

CASE STUDY

JHG Ambassadors Programme Launched 24 February 2020



Photograph: Ambassador Chris Townsend at Community Takeover

Background

The first Ambassadors group came together after the Community Take Over and the World Café Event (2019). The World Café was facilitated by Amanda Smethurst. We asked everyone who came how they viewed Southampton and about the vision they had for the future. We asked how they would like to be take part in developing a better Southampton for themselves and their children. We shared our outline plans to launch the JHG Ambassadors programme and invited people to nominate themselves or others from the community.

The JHG Ambassadors programme aims to be open and inclusive, making a space where diverse voices are valued and heard. It is about working alongside and with a cohort of people who are active within their communities and who want to explore how they can do more.

Approach

Co-sharing is at the heart of JHG Ambassadors, as is an openness to new ideas and ways to shape our thinking and our engagement and learning programmes. JHG Ambassadors spent time talking about the importance of words and meaning and finding a shared language that everyone felt comfortable using. This included not using art jargon or institutional language which could be unhelpful or form barriers to participation.

The project created new opportunities for the benefit of the JHG Ambassadors, with their needs and interests at the forefront. There were opportunities for networking, training and developing new project ideas.

The group discussed how to address some the institutional issues the communities face and to raise questions about distribution of power that have left people feeling isolated. For this project to succeed, we placed an importance on their voices being part of conversations and decisions.

Responding to unexpected changes.

We adapted this project when Lockdown was announced in 2020. We went back to the basic questions of what the Ambassadors wanted, given their changing circumstances. They all agreed they needed to develop their skills, confidence, project portfolio and networking with more people in the community.

We asked all of them how we should proceed, and everyone was happy to move to online meetings. This provided a space for the group to share their feelings and thoughts on what was going on, we could all check in with each other, during this challenging time. This fostered supportive and trusting relationships where everyone was respectful of each other, and open to forming new ideas.

Responding to need

When we asked everyone what they would like to gain by taking part, they said:

- Training
- Confidence
- Connections and links
- Something that will benefit their portfolio

To meet their needs, we invited Mel Larsen, Dream Project Coach, to lead 4 online sessions from June to August 2020. These sessions gave participants a chance to look at their current situations and how Covid was impacting on their aspirations. They looked at

how they do things, how to re-frame and resolve challenges and make opportunities. They shared their visions and “Big Dream” projects and explored the steps to get them to their goals. The final session explored confidence building and how to overcome setbacks.

We invited JHG Ambassadors to give us feedback in September 2020. From their comments we know that this project was a success and made a difference to them. One of the Ambassadors went on to develop her first community charity that does local food shopping for the community. Another stated in the feedback that it improved her confidence and not just see a problem, only to run away from it but to address it and to put her self-care as a priority.

“I gained a lot of insight from this course, especially when thinking about setting goals and envisioning a dream. The group facilitated a sense of freedom to imagine and share our hopes, fears, aspirations and potential contributions.”

“I learnt how to do things, which changed my life, it was wonderful, and I have become more confident, more involved with charity and able to develop a charity called Southampton Connects where I feed people every day.”

“Just to say a big thank you to all of you for setting up this group and for investing in our training. This is very valuable, and I feel like this training will be good in the community too.”

The group have come back together for key meetings and to explore developing new projects including:

Safe Spaces



At a very early discussion, the group spoke about safe spaces, gardening, ownership, and reimagining a place of Sanctuary. This led to a new project called Safe Spaces Soton and a partnership with one of the Ambassadors and Skate Southampton (weblink). <https://jhq.art/events/safe-spaces-southampton/>

It has also led to other conversations around community gardening project with Yellow Door, which led to the **Garden in the Gallery** project within **Community Takeover (2022)**



Supporting next steps

After 12 months, many of the Ambassadors have found new and rewarding projects or employment in the charity, commercial and local government sectors and as freelancers. These conversations have led to a strengthened network with many actively involved in Southampton City of Culture Bid consultation meetings. At each point we have valued the individual Ambassador, keeping their interests and needs in mind.

For example, we connected one Ambassador with a keen interest in sustainable fashion, to Winchester School of Art Fashion Forum. This has enabled her to network and to meet like-minded people who share their same interest.

As we embark on recruiting the next cohort, we will also keep our links with this Ambassador group. Many are keen to stay involved and can play a part in helping us to support the incoming JHG Ambassadors of 2022.

Testimonials:

"I would like to sincerely thank you for initiating such an incredible project for Yellow door's community garden - I imagine people that access this service would be deeply moved by having access to an evolving blooming garden, to connect with plants, integral heritage - celebrate traditions of how plants were/are used in Southampton - and to encourage a positive relationship with nature/outdoor spaces. It may empower people to feel safe and more likely to want to nurture and maintain the space by looking after the plants and perhaps be somehow involved."

"This is fantastic! Excited to speaking with you all again and it's so wonderful to be part of this group, I am so grateful."

"Very happy to be part of this group and very happy to continue involvement. It's been good to connect with such a variety of key cultural drivers in Southampton. Best value for me is to find that we can easily find empathy and understanding of each other's efforts and goals via

the shared conversations and projects. It's clear that during group discussions lots of real connections take place, advice and mutual encouragement are very evident."

"Being part of this group is helping me to find a broader Southampton, its changing my perspectives. So I see real value in being part of the group, am excited to see how we can help each other and possibly collaborate on future projects."