GLOBAL LESSONS FOR A NEW SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL IN MANCHESTER

Dr Laura Pottinger

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Foreword

Darren Crosdale
Author, teacher and Rekindle elder

Recent events demonstrate the urgent need for a supplementary school such as Rekindle, in a city such as Manchester.

In February 2020, the school’s Steering Committee (composed of eight young people between the ages of 17 and 24) began to increase efforts to network, fund and further research the Rekindle school. Then the coronavirus pandemic put everything on pause. The lockdown period and the expected accompanying economic downturn laid bare the deep inequalities in British society – exactly the social issues the group had been discussing.

The issues faced by large swathes of British society are numerous. Manchester-born footballer Marcus Rashford had to remind Westminster that school closures would have a hugely negative effect on children reliant on free school meals. The Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, promised laptops to needy children to allow them to continue to study on 19th April, but many schools did not receive these until July, mere weeks before the end of term. Even the most optimistic teachers worry about how disadvantaged children will fare when they return to school in September 2020, after nearly six months without tuition. British children, already surveyed as being the saddest in Europe, will need emotional, mental and physical support. However, the government appears to have no specific plan to provide and fund this support.

Even before the pandemic, Rekindle was grappling with ideas about disadvantaged young people.

Rather than the deficit model many schools employ, Rekindle has shaped a support structure and curriculum on proven methodology. The principles of the four schools mentioned in this report – based in the Netherlands, USA, Kenya and Colombia – are replicated and tuned to the south Manchester community Rekindle will be based within.

In late summer 2020, when the lockdown eased, I took three young men to a Barbican photography exhibition on Masculinity. While we walked, observed and whispered about the striking images, I was struck by the notion that, for each of these young men, it really did take a village to raise them successfully. The eldest, quietly spoken but with a sharp intellect, has a Master’s degree in law and works in Parliament. He can, however, speak powerfully about growing up poor and Black in east London. His parents and siblings helped him recognise and survive the prejudices of his comprehensive teachers. The next eldest, Manchester-born but now studying at LSE, could tell you about his poorly performing high school. It was the engaged adults in his life who delineated the hurdles that often trip up boys like him, which helped him to achieve academic success. Lastly the youngest, who had spent time in the care system, credits the support provided by his grandparents and his mentor, Ruth Ibegbuna, with helping him recognise Oxford university was in his grasp.

Three young men from typically termed “disadvantaged backgrounds” who have, with emotional, intellectual and social support, been able to achieve what more financially stable families would deem normal trajectories.

The need for a school like Rekindle remains. Recognising the techniques utilised by similar institutions around the world demonstrates an understanding of the theory and practice in supporting young people to recognise their potential in a meaningful and fully encompassing way.
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Executive summary

This report is commissioned by Rekindle, a Manchester based supplementary school for teenagers aged 13–16 planned for 2021. It profiles four innovative educational organisations globally that are improving the outcomes for young people at risk of a range of negative outcomes. It highlights five key factors that have led to success in diverse contexts, identifying attributes that Rekindle already shares and recommendations for further consideration as Rekindle develops.

In January to February 2020, six interviews were carried out with key individuals (three CEOs, one Director of Education and two school alumni) at four education organisations across the world. The aim was to understand how these successful initiatives identify, support and inspire young people to reach their full potential. Each organisation takes an innovative approach to respond to local challenges and opportunities, and to improve outcomes for young people.

**IMC Weekendschool, Netherlands:** A supplementary school for young people aged 10–14, often from immigrant backgrounds and underprivileged neighbourhoods. Students attend the school every Sunday over three years. Volunteer guest teachers from diverse professional backgrounds introduce students to potential career pathways, ranging from ICT, entrepreneurship and medicine to philosophy, journalism, law and the arts. After graduating, students can join the IMC Alumni network and access further training and mentoring.

**Green Bronx Machine, New York, USA:** Located in New York’s South Bronx district, Green Bronx Machine is a school-based model that inspires students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 through urban agriculture. It encourages healthy diets and urban greening, improving school attendance and developing entrepreneurial and vocational skills. Using ‘edible walls’ and vertical planters inside the classroom, it integrates growing vegetables into the whole school curriculum. The programme now operates in schools across the United States and beyond.

