

'Ditch F-word from your rap songs if you want to use music studio ... and they did'

THE DISPOSSESSED FUND

A youth club on a notorious London estate is singing a different tune thanks to a grant from the Dispossessed Fund and Comic Relief. **David Cohen** hears its story



THE youth club run by SHAK on the notorious Rowley Way Estate had just opened its state-of-the-art recording studio, but when the local teenagers arrived they were told their "f***-you" rap songs were banned. "Users of this studio are reminded that defamatory lyrics will not be tolerated," proclaimed the code of conduct plastered to the wall, and those who failed to comply were sent packing.

"It was a high-risk strategy," admitted music tutor Nick Holder, "especially as the estate had problems with anti-social behaviour and the teenagers only wanted to lay down tracks about how they were going to 'do the other gang in'. Our aim was to use music to change the way they thought and talked and transform the narrative of their lives.

"So we said: 'Come and do positive songs about how you can improve your life and make your mum proud'. Of course they ran off in disgust, but our equipment was so good that they drifted back. Now, a year later, we have dozens of teenagers signed up and we are beginning to see a big difference in their lives."

The South Hampstead and Kilburn Community Partnership (SHAK) is the only youth club on a cluster of estates in the Kilburn ward of Camden collectively known as the Rowley Way Estate. Here 2,500 residents live in overcrowded social housing amid high rates of unemployment and poverty. But without SHAK, they say, crime would be much worse.

Last year, a £17,216 grant from the Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund was used to employ Mr Holder, 31, along with two others to run an accredited course in sound engineering for up to 60 young people on the

estate. The grant came out of a £1 million cash injection to the Dispossessed Fund by Comic Relief and was one of 66 grants we made to grassroots groups tackling inequality across the capital.

This year, once again, the Standard has joined forces with Comic Relief to raise money for Londoners living in deprived conditions. Traditionally Comic Relief asks people to do something funny for money, and in this vein we are appealing to our readers to go to work in their pyjamas on Red Nose Day, March 15, and get sponsored. Because without the generosity of ordinary Londoners, transformative groups like SHAK would fall by the wayside.

According to SHAK's founder Jane Lee, 55, raising the cash to keep the project going is tougher today than when she founded it 10 years ago. It all started when Camden council gave her a £24,000 grant to go onto the worst estate in the borough, with its brutalist concrete design, to identify the needs of the residents. She said: "A lot of people wouldn't go near the estate because of its terrible reputation, but I had been a health campaigner and saw it as an opportunity to change lives."

It didn't take long for Mrs Lee, a sociologist from west London, to discover that older people on the estate lived in fear of being attacked, and that this was because of bored, fractious youngsters who had nothing to do and nowhere to go.

"There was a derelict laundrette on the estate and I managed to get a

£50,000 grant from the Camden Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to convert it into a UK Online hub to teach local people IT skills and that's how we began," she said.

Today, driven by Mrs Lee's ingenu-



SHAK FACTS

What they do: Founded 10 years ago by sociologist Jane Lee, the South Hampstead and Kilburn Community Partnership (SHAK) is the main youth services provider on the Rowley Way Estate in the deprived Kilburn ward of Camden.

Amount awarded last year: £17,216

How grant is being used: To employ two music tutors and a youth worker to run accredited courses in sound engineering and music technology for 60 local people aged 16 to 24 who are not in employment, education or training, or at risk of becoming so. It also helps them with CVs, finding apprenticeships and job searches.

Website: www.shakonline.co.uk

"Time to de-stress": Ramar Roberts, top left, with Suzette Williamson, Jane Lee and, in foreground, media production tutor Nick Holder

I became disruptive at school and started hanging around with the wrong crowd.

MY friends were robbing and taking drugs, and I could have joined them, but I saw this club as a chance to stay out of trouble and accomplish something in my life.

"I can't put into words what SHAK means to me. It was here that I discovered my talent and my passion. Without it, I'd have ended up in trouble with the law like my friends. This place has been my escape route and has given me a future."

SHAK has also worked closely with the local police to reduce anti-social behaviour, said youth club manager

Suzette Williamson, 40. "Sometimes the police call us if something kicks off and ask what we know about such a person, and we say, 'leave it to us', and we talk to them and try to steer them in a better direction."

But sometimes the youth club is itself the target of crime, she added. "Two years ago we arrived to find the windows smashed and £20,000 worth of brand new recording equipment gone. Although we were fully insured and have since put in CCTV cameras and security bars, it was devastating to think that people on the estate would steal from their own."

"Around that time we also had a mini-riot when a gang looking to make their name arrived and started throwing pool balls and chairs. We

banned the main culprits, but we also had meetings to work out terms under which they could return to the club. They apologised, which was a big step for the likes of them, and today most of them are regular members of the club."


But it is the estate's location, surrounded by the multi-million-pound houses of St John's Wood, said Mrs Lee, that poses a particular challenge. "These teenagers walk past the drive-ways with the big cars and they come here and boast, 'I'm going to be driving a Range Rover soon'. We say, 'have you thought how you are going to afford it?' Thanks to Comic Relief and the Dispossessed, we are building their confidence, giving them skills and helping them change the sound-track of their lives."



Tuesday

Harissa lamb with mint couscous

Make your roast go further. Simmer leftover lamb in a spicy, Moroccan style tomato sauce with red pepper and mangetout peas. Serve on a bed of aromatic, mint flecked harissa couscous.

Sainsbury's 

Pick up recipe cards in store or visit
sainsburys.co.uk/makeyourroastgoFurther

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Monday

Speedy lamb and sugar snap curry

Make your roast go further. Add cubed leftover lamb to a light, aromatic Malaysian style curry with fresh coriander and plenty of colourful vegetables.

Sainsbury's 

Pick up recipe cards in store or visit
sainsburys.co.uk/makeyourroastgoFurther

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