

## **Gary Francis Youth Achievement Awards**

### **Introduction**

The Gary Francis Youth Achievement Awards were established in memory of Gary Francis, the former Head of Youth Programmes at Hackney CVS, who helped to create the foundation for all that we do to support local young people and the local youth sector. He was instrumental in the creation of Young Hackney too and secured lots of money for local organisations to deliver inspiring projects for young people.

Every year we invite local voluntary and community sector organisations to nominate young people between the ages of 18-25 who have achieved great things and have overcome some difficulties of some sorts. The person nominating has to explain why the young person meets the criteria and deserves an award. A panel of local people then meets to decide who should be given an award – which is a £250 cheque which the young people can spend on what they like. This year we had 7 nominations. Many past winners have gone on to achieve even more so we are incredibly honoured to be able to honour the contribution that these young people have made to the borough.

With thanks to the members of the Award Panel – Raphael Antigha, Janette Collins, Jess Mullen and Saqib Deshmukh for helping us decide which young people are deserving of a Gary Francis Youth Achievement Award.

### **WINNER 1**

So our first award goes to Daniel Ocitti. Daniel, who is 19, was nominated by Luke Billingham at Hackney Quest. Over the past 2 years, Daniel has become a real community leader for local young people. He was involved in the Hackney Wick Youth Voice project from the start, acting as a brilliant role model and leader on the Youth Voice Panel, and speaking publicly on numerous occasions in front of prominent decision-makers. Daniel was instrumental in ensuring that a number of the report's recommendations were implemented by the council, including the renovation of the artificial pitch by the Old Baths building in Hackney Wick. Last year, Daniel became a paid youth leader role on Build Up Hackney, leading a group of young people to design & build a new public space. He was a key part of the project's success: he built brilliant relationships with participants of all ages, forming an especially strong bond with a shy younger participant, and enriched the project significantly with his extensive local knowledge.

There are many reasons why the panel felt that Daniel should be given an award. Daniel has faced a wide range of personal challenges over the past few years at the same time that he has been establishing himself as a young leader. The panel was particularly impressed by the fact that Daniel became a really important inspiration for one 11-year-old participant, who'd recently been diagnosed with ASD. The young boy was incredibly shy, wanting to be part of the project but struggling with social anxiety and awkwardness. Daniel took him under his wing from day one, and it was wonderful to see how the boy flourished with Daniel's guidance.

Daniel is doing a course in Business and IT and plans to have a career in business that will allow him to support himself, his family, and his community. He is also pursuing a career in music, recording tracks with positive messages and poetic lyrics.

## WINNER 2

So our second award goes to Mona Ait Jakane. Mona, who is 21, was nominated by Paul Anderson from Voyage Youth. Mona has achieved a lot over the last year whilst being the main carer for her disabled younger brother and dealing with the pressures of a young Muslim women seeking a more independent lifestyle. Its been a very stressful time for Mona but she has remained committed to her friends, family and to her volunteering with Voyage at all times. Paul says 'Mona is amazing as she managed to do this whilst studying for her MA in social psychology whilst combining this with her first full time job as independent living mentor for a housing association. Mona exemplifies the young people we work with at Voyage and she actively demonstrates the values and outcomes we wish to see in our young people. I nominate Mona as someone who is just amazing, inspiring and dedicated to supporting young people'.

The panel was particularly impressed with Mona's ability to overcome her own pain and suffering into a deeper understanding of the needs of young people she works with. So even though what she has experience has been tough its made her stronger and more effective in what she does and her commitment to this is now even stronger.

I believe Mona aims to continue to study and complete her MA whilst working full time work and continuing volunteering with us at Voyage.

So lets welcome Mona to the stage to pick up her award and please give her A BIG ROUND OF APPLAUSE!

## WINNER 3

So our third award goes to Jade Walcott. Jade is 25 and was nominated by Kelly Reid from the Crib. Jade has been with the Crib youth project for many, many years. In this time they have watched her grow from a young vulnerable attendee of the Crib to being an inspirational volunteer with confidence and the right attitude to succeed. Jade spent her teen years and other periods of her life in and out of care. In 2015 she went into independent living and has proved people wrong - growing from strength to strength. She has volunteered at the crib supporting young care leavers, helping to create activity programs and assisting in the production of the fabulous Boroughs United annual talent show hosted by the Crib. She also works in the evenings with resident dance group Flexy where she is the administrator - organizing the young people's events and shows throughout the year. Along with this Jade has been in contact with her young siblings, supporting Foster carers in helping them achieve and sustain a family network for them. Kelly said: 'No matter what is going on in Jade's life she has been the back bone for her siblings and a fantastic role model. We feel its about time this young lady knew her worth and how much we value her contribution to The Crib and the Flexy UK dance group as well as supporting her siblings.