**Kibera School for Girls, Nairobi, Kenya:** The school offers free primary education for girls in Kibera, one of the largest slums in Africa. As well as offering high-quality education, it supports students by providing free healthcare, food and psychosocial support, as well as adult literacy courses and employment training for families and the wider community. Run by Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO), it is the first school specifically for girls in the area and the only one that is free to attend.

**Coschool, Colombia:** Coschool is a B Corp – a for-profit company certified as meeting rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency – founded in 2014 that develops the life skills of young people in Colombia. It blends a strong understanding of Colombian context and culture with the latest research in social emotional learning. Developing skills such as self-awareness, empathy, determination, decision making and leadership in a post-conflict context, Coschool draws on project-based learning to encourage students to see themselves as agents of change in their communities.

The profiled schools share five key attributes:

1. **Safe, healthy spaces that look beyond academic results:** Mental, emotional and physical health is prioritised through free, healthy food, specialist counselling and support where it is needed, and a commitment to social emotional learning. Emphasising the health and wellbeing of students, communities and environments positively impacts test results, attendance levels and enjoyment of mainstream school.

2. **Positive interactions with supportive adults:** Students interact with caring, enthusiastic adults as guest teachers sharing their passion for their jobs or mentors offering one-to-one support or group project guidance. Successes are recognised by adults in the programme and wider community.

3. **Learning through doing:** Real-world projects motivate students to attend supplementary and mainstream education by developing confidence,
teamwork, self-awareness, determination and decision-making skills. Students see the impact of their efforts on themselves and their community.

4. **Exposure to real careers**: Supported by role models from within and beyond the local community, students are more aware of career options that exist, the skills required in different professions, and the steps they need to take in order to realise their ambitions.

5. **Whole community involvement**: Parents, families, local businesses and community leaders are involved in a variety of ways, including the decision-making and running of organisations, volunteering and public celebrations of students’ successes. Schools and organisations act as a hub that brings the wider community together.

**Recommendations for Rekindle**

Rekindle recognises that young people from working-class communities often struggle to achieve academically and can fall short of fulfilling their own potential in formal structures, leading to poor attainment and demotivation. Underpinned by the SNAPback model, Rekindle is designed to **Support, Nourish, Achieve and Protect** by working with young people in the evenings via small, local educational centres that will stimulate learners and equip parents, local stakeholders and positive role models drawn from the local community and beyond.

Rekindle already shares many of the aims and approaches of the profiled organisations, including:

- having clear plans for young people to interact with supportive adults (teachers, university students, youth workers and mentors)
- prioritising students’ physical and mental health, wellbeing and nutrition
- providing safe, healthy spaces to learn
- emphasising social and emotional learning
- exposing young people to potential career pathways and vocational skills
- engaging the whole community, involving mentors and role models from the local area and beyond

Based on this research, questions for Rekindle to consider moving forward include:

- How will parents be brought on board from the start to ensure they can assist their child’s learning as well as developing their own skills?
- Are there opportunities for young people to work together on shared goals via project work or community projects?
- How might Rekindle’s clear plans for providing healthy meals and guidance on nutrition be taken further, through food-based entrepreneurial or community projects or by linking food preparation and cultivation to academic subjects, for example?
- Could young people grow some of their own food as well as cooking it, perhaps through a small community garden or indoor growing space, supported by local volunteers? •
Introduction

This report is commissioned by Rekindle, a Manchester-based supplementary school for teenagers planned for 2021. The report identifies four innovative supplementary and mainstream educational organisations globally that are improving the outcomes for young people at risk of a range of negative outcomes. It highlights the key factors that have led to success in diverse contexts, identifying the attributes that Rekindle already shares and offers recommendations for further consideration.

In January to February 2020, six interviews were carried out with key individuals at four education organisations operating in diverse contexts across the world. Participating organisations were identified via desk-based research, which aimed to locate examples of best practice in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, either through supplementary educational programmes or pioneering approaches within a mainstream school setting. Five organisations were contacted, and the following four agreed to participate in the research:

- IMC Weekendschool, Netherlands
- Green Bronx Machine, New York, USA
- Kibera School for Girls, Nairobi, Kenya
- Coschool, Colombia

Each takes an innovative approach to respond to local challenges and opportunities, and to improve outcomes for young people.

Case studies on each of the four schools, drawing on interviews and desk-based research, are presented in the report. To gain a clearer understanding of how these initiatives identify, support and inspire their students, we spoke to the CEOs of the schools, while two alumni from the IMC Weekendschool were also interviewed to understand the impacts of the programme from a student’s perspective.

