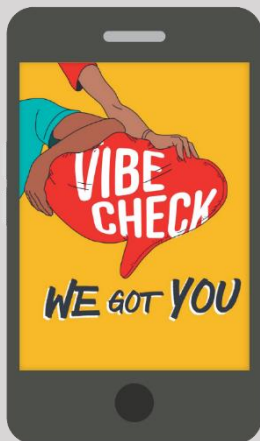


Princes Trust International: Driving Impact in the Face of Covid

For this November's webinar in the current series from Learning Possibilities, on the theme of education survival and recovery during the pandemic, Mehool was talking with Jo Parsons – Director of Delivery and Impact at Prince's Trust International (PTI), and a panel of international guests made up of some PTI implementing partners from Jordan and Malaysia.

The Trust has been making some tremendous contributions to the well-being and emotional resilience of young people who have been hit particularly by the pandemic. Fundamentally PTI exists to tackle the global crisis of youth unemployment and it was founded by the Prince of Wales in 2015, based on the experience of his Prince's Trust in the UK. Since its launch it has supported more than 34,000 young people in 13 countries, primarily in the Caribbean, Africa and South East Asia regions. The education programmes provide alternative approaches to learning that focus on personal development and confidence building to improve young persons' life chances for employment and enterprise. The employment programmes promote the development of workplace skills whilst the enterprise programmes offer the opportunity to understand business management and unleash students' potential as budding entrepreneurs.



Already skillful in the integration of digital tools into their work, the organisers at the Trust dramatically accelerated the roll out of their digital strategy in the face of the Covid crisis. For the first time many of the Trust's partners, internationally, delivered entire programmes online, with four out of every five young people being reached digitally. Vibe Check, for example, is a digital programme designed by PTI as an online space for young people to develop key life skills in a supportive online space. Launched initially in Barbados in 2020 it aims to promote confidence, communication and collaborative skills, since these are priorities in the employment market. Around 89 per

cent of the high quality users agreed on, and relevance of the content and half of them said they would do things differently as a result of the programme.

The work of Injaz, based in Jordan, was introduced by its Executive Director, Muhannad al Jarrah. As one of PTI's strong partners in the Middle East Injaz is introducing financial literacy and business skills training to young people to help them gain confidence and better skills for employability, their Enterprise Business Challenge, with a strong focus on girls' empowerment; the programme uses a skillful mix of online business simulation challenges amplified by face-to-face collaborativeworkspaces to increase the confidence and the fluency of the participants. Sojo, who is 15 years old, and took part in the Enterprise Business Challenge programme in Irbid last year says - "This course was an education for my life that trained me and taught me about entrepreneurship, self-confidence and social work, and the impact of this on my life was that it helped me to build my self-confidence."



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In Malaysia, the Trust works in partnership with SOLS 24/7, a local NGO that has been around for more than 20 years but has found a new avenue to create impact through the delivery of the PTI programme modules, during the course of the lockdowns. Daniela Strimbel, the Executive Director spoke of their skills for the employability programme as a particular example of the ways in which the programme has had a large impact. The programme has been successful in raising, not only the participants' self-esteem, but actually impacting their academic performance strongly, too. As an example of the sort of entrepreneurial spirit generated by the programme, she spoke of their own experiences in rural Malaysia, where the lockdowns in the villages had been particularly severe. A number of young people from the educational centers in village areas, who were not allowed to travel outside for work, started their own successful mini enterprise.

But, above all, the life skills programme has helped to give a voice to the voiceless and hope to those in despair. Everyone has come to realise over the course of the pandemic that, for young people, in particular, the absence of social and emotional opportunities for nurturing and development through mixing with their peers has taken a heavy toll. So, through modules that improve communication and self-management skills, and those that promote self-reliance, the work of the PTI has served to give hope and ideas of a better future, to sustain the participants through their recent challenging, and often gloomy, locked-down lives.



Daniela stressed that most of their clients come from the lowest 40 per cent of the socio-economic spectrum, whose lives have been strongly impacted not just through the sense of loss and longing for their previous freedoms, but whose families have also suffered real economic hardship. Just forming friendship and affinity groups online has helped to develop their emotional resilience and their coping skills enormously.

Looking forward, the team at SOLS 24/7 are planning a hybrid delivery model in the future. They recognise the value that online learning can bring in terms of numbers and breadth of coverage, and for the teaching of vital online safeguarding skills; nonetheless they also see the fragility of social bonds made purely online and recognise that elements of face-to-face teaching and learning must also be incorporated.

The final PTI partner to make her contribution to this month's webinar from Learning Possibilities was Farah Nor from SAY, an NGO founded by Malaysia's own crown prince. Their programme for underprivileged youth mixes online and offline modes 50/50, but they are also very concerned about the digital divide, so they have been experimenting with an intermediate tech approach, for those who lack connectivity and access to devices, using content delivery through WhatsApp via smartphones. They are determined to stay relevant to young people and reach them at their own level.



Mehool challenged the panelists to predict if the future of learning is likely to be entirely hybrid, but the PTI global partners all agreed that, post-pandemic, whilst digital would no longer be a primary vehicle for programme delivery, it would always play a big role in a more hybrid form of learning experience with the face-to-face and online experiences being mutually supportive and enabling. Jo Parsons concluded that their programmes are always 'needs driven' and there was no 'one-size-fits-all' – future programme delivery would probably be a mix of online and face-to-face, but the balance would always be determined by the clients and beneficiaries.