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The ex-con who helps turn young

Jamal Rahman – who served seven jail terms – now runs his own community group, one of many projects that will benefit from a new £1m grant. **David Cohen** reports

THE DISPOSSESSED FUND

JAMAL RAHMAN was a bright 14-year-old living in Tooting when the wheels came off his life. His parents split up, he was expelled from school for fighting, and emerging from a Pupil Referral Unit at 16 with no GCSEs and no father to guide him, he began to get into trouble.

It started with petty shoplifting but when a few years later his mother emigrated to Barbados, leaving him homeless, he became a career criminal. By the age of 27, his charge sheet ran to three pages, mainly burglary of shops and houses. He served seven sentences and five years inside Wormwood Scrubs, Brixton and Wandsworth jails. Then something shifted.

"When I came out that last time," said Mr Rahman, "I was 29, I had read lots of books and something inside me clicked – I decided I was worth more than this and would never do crime again." But going legit was hard. "I had no qualifications, a criminal record, and two children to support. The one thing I had was a reputation as a person who could handle himself. So I decided to train and start my own security company."

Over the next decade, Mr Rahman, now 49, became an iconic figure in the security industry, working as security or personal bodyguard for the likes of Beyoncé, James Brown, the Saudi royal family and the American actor and hip-hop star Mos Def.

He also did VIP door-work at the Emporium, a West End nightclub then favoured by footballers such as Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke.

Six years ago, Mr Rahman had a vision that he could help other "lost, struggling" youngsters and he started Norwood Community Group in Lambeth. Starting with nothing, he got seed funding and built a £40,000 programme that now helps hundreds of

marginalised young adults by offering them weekly sports programmes as well as courses giving practical routes into employment.

Last year, the group received a £6,620 grant from the Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund, one of 126 disbursements made from the £1 million given to the Dispossessed by the Big Lottery Fund. Mr Rahman used it to run a "back to work programme", putting on three training courses that enabled 31 people to get qualifications as a National Door Supervisor and seek work as door operatives or guards.

Visiting his programme on the eve of a second £1 million boost to the Dispossessed Fund from the Big Lottery Fund, Dharmendra Kanani, 46, England Director of the Big Lottery Fund, said: "Jamal's group is living proof of what our People Powered Change ethos is about. I see his extraordinary community spirit in hundreds of projects we fund. There are lots of people like Jamal who are written off by society but who, with a little support turn their lives around, and pull others in their slipstream."

This latest grant takes the total raised by the Dispossessed Fund to £9.3 million, and is inspired by the paper's recently launched Ladder for London campaign that gets jobless young Londoners into



Role models: Jamal Rahman, left, Elliot Hudson, Carl Burke, and Big Lottery Fund's Dharmendra Kanani

work through paid apprenticeships. The £1 million will be distributed in grants to charitable groups that help Neets on the path to training and employment.

"We are collaborating to support the base of the ladder in Ladder for London because if we can put people on the road to a job, we allow them to break from past cycles of dependence," said Mr Kanani.

Mr Kanani, 46, also met two beneficiaries of Rahman's programme – Carl Burke, 25 and Elliot Hudson, 24 – and recalled his own childhood on the wrong side of the tracks. "When I first came to London 40 years ago, I was six years

old and we lived in a refugee camp," he said. "We had fled Uganda because Idi Amin had begun ethnic-cleansing the Asians. On the way to the airport, we were stopped by the military who put a gun to my father's head and threatened to kill us. My dad bribed them with gold jewellery and we got out safely."

THE KANANI family arrived, unable to speak a word of English, to face the wrath of the National Front marching on their refugee camp and shouting, "Asians out!" Soon after they were decanted onto a council estate in the new town of Harlow in Essex.

"We arrived with nothing, but our neighbours helped us with clothing, bedding and buddies to take us to school. I will never forget that – my first taste of the positive power of commu-

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HOW WE HELP



What's the big news? The Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund today received a £1 million windfall from the Big Lottery Fund (BIG). This grant is the second time a million-pound boost has been provided by BIG to the Dispossessed Fund and, like the last grant in March last year, it is made as part of its People Powered Change initiative. This grant is inspired by our Ladder for London campaign, which seeks to help jobless young Londoners into work through apprenticeships.

What is BIG and what is People Powered Change? BIG is the largest distributor of National Lottery good cause funding in the UK. In England it is focused on supporting People Powered Change, recognising that every community contains people and groups who can step forward as the solution. This empowering of community-led action is an ambition shared by the Dispossessed Fund.

Where will the money go? The £1 million will be distributed to charities and community groups that help young Londoners aged 15 to 26 who are Neet (not in education, employment or training) or at risk of becoming so, to overcome barriers and set them on the journey towards apprenticeship and employment. Grants up to £50,000, spread over two years, will be mainly focused on small and medium-sized groups.

Who can apply for a grant? The grants will be made to applicable groups known to the Dispossessed Fund and BIG networks. We regret we will not be receiving unsolicited applications for this programme, though we expect to do so again in the future under other income streams of the Dispossessed Fund.

Who will decide? An advisory board with representatives from the Standard, the Big Lottery Fund and the Community Foundation Network, which administers the Dispossessed Fund, will have the final say on agreeing grant applications. CFN will work with its affiliate, The London Community Foundation, to deliver the programme on behalf of the Evening Standard.

What has the Dispossessed Fund achieved so far? The total raised since its launch in July 2010 stands at £9.3 million. So far, £4 million has been given out in grants to more than 630 groups, helping over 100,000 beneficiaries across the capital. The fund has won plaudits, including the Cudlipp Award and Campaign of the Year in the British Press Awards.

Donations can be made online at: www.dispossessedfund.com or communityfoundations.org.uk

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