These are followed by a discussion of the key attributes shared by the approaches of these diverse organisations. Five key themes are identified:

1. Safe, healthy spaces that look beyond academic results
2. Positive interactions with supportive adults
3. Learning through doing
4. Exposure to real careers
5. Whole community involvement

The final discussion looks at which of these elements Rekindle already has in its DNA, and identifies areas that Rekindle could take on board as it develops over the next 18 months.
About **REKINDLE**

Rekindle is a supplementary school for young people aged 13–16 in South Manchester. The school will focus on providing the pastoral care, community support and critical thinking needed to safeguard young people and ensure they have the confidence and networks to soar. It will spark a love of learning and encourage young people to be fierce critical thinkers. It will provide a curriculum to engage the head, heart and soul.

Rekindle will work with students who have not been given the opportunity to fall in love with education in their mainstream schools. Our primary focus is to design an approach that offers care, support, connection, hope and aspiration. That pushes disadvantaged young people to believe they can be more, but first establishes the solid foundations to catch them when they fall (and they will, often). An approach that helps parents who struggled themselves with schooling find a way back in through the gates, into a space they now feel comfortable and valued. An approach that first cares about what young people care about, where adults act as mentors and provide space for safe conversations that calm the raging fears of teenage minds. An approach that is eminently practical. What do young people without resources from struggling homes need? They need food. Good free food. Every night.

There is so much more to Rekindle. This is not a project that has been created because there is the possibility of funding available; this is a partnership with engaged, powerful, passionate young people who deserve better from their education. It’s an attempt to switch the school lights back on and lure them into loving literature, trusting their peers again, visiting industry and seeing that there are careers out there, within their grasp.

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**About the author**

[Photo of Laura Pottinger]

**Laura Pottinger** is a researcher at the University of Manchester focusing on everyday forms of social and environmental activism. Her recent work has explored youth politics in the context of austerity and devolution in Greater Manchester, and as a keen gardener, she is also interested in community cooking and growing initiatives.

Laura lives in South Manchester, and before studying for a PhD in Human Geography she worked with youth organisations in the city. She is passionate about developing participatory methods for research with young people and communities, and is currently working on a project called Methods for Change, which highlights how social science methods can contribute to social transformation.
CASE STUDY

IMC Weekendschool, Netherlands

- Guest teachers from a range of professions teach students aged 10–14 every Sunday for 3 years
- Schools are targeted in low-income neighbourhoods; students are often from immigrant backgrounds
- Provides opportunities for positive interaction with supportive adults
- After IMC Weekendschool, students are more aware of different career options and more actively involved in society
- IMC Weekendschool graduates can join the IMC Alumni network and access further training and mentoring
- 10 IMC Weekendschool branches currently run in the larger cities of the Netherlands, offering Sunday IMC Weekendschool classes and IMC on Tour aimed at newcomers (refugee and migrant children)
- A modified programme IMC Basis is integrated into the curriculum in 35 primary schools
- Sister schools in Belgium, Mexico and Hong Kong
IMC Weekendschool is a supplementary school aimed at young people aged 10–14, often from immigrant backgrounds and from underprivileged neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. Students are invited to attend the school every Sunday over three years. Volunteer guest teachers from a variety of professional backgrounds introduce students to diverse topics and potential career pathways, ranging from ICT, entrepreneurship and medicine to philosophy, journalism, law and the arts.

Founded in Amsterdam by psychologist Heleen Terwijn in 1998, in partnership with International Marketmakers Combination (IMC), IMC Weekendschool has ten branches in the larger cities of the Netherlands, each welcoming around 100 students every Sunday. Three sister schools now also operate in Brussels (Belgium), Chiapas (Mexico), and Hong Kong. The model has also recently been modified and expanded into mainstream primary schools via IMC Basis, which currently takes place in 35 schools in the Netherlands during the week, as well as an adjusted programme called IMC on Tour which provides courses via language schools to ‘newcomers’ – children who are refugees and recent migrants. Around 4,000 guest teachers volunteer every year. When students complete the three-year course, they are invited to join IMC Alumni, a vibrant network of IMC Weekendschool graduates.

The IMC Weekendschool Sunday programme aims to recruit students who are most likely to benefit from additional support and access to positive professional role models, focusing on those from underperforming schools and pressurised neighbourhoods. Schools are approached in neighbourhoods identified as underprivileged based on government poverty indicators. All students who fall within the target age bracket in participating schools can apply for one of 40 places at IMC Weekendschool. If more than 40 students apply, places are allocated through a raffle, so as to minimise the disappointment of not being chosen to take part.