Looking ahead, Jade is determined to develop her education and is due to start university at the end of February studying business management. She dreams of one day owning her own nightclub working within the entertainment industry. Although she has the experience and basic knowledge, she feels that the academic achievement will make her dream more achievable.

So lets welcome Jade to the stage to pick up her award and please give her A BIG ROUND OF APPLAUSE!

## WINNER 4

So onto our fourth Gary Francis award which goes to Kyarna Morris. Kyarna was born in 1999 which makes her 21. Kyarna was nominated by Charmain Humphreys of Immediate Theatre.

Kyarna is an inspirational young person who has been actively involved with Immediate Theatre for over 10 years. Kyarna joined them firstly as a participant on one of their summer projects and impressed Immediate Theatre with her hard work, dedication and the journey of personal growth she went on despite some personal challenges. Kyarna went on to train to become one of their Peer Facilitators, supporting young people in their Youth Theatres for over 4 years. She is now one of their most skilled practitioners and is involved in recruitment of staff members at Immediate as she has developed such a deep understanding of the company's aims as well as young people's needs.

Kyarna has unfortunately lost a number of close friends and peers in recent years but has remained focused and committed to her work and Immediate Theatre despite this trauma. Charmain said the following about Kyarna: 'Kyarna consistently goes above and beyond to find new, exciting and inventive ways to engage our participants. She will often research and develop her own new games and activities to try out with our young people and delivers these with boundless energy. The young people love working with Kyarna as she is able to bring out the best in them. Kyarna is especially skilled at being able to identify when a session is not going to plan, when a staff member needs support or when a young person is struggling. In these situations, she uses her initiative to intervene in an appropriate and professional manner. As a successful, strong and well educated young black woman from Hackney, Kyarna provides the young people, especially girls, with the positive role model they need in order to succeed'.

The panel was impressed by the level of maturity and resilience. Looking ahead Kyarna is currently in her final year at Kent University studying for a degree in Criminology. Kyarna has a big, successful future ahead of her which is due to her hard work, diligence and resilient attitude. She hopes to become a Criminologist with a specific interest in scrutinising various prisons.

So lets welcome Kyarna to the stage to pick up her award and please give her A BIG ROUND OF APPLAUSE!

## WINNER 5

So our fifth Gary Francis award goes to.... Montell Pemberton. Montell is 19 and was also nominated by Charmain Humphreys of Immediate Theatre. The panel heard that Montell is a remarkable and talented young man who started at Immediate through his work experience placement there. Since his placement ended, he chose to stay on as a volunteer on numerous youth theatre projects and then progressed on to become one of their trained Peer Facilitators. Montell consistently goes above and beyond in all of his duties at Immediate Theatre purely because he loves working with young people so much, particularly those who are most at risk and in need. Montell volunteers at the Drama sessions across the borough and regularly volunteers to flyer for their sessions in the community. Charmain said the following about Montell: 'He is an excellent ambassador for Immediate Theatre and a fantastic example of a young person who is truly community focussed and selfless. He takes the initiative to complete tasks without being asked and these always include the jobs that are most unpopular with the team such as emptying the bins and sweeping the

floors! Montell carries out all of his duties without complaint. When Montell first joined us, he lacked confidence and self-esteem. He found leading activities challenging as he was more comfortable

in an assistant role. However, Montell has actively sought out opportunities to grow and develop on a personal and professional level. This has included him attending both compulsory and optional staff training sessions so that he can learn and develop his presentation and facilitation skills.'

The panel also heard that young people gravitate towards Montell as they know that they can speak to him about anything due to his approachable manner. Montell is a fantastic young leader for young people in his community as he is from the community himself. As a strong, young, black, well educated male, Montell is an excellent role model for many of the young people we work with who often lack a sense of identity. Montell is able to buck many of the negative stereotypes surrounding young black men in East London communities. This benefits our young people greatly, especially many of the young boys who Montell mentors within our sessions. This has resulted in the improved behaviour, conduct and confidence of these boys in a short space of time.

Looking ahead Montell is considering a number of options including going to University. Montell is also a talented actor, musician and jewellery designer who has a bright future ahead of him, whichever path he chooses to take.

