

VILLIERS PARK NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 18 | SPRING/SUMMER 2018

www.villierspark.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 225920

We mean business

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world of commerce | PAGE 5

Oxbridge achievement

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Richard Gould, CEO



Letter from our Chief Executive

Social mobility continues to be in the news and we are delighted that one of the six young people featured in the excellent BBC production *Generation Gifted* is one of our Scholars. The series will track progress over three years – they have considerable potential, but will it be realised by the time they take their GCSEs?

Since being at university I can see that the quality of teaching I received at Villiers was on par with the education I am currently getting at the University of York.

Eleanor
Swindon Scholar Alumna

The barriers they face are substantial, including those resulting from low household income. Even at their relatively young age, whilst there is recognition that going to university is 'a good thing', they and their families have concern about accumulating a debt of £50,000 if they decide to do so. Therefore, we are pleased that the government have announced a review of post-18 education. Perhaps fees will be replaced by a graduate tax that only kicks in when a certain level of income is reached; perhaps means-tested maintenance grants will be reinstated.

There remains a divide in perception of the quality, value and status between post-18 vocational and academic qualifications. As long as this exists there will be a tendency to accept one pathway for high ability middle class youngsters – access to a leading university – and other options predominantly for those with equal ability from less advantaged backgrounds.

We set out to create an equal playing field so that our beneficiaries can access the best choice for their interests and abilities, be it a top university, an apprenticeship or a particular career. Destination must not be based on socio-economic background. However any achievement must match those of their more privileged peers – a university wants to enrol the best, a company wants to recruit the best.

DESTINATION MUST NOT BE BASED ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Our programmes are working! We are delighted by the progress our students are making: some of their success stories are featured in this newsletter. We want to help more young people to succeed. As a charity, we can only do so with outside support like that given by the Reece Foundation that enabled us to establish the programme that will ensure that our *Generation Gifted* student, Liam, excels.

Richard

Richard Gould, CEO

Mentoring in the spotlight

We were delighted to be invited to the Alternative Provision: Pathways to Excellence conference, organised by the St Edmunds Society in Norwich. Held on 16 February in Norwich Cathedral, the day was focused on how alternative provision – i.e. teaching young people practical, vocational subjects in which they excel – could work alongside mainstream education.

Delegates, who included local teachers, charity professionals and alternative education providers, joined Jo Gurvidi, Programme Director, Cerian Lye-Owens, Involve Facilitator and from our Norfolk Scholar team, Laura Anderson, Programme Manager and Zoë Mitchell, Learning Mentor, for a workshop on approaches to successful mentoring. The focus of the workshop was to demonstrate the positive impact of the Scholars Programme.



"We were able to share the impact of working with young people for a long period of time, running meaningful events and activities. We discussed how our mentoring builds confidence and then success in our young people," said Jo.

"It was a great forum to discuss best practice with a range of people from different organisations and, importantly, a good opportunity for us to raise awareness about our work."



ATLAS APPEAL SUCCESS!

In our Autumn/Winter newsletter, we asked our supporters to help us improve and upgrade our library facilities. Although well-stocked with resources, the décor is tired and we want our facilities to match the high-quality, innovative education we provide. We are delighted to report that the appeal led to a number of donations (thank you very much), but that it also inspired a generous supporter to bridge the funding gap and cover almost the entire cost of the refurbishment. The work will take place over the coming months. We are thrilled that our young people will soon have access to a brighter, modern and more inspiring learning environment. Keep an eye on our social media for the latest updates.

WILL YOU BE OUR FRIEND?

BEING A FRIEND OF VILLIERS PARK IS NOT JUST A MONTHLY DONATION.

It is Hastings Learning Mentor Alex, who supported a Year 11 Scholar, Courtney over ten mentoring sessions, helping her secure a high grade in her Maths GCSE. It is a place on our Criminal Law course for Harry, who then realised he was able to go to university and study the subject he loves.

Being a Friend of Villiers Park gives us the continued support we rely on to make our work possible. With just a small monthly donation, together our Friends help us change the lives of the young people we work with every day.

Become a Friend of Villiers Park today, and help us prove that together, a little support can go a long way.

Please contact

✉ development@villierspark.org.uk or visit our website to find out more.