Unlike in mainstream school, IMC Weekendschool classes give students the chance to gain hands-on experience of what professionals do in their day-to-day work. Where possible, guest teachers are identified from within the local neighbourhood. Each guest teacher introduces the class to a new subject over around four weeks. As well as having the opportunity to ask questions about a particular career, students get a taste of, for example, publishing a news report alongside real journalists, or conducting medical diagnostics and research with practising doctors.

Marwa Mohammed, an IMC Weekendschool alumnus who is now studying nursing and helping teach new recruits, says that what makes IMC Weekendschool different is the opportunity to actively do something. ‘I’m a visual learner, and for me, sitting in a class gets boring. But at the Weekendschool, even if you don’t like something, the way they teach it, you still want to try it out.’

Simon Tesfahuney, who graduated from IMC Weekendschool in 2015 and now coordinates masterclasses for the IMC Alumni network, agrees: ‘From the first day you sign up, you’re saying, “I want to go to school every Sunday.”’ You start aged 10, and they plant the seed that “I want to learn”. They teach you in a way that you enjoy learning.’ For Simon, it was the experience of designing and building a company in the classes led by a business entrepreneur that left the biggest impact: ‘After five years I can tell you exactly what we did every Sunday, because it was so great! I still use some of the skills I learnt during those four weeks in my daily life.’

In the beginning I was a bit shy, I was afraid to talk to someone to ask for help. But now I’m a different person, a better person. IMC Weekendschool taught me how to have courage.

Simon Tesfahuney, IMC Weekendschool alumnus

Founder Heleen Terwijn claims the programme works because it looks beyond academic qualifications as a measure of success. A key message IMC Weekendschool conveys to students is the importance of finding a place in society that matches your capacities and enthusiasm: ‘We say you are
successful when you do something that you love to do. And when they understand that, it opens up a whole world of enthusiasm for the kids and their parents.’

**IMC Weekendschool was so much better than I imagined. I thought I’d sit in class, but we went places, we did things, and it was all free. I was a very shy girl before, and now I have my own class at the Weekendschool, so my self-confidence has really grown. You just think, “There’s nothing holding me back!”**

Marwa Mohammed, IMC Weekendschool alumnus

IMC Weekendschool develops students’ understanding of the different occupations that exist and what they involve. But it also gives young people who may not be enjoying mainstream school the opportunity to have positive interactions with enthusiastic adults, who then share with the students what is most valuable and interesting in their working lives. ‘The teachers teach intensively how important it is to love what you do. The interaction with adults on really interesting stuff, that interests them both, is something we can really add to regular education.’ Significantly, the intervention has been shown to have the biggest impact on pupils who experienced problems during primary education. In turn, guest teachers are inspired by the enthusiasm of the young people they work with.

These impacts are highlighted in research conducted with alumni in 2015–2016 which found that IMC Weekendschool met its aims of developing students’ self-confidence, future perspectives, motivation and perseverance. Alumni in the study said that, following their participation in IMC Weekendschool, they were more actively involved in society and had a favourable view of education in general. The positive impact on students’ emotional relation to their mainstream
school is significant for Terwijn: ‘They say they love the Weekendschool, otherwise they wouldn’t come on Sunday, but they also start to like their regular school better.’ The study also finds that the positive impacts of the programme could be increased further by providing more opportunities for alumni to maintain contact with valued former guest teachers.

The central aim of IMC Weekendschool is to prepare children to become adults who are well motivated to take their place in society – qualities exemplified by the school’s alumni who are now in their twenties and thirties. After graduating from IMC Weekendschool, IMC Alumni offers students the opportunity to connect with one another and further their professional development through masterclasses, leadership training, and opportunities to work on real world problems together. Many also volunteer as guest teachers. There are currently around 3,000 active alumni from the 10 IMC Weekendschool locations including those from the earliest cohorts, now in their thirties. Looking to the future, the IMC Weekendschool aims to extend its model more extensively into mainstream education in the Netherlands, growing from 35 to 50 schools participating in IMC Basis over the next five years. Terwijn is keen to maintain the high quality of the IMC Weekendschool Sunday programme and IMC Alumni, and is interested in identifying global partners to grow the network of sister schools.
CASE STUDY

