work started in March 2015.



This report is a summary of an independent evaluation undertaken by The Social Innovation Partnership - www.tsip.co.uk.
The full report can be found on www.trustforlondon.org.uk

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings relating to the MoU projects

- **271 young black men are known to be in paid work following their participation in MoU.** This equates to a job entry rate of 40-60%. This finding is based on having data for 66% of the 683 participants that took part in MoU, so the real figure across 100% of participants is likely to be somewhere between 271 and 410. This success rate is comparable to similar programmes in the field.
- **MoU had the biggest impact on participants' attitude, confidence and understanding of work.** Whilst some improvement was seen in career direction and more practical job application skills, survey and interview data indicates that MoU's impact was driven more by psychological outcomes – with young black men being more motivated, confident, and aware of what employers are looking for in terms of skills and behaviour.
- **The thing that MoU participants valued most about the projects was that the staff cared.** Participants consistently appreciated, at times effusively, that the project staff always gave them their time, showed a genuine interest in their success and wellbeing, and never gave up on them. Their descriptions imply, and sometimes explicitly state, that this level of care was rare among people they had encountered from other projects or agencies.

'You feel more than just a number, you feel like they're actually dedicating their time to you. That's one thing that I really cherished about it.'

- **MoU participants also appreciated when the projects were targeted and tailored to young black men.** Many interviewees said they felt empowered by people caring about young black men as a group, and felt like they were interacting with people who understood them and the specific issues they were facing.

'The course did state young black males, it did actually state that. I thought that was really cool, to be honest, because it's like, okay, there's people who actually care about this topic and issue'

Key findings relating to the MoU participants

- **Young black men have to deal with barriers which are additional to those facing other young people trying to find jobs.** Three-quarters of the project participants interviewed for this evaluation believe that as young black men they need to work harder than other young people to get a job. This view results from their own negative experiences of trying to find work, which include instances of perceived discrimination from employers, and from the experiences or views of their friends and family.

'When I was younger, my grandma used to tell me, 'If you're black, you have to work twice as hard.' She always used to tell me that. I didn't like the idea of thinking, 'Why am I not good enough that I have to work twice as hard?' Are my opportunities not going to be as great, just because of the colour of my skin?'

- **MoU participants had high aspiration to begin with.** Lower aspiration is often identified as a key barrier to young people gaining employment, but MoU survey data showed that these young men had very high aspiration to begin with, with little room for improvement. Baseline survey scores were higher for this outcome than for any other. This indicates that at least for this group of young black men, it is not a lack of aspiration that is preventing them from securing employment.
- **Social capital is still a key area of disadvantage.** In stark contrast to aspiration, MoU participants scored lowest on baseline survey questions relating to social capital. These questions focus on using personal relationships to find work. This was also the only outcome not to see any improvement at follow-up, and to receive almost no references in the participant interviews. Clearly this is an area that may need more intense, targeted support, and/or further research to explore this in more detail.
- **MoU participants had consistently negative views of Jobcentre Plus.** The participants' positive views on project staff stood in contrast with their views of support from the JobcentrePlus (JCP). 50% of survey respondents rated the value of JCP support as 1 on a scale of 1-5, and this was reiterated by half of the interviewees who said the support was not useful, the staff didn't care about helping them, the sanctions are unfairly punitive and the job application targets are unrealistic and unhelpful.

Key findings relating to the MoU Initiative

- **Engaging employers is a key challenge.** Supporting the young black men is only one side of the issue of their higher rates of unemployment – the supply-side. For this issue to be addressed successfully, the demand-side must also be addressed by engaging with employers. This has been a challenge for MoU projects throughout the initiative. MoU-commissioned research by YouGov suggested that there is a need to raise awareness amongst employers about opportunities for young black men – as they were not top of mind for most. The best approach to engaging employers might be to clearly identify the problem, explain what is currently being done about it, and explain what employers can and should do themselves – without laying the blame for the problem at employers' feet.
- **The MoU Initiative has been able to raise awareness among policymakers of the issue of young black men unemployment.** A London Advisory Group was established and received good engagement from the Department for Work and Pensions, JCP and the Greater London Authority, among others. Damian Hinds, Minister of State for Work and Pensions, visited the MoU Initiative in 2016, and there are ongoing conversations with DWP about learning from MoU's targeted approach to supporting young black men.
- **Focusing both on hard outcomes and learning can be a tricky balancing act.** The MoU Initiative and this evaluation tried to balance the need for hard outcomes with the desire for learning - to support as many young black men into work as possible, whilst learning as much as possible along the way. Whilst broadly speaking this has been a success, this juxtaposition may be particularly hard on projects, and requires careful messaging both internally and externally.



METHODOLOGY

The evaluation that led to the key findings above had five research questions:

Area of focus	Research question
Participants	What type and level of disadvantage have the young black men who are part of the MoU Initiative faced?
	What has the participants' experience of the job market been before joining MoU?
Projects	What was the impact of the MoU projects on the participants?
	How could the projects increase their impact going forward?
Initiative	What did the MoU Initiative achieve more broadly?

To answer these research questions, the evaluation took a three-pronged approach: administrative data already collected as standard by the six MoU projects; additional surveys designed by TSIP in collaboration with projects and partners; and semi-structured interviews with young black men who received support from the projects.