In **2017** our **FRIENDS GROUP** collectively donated

£8,400 to our cause.

That's the equivalent of

700 HOURS of mentoring, or

56 PLACES

for students on a two-day Scholar residential!

Thank you to all our regular givers, your support is essential for our work in improving social mobility.



Natalie and her peers visiting HMP Peterborough as part of their Criminal Law Inspiring Excellence week

A tale of two firsts: Oxbridge offer for budding lawyer

“That was probably one of the only times I have ever been completely speechless.” This was how East Lancashire Scholar, Natalie Whitham, described her reaction to gaining a place at the University of Oxford to study Law last summer. Natalie is not only the first in her family to go to university, but also the first ever student from her school to go to an Oxbridge College. A fantastic achievement.

After two years on the programme, Natalie tells us how her time with Villiers Park opened her eyes to the opportunities available to her, and that her great achievements wouldn't have been possible without our support and encouragement.

“As a student, the Scholars Programme has completely reinvented me. At the beginning of Year 12 I was still motivated and invested most of my time into my studies, but I had a completely different worldview to the one I have now ... I severely lacked confidence in talking to others and the ability to reflect on my own progress.”

As a Villiers Park Scholar, Natalie was supported throughout her time on the programme by a personal Learning Mentor. With regular meetings to help guide her studies and develop future plans, Natalie soon found her confidence greatly improved, as well as her ambition to achieve.



“Coming from an area that is particularly disadvantaged, Villiers Park has allowed me to see that background does not matter as long as you have the ability and the willingness to work hard.”



“The programme has given me all of the resources I need to ensure success in the future. By being involved in the workshop days and the Stepping Stones to Excellence course, I have become so much more confident in myself and my ability.

“I received extensive help with my university application, and most importantly with my interviews at York and Oxford University. The help I was given allowed me to progress through the application process smoothly, which subsequently led to me receiving offers from all five of my chosen institutions”.

Looking to the future, Natalie now wishes to pursue a career in law. “Once I have finished university, I am hoping to train to become a fully qualified barrister. However, I am still open to other options such as pursuing a PhD in Law and becoming a legal academic”.

We can't wait to see Natalie go from strength to strength and achieve all she is capable of – we are sure she has a great career ahead of her. Every year, Villiers Park works with 750 young people like Natalie on the Scholars Programme and we hope they are inspired by Natalie's success as much as we are.



“My experience with Villiers Park has been absolutely incredible – they saw something in me and encouraged me to realise and fulfil my own potential. I'm sure I do not speak just for myself when I say that they make a difference in all of their students' lives.”



INVOLVE SHOWCASE: GET INTO BUSINESS



Across the country, our Scholars are busy working on their INVOLVE projects. The idea behind INVOLVE is to challenge our young people to create and lead a project in their school that enriches the learning environment. As well as improving their skills and employability, it has a positive impact on their peers, too.

Seven Year 11 Swindon Scholars who study at Lawn Manor Academy have developed their INVOLVE project titled: 'Get into Business'. In October, they organised and led the first business workshop that featured activities, an inspirational talk from successful local businessman – and supporter of Villiers Park – James Phipps, and a Q&A session. A total of 34 students identified as 'gifted' from Year 7 and 9 attended, and feedback was positive.

"It made me more motivated to listen in school," commented one student, with another saying: "It makes me want to do more with my life".

"I found, as always with the Scholars, them to be engaging, intelligent and keen to learn, and spending time with them is truly rewarding for everyone involved," said James. "It was a pleasure to oblige with this project".

The Scholar's next event, a business skills workshop, took place in March. Attendees took part in a business game – designed and led by our Scholars – challenging them to best manage a profitable ice cream company by making decisions on flavours, pricing and stock levels.

Our Scholars have told us they feel the following skills have been developed by doing the project:

Organisation:
Arranging the logistics

Communication:
Communicating the logistics to staff and students

Creativity:
Marketing both events

Teamwork:
Working together to plan and lead the events

Confidence:
Developing confidence in their ability to plan and deliver events, as well as the confidence to speak to a group of people.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

A quick catch up with a Villiers Park Alumnus.