So, without further ado, lets welcome Montell to the stage to pick up his award and please give him A BIG ROUND OF APPLAUSE!

## **WINNER 6**

So our sixth Gary Francis award goes to.... Shenique Bass. Shenique is 22 years old and was nominated by Lily Dowse of the Build Up Foundation. The award panel heard that Shenique joined youth construction charity Build Up in 2019 as a very shy young person, unconfident in her abilities and nervous of the construction world. Throughout the project, she faced her fears regarding confidence and then went on to support 60 young people with challenging backgrounds to face their fears in confidence too, supporting them to design and build a new inclusive public space in Hackney for everyone. She then made a powerful film about it. She then addressed a crowd of 150 people about why it is important to involve young people in decision-making and to give them genuine power in their area. Outside of the building site, Shenique focused on creating a safe and welcoming space for the young people by leading interactive games at the beginning of sessions, enabling tight bonds to be made between the older and younger young people and helping to debunk the borough-wide fear of older young people. Local headteacher commented that this had strengthened their Year Six pupils' transition from primary to secondary school.

On the building site itself, she encouraged young people to take ownership of their work. She supported younger team members that had suspected learning difficulties to feel included, giving them close support with tools and construction techniques and helping them to focus their attention through a physical approach to learning.

Alongside this, Shenique led a team to make a film about the process and was later interviewed at BBC about why young people should be involved in decision making.

Shenique described her character as incredibly shy when first meeting Build Up, describing how her lack of confidence regularly held her back in life - she was not forthcoming in groups

and at university she was too nervous to use educational facilities, such as shared spaces and construction workshops.

When asked how she would use the skills that she's gained at Build Up in her future, Shenique replied, "For almost everything! It has helped me so much at university, because finally I'm not scared to take part in discussions or use the workshops and tools."

Going forward, Shenique is studying Architecture at university. She also wants to set up a mentoring programme to enable a continuation of support to be given to the young people after they've completed construction projects with Build Up.

So, lets welcome Shenique to the stage to pick up her award and please give her A BIG ROUND OF APPLAUSE!

## **WINNER 7**

So our seventh and final Gary Francis award goes to.... David Smith. David is 19 years old and was nominated by Tim Head at Hackney CVS. The panel heard that David is an inspirational young leader working with Hackney CVS as part of the Account group which holds the police to account and the Improving Outcomes for Young Black Men' programme. He is widely known and celebrated as a dedicated, passionate and articulate advocate for young people in his community. David started working with Hackney CVS in April 2018 when he took the opportunity to represent young people in the borough as part of the stop and search monitoring group (known as Account). Initially David was shy and slow to talk in sessions, preferring instead to listen and absorb information. Within a few months however David went through a remarkable transformation. He began to take on more work, leading on developing a research project, and designing an outreach project in a local youth club. David also grew into a powerful leader within the group, sharing his wisdom and critical insights to bring projects forward.

David took the initiative to increase his involvement dramatically in the work of Account, going above and beyond the expectations placed on him. From summer David began coming in for countless extra hours, to organise and carry out a comprehensive research project that he played the leading role in designing. The project, looking into racial injustice in the educational and criminal justice system, was carried out over a series of weeks. This involved carrying out interviews, attending meetings, reviewing literatures, and (most impressively) delivering training sessions on methods to other members of the group.

David also pursued his passion to reach younger people in the community (beyond the core group) by designing and carrying out a series of weekly youth workshops. These sessions have established David as a leader amongst youth in the community, demonstrating his passion and drive to raise the aspirations of those around him.

Despite facing some personal difficulties and challenges, David has really excelled. Tim said about David: 'One of the most remarkable things about him is that he not only puts in the effort to learn and develop skills and knowledge – but that he consistently works to pass on these benefits to others. We see this every day at Hackney CVS, with David working at every opportunity to get the message of his projects out to a broader audience – and to feedback young people's views to those in power.

Looking ahead David has two main passions that he is currently pursuing. The first is for youth work; for helping youth in his community to succeed, for educating them about their history,

roots and the system around them, and primarily (as he says) for giving them 'hope'. He is currently enrolled to begin a Level 2 Youth Work qualification in the next few months. David's second passion is for food. He is an aspiring chef and food critic, currently developing his own food channel on Youtube. Anyone who has had the pleasure of eating one of his signature dishes will know first-hand his ability to spread joy through food!