Green Bronx Machine, New York, USA

- Whole school program based around plants that utilises vertical indoor urban agriculture in the classroom
- Interdisciplinary, hands-on, project-based learning is linked with core academic requirements
- Students take pride in growing, nurturing and eating their own vegetables, and are more motivated to attend school
- Responds to local challenges of unemployment/underemployment and health inequalities
- Encourages healthy diets, improves school attendance, develops entrepreneurial and vocational skills
- Based in the National Health, Wellness and Learning Center at Community School 55, which acts as a hub for community and teacher training and workforce development
- Green Bronx Machine Classroom Curriculum is now in schools in USA, Canada, Latin America and Middle East, impacting 50,000 students every day
Located in New York’s South Bronx district, Green Bronx Machine is a school-based model that inspires students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 through urban agriculture. It responds to the challenges of the local community by encouraging healthy diets, urban greening, improving school attendance and developing entrepreneurial and vocational skills.

Founded in 2007, Green Bronx Machine began as an after-school alternative programme for students at Discovery High School led by CEO — self-described ‘Chief Eternal Optimist’ — Stephen Ritz. Using ‘edible walls’ and vertical planters inside the classroom, Green Bronx Machine integrates growing vegetables into the whole school curriculum and the programme now operates in schools across the United States and beyond.

The seeds of Green Bronx Machine were sown when Ritz, a high school teacher, was given responsibility for a group of 17 students aged 18–22 who had just come out of prison. ‘Nobody knew what to do with them, me included,’ says Ritz, who shares his inspirational story in his book, *The Power of a Plant*. The realisation that they could grow vegetables in planters in the school was revolutionary. ‘When we learned we could grow food, and then sell that food for top dollar… that really resonated with children of all types of ability, and disabilities and challenges. It really worked for getting these children who were very disconnected to be connected with the idea of growing, and most importantly to the idea of living wage economics.’

Attendance improved from 43% to 93% as students started to want to come into school to look after their plants. Thirteen years and 85,000 pounds of fresh, locally grown vegetables later, that first cohort of students is now working in the food and green space industry or in other meaningful careers, and not one has returned to prison, says Ritz. Green Bronx Machine has been recognised as a Citywide School of Excellence by NYC Strategic Alliance for Health, cited as one of five national exemplars of Service Learning by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and named Best of Green Schools 2014 by the US Green Building Council/Center for Green Schools.

Providing young people with the opportunity to nurture something, watch it grow and feel a sense of pride in that achievement has a huge impact, as Ritz explains: ‘Giving children who have not succeeded at much of anything a chance to succeed at something really vital, and to take ownership of that is critical. And plants, inherently, they grow! They succeed, they’re fun to look at, they’re manageable, they’re somewhat invincible. The beauty of planting seeds is that nature does most of the work for you: biology is designed to succeed. Having young people feel good about growing something and taking care of something, teaching them about nature teaches them to nurture. And when we teach children to nurture, we as a society collectively embrace our better nature.’

By integrating food cultivation into the whole curriculum rather than as an additional extra, schools have noticed not only health benefits for their students, but measurable improvements in academic performance and attendance. ‘For a low-cost investment, you are seeing transformational school data. But then also the health benefits alongside it

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*It puts a big smile on my face when I walk into the class and everyone has their heads in a book, pen to paper, taking care of the plants and cooking, [or] making smoothies. They’re always doing something new and learning something new. My daughter comes home excited to share what she did in school. I went to the same school, and I can honestly say, we did not have a program like this. To have this now is amazing.*

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*Parent of Green Bronx Machine student*

*I’m happy when I’m here. When I’m here, cooking, or doing science, that’s the time when I’m mostly happy.*

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*Green Bronx Machine student*
have been phenomenal,’ says Ritz. In the process of growing healthy food, an important shift also takes place for students as they begin to see themselves as producers, capable of developing viable careers in the food industry and positively impacting the health of their neighbourhoods:

‘We’ve taken the poorest congressional district in America, and turned it into an epicentre for growing food, for awareness around what food is. So many

Sometimes I have a hard day in school, and when I get here, I have more fun.

Green Bronx Machine student

My son had trouble in school, and Green Bronx Machine has always been open for him, has always welcomed him. He makes better choices now, like when we go to the store. He won’t pick chips anymore, now he picks mixed nuts. He loves salad. He helps out in the kitchen now, and in the kitchen, he’s learned how to try new things. My son is a relatively reserved child, he doesn’t open up that much to people, and working with him in the kitchen is opening up communication with him.