Rob completed our Geography course back in 1997, and now has an exciting career with Shell as a Geospatial Technologist. His work has taken him to places such as Cape Town and Beijing, and Rob now hopes to share his career experiences with our younger alumni as a Villiers Park mentor.

Q. What did you think of your time at Villiers Park?

A. "I had come from an environment where I was the exception for enjoying my studies, and for the first time I found myself in a group of people who also enjoyed studying."

Q. Do you think Villiers Park influenced your career choice?

A. "I think the course played a big role in what I went on to do. It gave me the confidence to travel, so I picked a university course which involved a year abroad. It also reaffirmed my love of Geography, which I went on to study and then practice in my subsequent career."

If you're an alumni and interested in getting some advice on a career in Geography, sign up to Shaping Your Future to be matched with Rob today!

Visit the Shaping Your Future page on our website to register.



What happens on ... A Scholars Residential

Every year, students on our Scholars Programme will hop aboard a coach and travel to Foxton for a residential course. But what actually happens when they arrive? We joined a group of Year 12 Scholars from Tyneside to find out more...

Our residential trips offer a number of benefits to students, including:

- » a bespoke, developed and inspirational activity schedule focused on their learning
- » exploring topics not covered in school
- » developing their 'Skills4Success', such as project management and being a team player
- » mixing with young people from different schools
- » boosting independence and self-confidence
- » trips to places they may never have seen
- » healthy and delicious food, cooked on site
- » input from expert tutors or industry professionals.

Day one – the launch

Late one February afternoon, a bus containing 28 STEM Scholars from Tyneside pulled up in Foxton ready for the 'launch' meeting, where their project was to be revealed. They were to take on a brand new project developed with our partner, Havas, a global advertising agency.

After an ice-breaker game to get the Scholars mixing, Heleana Blackwell, a strategist from Havas (and Villiers Park trustee) introduced their challenge: create a new brand of popcorn and pitch it to a panel of industry experts. Their brief was a big one – they had to consider the brand, audience, marketing activity and crucially, the budget – and be ready to present it all in under 48 hours.

The Scholars were assigned teams and given a pack of information, worksheets and of course, bags of popcorn, to help them navigate the task. Jo Gurvidi, Programme Director and course tutor, held a discussion titled 'What makes a good team', helping the Scholars to identify key behaviours they should be displaying, such as organisation, good leadership and communication. Research then got underway, with the teams comparing the competition – both for their branding and their taste – before a dinner cooked by our in-house chef.

Day two – developing skills

Bright and early the next day, the Scholars, who are all studying STEM A-levels, were joined by Tom O'Neill, our chemistry tutor and PhD student at the University of Cambridge. He delivered a talk to help the Scholars understand the transferable skills they will be developing by completing the project, asking them to critique pitches written by scientists seeking funding for new drugs.

"Scientists need to be able to communicate their work, to sell their science and get people to fund their research," he explained. "Research and presentation skills are fundamental in the world of STEM."

The day then continued in a whirl of research and practice pitching, including an afternoon Skype call with Heleana from her London office. After dinner, the Scholars were joined by a Villiers Park favourite, Paul Cook, delivering his dynamic 'maths of juggling' workshop.



Day three – time to pitch

The nerves were palpable as our expert panel comprising Richard Bland and Anthea Hughes from Kiss Communications, a digital, PR and advertising agency, and Sue Keogh, owner of Sookio, a digital agency, walked into the conference room. Each team had 15 minutes to pitch their popcorn and field questions from the panel, who were scoring them for their ideas, their analysis of the marketplace and their understanding of the audience – along with their overall pitch. Their ideas were:

Mrs Muybridge: A popcorn named after Eadweard Muybridge – a man linked with the ‘birth of the cinema’ – that had a vintage feel and was sold in recyclable conical boxes.

Pop’s Corn: ‘Pop’ was a character based on ‘the friendly old man in your street that everyone knows’, who had also travelled the world – bringing his unique flavours back into his popcorn, such as wasabi.

Toon Pops: Aimed at children – a gap in the market identified by the team – the ‘toons’ were a range of cartoon monsters who livened up the packaging and the popcorn itself would be dyed bright colours.

Popemon: Based on the popular game Pokémon and riding on the back of its popularity, this low calorie popcorn had fruit flavours such as lemon and blueberry and the packages featured collectable cards.

