SOAS 60-Second Interview – UnLtd Award winner

Name
Kanika Selvan

Project Title and Description
Parallel Roads launched in 2013 and develops tailored training programs in enterprise for marginalised groups. Through 2013-2015 we developed our curriculum and trialed our training methods. We then ran a 3 week pilot with 6 black ethnic minority young men from the Manchester area, all who were interested in developing their skills in business. Through building an interactive, adaptive training program, which has local business entrepreneurs and experts training the participants, the program was as real life as possible. It ended with the graduation of five participants, each pitching their ideas to a panel of judges. The winner received a start up prize worth £1000 and other participants received business mentoring over the next 6 months, other tailored offers from businesses who had seen their potential and moved into our alumni, garnering them continued peer support and regular meet-ups.

What are you studying/did you study, involvement in societies/projects etc.?
I studies History and Development studies at Undergraduate and was developing Parallel Roads throughout my final year 3 of study.

Year of Study
2009-2013

Why did you decide to apply for the UnLtd Funding?
I was recommended to apply to the funding through a friend who was doing some work with the hub, Charles. In part we had discusses casually the different types of interests we both had in social justice and when the opportunity came up to apply Charles sought me out and said that I should come up with an idea. It could be that I have him to thank for the start of this journey.

How did SOAS help?
The best thing about SOAS was that they gave me a structure but also a freedom to make this happen. I suffered some health issues a few months after receiving the funding for this project and SOAS were flexible and continued to believe in me and my project, despite the delay.

Having someone on the end of the phone to give you some suggestions about next steps, who supported without judgement was a massive help. It was SOAS who directed me towards the additional funding body that meant the first program could be larger than originally planned.

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What do you hope to achieve through your project?
This project looks to find creative empowering ways to support marginalised groups to develop their own ideas for enterprise and make them a reality. Outcomes should include heightened confidence, an new network of peers and business connections, business skills and tools from trainings, an understanding of how to work in a group setting and a developed business idea with clear next steps.

Future plans?
Now Parallel Roads is partnering with social enterprises, entrepreneurs, housing associations partnering on larger bids for contracts, franchising to different locations and developing specialist enterprise programs for other marginalised groups. We are also working with Manchester University to discuss opportunities for work and sale of produce from our participants businesses.

We are looking for funding to ensure that all of this development can pay expenses at the very minimum for all those volunteering for us. It is our ambition to employ at least one member of staff by then end of 2016 and secure some regular contracts.

We also want to grow our alumni and specialise more so that our courses can be accredited by an official body of trainers.

Any tips for students who want to start something?
Work out why you want to do something, who you want to target and what you want to change- and keep that in the front of your mind. It was a big lesson to me to learn that I am not Parallel Roads, I have to be a separate person so that I can work and lobby and be resilient in a professional sense.

The people that actually make social enterprises happen are not all ruthless, cut thought people, an entrepreneur comes in all shapes and sizes- but they are the people who are focused on what they want to achieve and they don’t give in when they don’t succeed- they continue on.

If you want to run a project like this, you also need to remember that there isn’t a straight road to anywhere interesting- let your project adapt and form. Your networks and your conversations and learning’s along the way should all shape what you create. I had no idea that Parallel Roads would look this way in 2013.