Parent of Green Bronx Machine student

marginalised communities are marketed to in ways that simply dictate that these children become consumers. “Buy this!” “Use this!” When you grow your own food, you’ve gone from being a consumer to a producer, and that’s game changing. Because the way food is distributed is indicative of the structures of society, and sadly we don’t get a lot of good food in the Bronx, for a lot of reasons, whether you want to talk about environmental racism, economic racism or flat out racism. So being able to grow food is literally a license to print money, and that’s what it’s become for these children. It’s become a license to liberation, a license to feeling good.’

In the heart of the largest area of public housing in the South Bronx, Green Bronx Machine has created The National Health, Wellness and Learning Center at Community School 55. It sits in an area with some of the highest rates of childhood obesity, diabetes, heart disease and chronic unemployment. Here, an underused school library has been transformed into a state of the art facility and demonstration classroom that features a commercial indoor vertical farm, food processing and training kitchen and solar and alternative energy generators. The centre serves as a hub for teacher training and workforce development, accessible to students’ families and the wider community during evenings, weekends and school holidays.

Beyond the Bronx, the Green Bronx Machine Classroom Curriculum is available for schools to purchase and put into practice in their own classrooms. The curriculum puts plants at the centre of interdisciplinary, hands-on, project-based learning, which is then linked with core academic requirements in science, maths and the arts. Bringing plants inside the classroom means that plant-based learning can take place all year round. Green Bronx Machine is currently reaching 50,000 students daily across 20 US states. The curriculum is also being used in Canada, Latin America and the Middle East, and Green Bronx Machine has recently partnered with Qatar Foundation International to translate the programme into Arabic.

Looking ahead, Green Bronx Machine aims to extend its reach both nationally and globally as well as developing its work with renewable energy. Ritz is keen for the organisation to grow its impact in marginalised communities, including refugees and young people living in foster care or homeless shelters. He is especially proud of a new project that sees foster care youth running a commercial farm in Appalachia, the first of its kind in America. ‘Imagine that we are growing a new economy in coal country by growing plants… It’s amazing. And to do it with foster kids, that’s fantastic!’
CASE STUDY

Kibera School for Girls, Nairobi, Kenya

- The first school offering free primary education for girls, in Kibera, Nairobi – one of the largest slums in Africa
- Run by Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO), which also provides medical clinics, sustainable livelihoods programmes and water, sanitation and hygiene services in the area
- Places are offered to girls on the basis of need, allocated via a rigorous selection process
- The school provides free uniform, shoes, medical care, sanitary pads and nutritionally balanced meals so girls can focus on their education and become agents of change in their communities
- Families and the wider community are involved through volunteering in the school, PTA meetings, academic clinics, and can access SHOFCO’s adult literacy courses and vocational training
- Mentoring scheme partners girls in Grade 6 with successful female role models from outside Kibera to support transition to high schools elsewhere in Kenya or the United States
Kibera School for Girls offers free primary education for girls living in Kibera, one of the largest slums in Africa. As well as providing high quality education, the school supports its students to complete their education with a suite of wrap-around services including free healthcare, food and psychosocial support, as well as offering adult literacy courses and employment training for families and the wider community. Run by Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO), it is the first school specifically for girls in the area and the only school that is free to attend.

Kibera School for Girls was founded in 2009, and its sister school Mathare School for Girls followed in 2015, each taking students from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 8. The schools are run by Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO), a community-led organisation that aims to reduce gender inequality, founded in 2004 by Kennedy Odede, who grew up in the slum. SHOFCO provides a range of critical services in the area, including water, sanitation and hygiene services through the WASH programme, low cost medical services via seven health clinics in Kibera and Mathare, sustainable livelihoods programmes and other essential services such as gender-based violence safe houses and community centres.

The learning at this school is holistic, it has an approach that takes care of all the needs of the girls; their emotional, physical, spiritual, psychosocial needs.