Poppings: A twist on Mary Poppins, Poppings was free from artificial colours or flavourings and was aimed at families. Its strapline was ‘a handful of popcorn helps the movie go down’.

In addition to their creative ideas, the Scholars gave thought to the environment and sustainability, diets and healthy eating, value for money and how to stand out from the crowd. After much deliberation and considered feedback, the judges picked their favourite and the project was complete.

At lunch, we caught up with four friends, Abby, Erin, Abby and Hannah. They all agreed that their residential had exceeded their expectations and that they could see how the skills they’d learnt applied to their STEM subjects. “I’m quite proud of myself and what we came up with in a day and a half,” said Hannah. “The skills we’ve been focusing on – team work, resilience, and adaptability – will really help us.”

And with that, it was back on-board the coach for the five hour drive back to Tyneside.

“What’s so good about our residential courses for Scholars is the fact it’s a totally immersive experience,” said Jo, Programme Director. “Scholars are able to develop their skills, try new things and be challenged in a supportive environment and we find this approach – coupled with the fact they are staying away from home – builds confidence and resilience in our young people.”



In brief with...

Zoë Mitchell,
Learning Mentor

Tell us about your job

I am officially employed by UEA, who are partners with Villiers Park for the Norfolk Scholars Programme. My role is to raise the aspirations of each Scholar I work with through mentoring and skills-focused events. This looks different for every Scholar. For some, it’s encouraging them to apply to a leading university, for others it’s helping them to realise that their dream career is worth pursuing. It’s my job to help them get there.

What can a typical week look like?

Most of my time is spent in schools meeting with students for either individual or group mentoring sessions but other projects and opportunities are always cropping up. Last week I spent three days at Villiers Park with our Year 10 students for their first residential. This week I’m attending a conference in Cambridge about how we, as outreach practitioners, can support Muslim communities in progressing onto higher education. Next week I’m presenting on the benefits of sustained and personalised mentoring at a conference at which a Member of Parliament and an employee from the Department of Education are also talking.

What do you love most about your job?

Definitely how much variety there is. You need to be creative in order to develop resources to make mentoring sessions interesting and memorable. You need to be able to write an engaging workshop session and then have the confidence to deliver it to 30 students. Sometimes a student will have had a bad day and just need someone to talk to. When a student tells you they wouldn’t have made it through their GCSEs without you, it makes it all worthwhile.



Donation form

Let's not waste the wealth of talent that we have in young people. Please help us inspire and support students so they can reach their full potential.

Personal details of donor

Title First name Surname

Address

..... Postcode

Phone E-mail

☐ Villiers Park is always keen to recognise our generous supporters. Please tick the box if you are happy to be thanked in our Impact Report.

I would like my donation to be applied to:

- ☐ Scholars Programme ☐ Inspiring Excellence Programme (student courses)
☐ Mike Baker Memorial Fund ☐ Wherever it is most needed

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Beneficiary Account details

Villiers Park Educational Trust (Registered Charity Number 225920)
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Sort code: 40-52-40 Account number: 00004876

Signed: Date:


Let's stay in touch

We'd like to share:

Our latest news, stories from our students, more about our work, how your support is making a difference and other ways you can support or fundraise for us, if you'd like to in the future. We do this by email as it's the most cost-effective communication method.

☐ Yes, please keep in touch with me via email. ☐ No, I do not want to receive emails from Villiers Park

Our contact details

 Villiers Park Educational Trust
Royston Road
Foxton
Cambridge
CB22 6SE

 01223 872601

 vp@villierspark.org.uk

 www.villierspark.org.uk

 @VilliersPark

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Please scan and e-mail the form to development@villierspark.org.uk; or post the completed form to our address below. Alternatively, donations can be made online. Visit our website or search for Villiers Park on BT MyDonate or Virgin Money Giving.

Thank you!

New fundraising pack

As a charity, we rely on the generosity of the public to fund our work. To encourage further support – and make it easier – we've developed a new fundraising pack to help and inspire people to get fundraising. It's full of ideas and tips on how to organise and run your event. If you or someone you know may be interested in fundraising for us, you can download the pack from our website.



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