In addition to this formal three-pronged methodology, more informal learning took place in relation to the fifth research question (about MoU's broader achievements) through firstly, a series of internal learning sessions conducted with the MoU projects, and secondly, various meetings and discussions between projects and partners throughout the initiative's lifetime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for programme delivery

- **Continue what works well:** Delivery organisations should continue to do the things they do well - caring and persistent staff delivering tailored support targeted specifically at young black men, and providing direct contact with employers where possible.
- **Engage employers:** To meet an increased supply of high quality young black male candidates, employers' demand must be increased too – through appealing to their self-interest as businesses, their ethical or legal obligation, or their desire to do social good. On-the-ground delivery organisations often do not have the capacity to do this on a strategic scale, and so may need specialist or dedicated support.
- **Engage media:** Similarly, to raise the awareness of this issue and/or reduce negative stereotypes in the media needs a dedicated, specialist team to drive an organised, large-scale campaign – delivery organisations often do not have the in-house capacity or expertise to drive this themselves.
- **Engage locally:** Delivery could also benefit from more local engagement – maximising enrolment into projects both by building networks among the local families and communities, and building relationships with Local Authorities and JCPs.

Recommendations for funding and policy

- **Recognise disadvantage:** A vital starting point for funding and policymaking is to recognise the particular disadvantage that young black men face, and that this makes them a group worthy and in need of targeted support.
- **Shift balance from using the stick to providing support:** Many young black men on this project talked about the rules, targets, sanctions and punishments faced through school, the criminal justice system and/or Jobcentre Plus. The evidence from MoU suggests that providing support is a much more effective route to helping young black men achieve their potential, and that there might be value in policies taking a similar approach to engaging with young black men as the one taken by the MoU delivery organisations.

'If you're in the workplace, there are certain things you can do and you shouldn't do ... it can be a bit of a culture shock if you haven't been trained, or at least you haven't developed the sort of skills that are required to work in an office space'

- **Fund more support organisations:** Based on the two points above, a straightforward recommendation is to provide more funding for projects like those in MoU, which this evaluation has shown to be effective at addressing the issue of unemployment among young black men.
- **Refer to delivery organisations from Jobcentre Plus:** JCPs should systematically refer young black men to local targeted projects like MoU, to provide the support they need to find work.

Recommendations for future research

- **Focus on learning:** This evaluation has given a good indication that initiatives such as MoU can have a positive impact on the issue of unemployment amongst young black men, but there is still much more to learn about what works best. It is important to have a target in mind for the results that any programme is trying to achieve (for example getting a certain number of young black men into employment), but it is vital that this does not overshadow a focus on learning how to increase that number even further.
- **Focus on race and discrimination:** The interviews in this evaluation strongly indicate that there are racial barriers evident in the workplace. Future research should explore this in more detail in two ways. Firstly, exploring this concept in more depth, drawing inspiration from recent social research trends on unconscious biases, micro-aggressions in the workplace and white privilege. Secondly, measuring this issue quantitatively – using interview data from this evaluation to draft survey questions that measure the different aspects of these racial barriers, and sending the survey to large numbers of young black men to more robustly identify the scale of this issue.

'Honestly, really and truly, I appreciate the fact that you said you don't have to answer if you don't want to, but I feel like it needs to be more said. That's why I feel there's no way of talking about it or answering the question because it's a very touchy subject, and I don't think people should feel, not scared, but nervous, or whichever way, to talk about it. It's something that we do say and I think it needs to be, kind of, emphasised a lot more.'

- **Continue mixed methods:** Ideally any further evaluation should include both quantitative and qualitative elements, to have a representative picture of how much impact there has been, as well as a deep understanding of the exact nature of that impact and how it can be increased.
- **Maximise response rate:** Any quantitative evaluation will likely benefit from a focus on maximising response rate, whether it is using SMS technology to gather follow-up data on job outcomes, or providing hands-on practical support to delivery organisations to administer surveys.
- **Gradually increase robustness:** If the three recommendations above are met, a next or simultaneous step may be to increase the robustness of the quantitative evaluation by adding a comparison group. This could provide the strength of evidence needed to scale initiatives like this at a faster pace.



CONCLUSION

Young black men in London have perennially experienced a higher unemployment rate than young people of other ethnicities in the capital. This disparity is likely driven by a type of disadvantage that is unique to this group – experience of likely discrimination in the job market, that has the direct, tangible impact of receiving less opportunities, but can also have the knock-on psychological effect on confidence and motivation. This discrimination may stem from perceived negative stereotypes among employers and other stakeholders, that are mis-generalised from a minority and are likely actually caused in part by that discrimination, in a self-perpetuating negative circle.

The approach of the Moving on Up projects suggests a path for addressing these issues. Young black men recognised project staff for consistently showing that they genuinely cared about their success and wellbeing. Where projects targeted and tailored their approach to young black men specifically, this gave these young men a space where they could discuss the bias they have experienced with other people who have been in the same position; or where they could simply be free to develop and grow in its absence.

Through these two key principles, MoU projects were able to have a meaningful impact on young black men's motivation, confidence, and understanding of the world of work that many had had little experience of to date. Combined with a little bit of direction and preparation, this helped 40 to 60% of young black men secure paid work, which compares favourably with other similar programmes in the sector – despite young black men being one of, if not the most disadvantaged and underemployed groups of young people.

The projects were:

Action West London - www.actionwestlondon.org.uk

Elevation Networks - www.elevationnetworks.org

Hackney CVS - www.hcvs.org.uk

London Youth - www.londonyouth.org

Making the Leap - www.mtl.org.uk

Step Ahead - www.stepahead.co.uk

Photography credits:

Front Page - Francis Augusto, P4 and P 7 - Austin Taylor-Laybourn

Published summer 2017



www.bteg.co.uk



www.citybridgetrust.org.uk



The Social Innovation Partnership

www.tsip.co.uk



Trust for London

Tackling poverty and inequality

Trust for London
6 Middle Street
London
EC1A 7PH

020 7606 6145

info@trustforlondon.org.uk

www.trustforlondon.org.uk

 [@trustforlondon](https://twitter.com/trustforlondon)

Charity Registration Number: 205629