Deborah Odeny, Headmistress, Kibera School for Girls

There are currently 351 students enrolled in the Kibera School and 252 at Mathare, with both schools expecting to serve 400 students once they are running at full capacity with two classes in each year group. Classes are taught with a maximum student:teacher ratio of 15:1, and lessons draw on internationally recognised resources for maths, science and literacy, integrated with the Kenyan curriculum. Academic skills are balanced with immersion in the arts, a commitment to social and emotional Learning and the development of civic responsibility, leadership and critical thinking. The school boasts a 98% student daily attendance rate and in the 2019 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (national exam) the school was ranked second in Kibera sub-county, with 100% pass rate and a class mean score of 349/500. Since 2017, three classes have graduated from Kibera School for Girls, and all of these students have proceeded to high school under SHOFCO scholarships. According to Hecky Odera, Director of Education for SHOFCO, these early results show promise for significant change in an area where girls’ education has traditionally been marginalised and drop-out rates are high. ‘Our belief is that if we are able to educate these girls, they are going to be agents of change. Quality education will give them a voice. Many will progress to university or college, get jobs and come back and help change their families, their community or even the whole nation.’

The school’s holistic approach has been central to these initial achievements and, though SHOFCO’s ultimate ambitions for the girls and their communities may not be realised until later on, the school is already having a positive impact on families through the additional services and resources it provides.

Many of the students are from families experiencing extreme poverty, where it is not uncommon to go for a day without a meal. Students are not charged any fees to attend the school, and basic items such as uniform, shoes and stationery are also provided to ensure there are no financial barriers to attending. Free school meals are given to all students every day, starting with porridge for breakfast, a simple lunch and fresh fruit. Nutritionists work with parents to support them in providing balanced and nutritious meals from simple, low cost ingredients at home. If the school’s social workers identify girls who are unlikely to get an evening meal at home, these students are given a package of food after school, which they can then share with siblings.

Free medical care is also provided at SHOFCO’s health centres for any pupil who is unwell, and their medical costs are covered by the organisation if they need to be referred to a larger hospital. Odera suggests that the medical care offered to the girls, including the provision of basic items like sanitary
pads, has helped to reduce the number of school drop-outs in the community: ‘Girls will drop out of school because of very minor issues, especially in the slums. Well, maybe we call them minor, but actually they can be major issues. For example, when they are having their monthly periods they have to drop out because they can’t afford pads, so they have to stay at home. So by providing this in school we can have a big impact on attendance.’ Social workers and counsellors are also available to work with girls who have suffered more serious cases of abuse and neglect. A safe house, staffed by matrons is available for girls who are not receiving the care that they need at home.

With excellent academic results and services provided for free, places at the school are highly sought after. Around 300 girls apply for the 40 places available each year. A rigorous selection process then takes place, involving home visits to establish the economic situation of the family and identify girls who are most in need - those who would otherwise be very unlikely to go to school at all. Balancing high quality education with the expectations of the community has not always been easy: ‘We are often asked, “Why isn’t it offered to the boys? Why isn’t it offered to every other child in the community?”’ says Odera. ‘At the end of the day, resources are very limited, and you have to be very clear about what you want to do and stick to that. But you want to share with them the vision and mission even if you can’t meet all their expectations.’

There are several ways that families and the wider community are involved which have helped to overcome these challenges and garner broad support for the school and SHOFCO’s work. Instead of paying for their child’s attendance, parents are asked to volunteer at the school for three weeks each year, cooking meals or cleaning classrooms, for example. There are regular PTA meetings, where parents are involved in decision-making and running of the school. Parents are also invited to academic clinics, where they meet teachers and discuss how they can best support their child’s progress. Such partnerships between schools, families and communities have been shown to improve learning outcomes.12

Low rates of adult literacy pose a challenge to the level of support that parents are able to offer, however. SHOFCO provides an adult literacy centre and economic empowerment programmes where parents can access adult education and vocational training. SHOFCO Urban Network (SUN) is another programme that has worked to bring the community together, particularly during the tension and violence that often accompanies elections in the slums. Importantly, around 75% of SHOFCO’s 500-strong workforce are from the local community.

My hope for these girls is that they will become leaders who are going to base their leadership on ethics. They will become women who come out and fight the gender inequalities. They’ll be shining hope and light to the rest of the communities, wherever they’ll be.

Deborah Odenyi, Headmistress, Kibera School for Girls

When I succeed I will not forget where I came from, because that is part of my history. So I’ll come back to Kibera and also help other people, because once someone has helped you, you should also help other people.

Student, Kibera School for Girls13

SHOFCO continues to provide financial, emotional and leadership-building support for its graduates, who have been sponsored to carry on their education in high schools in Kenya and the United States. A mentoring programme which partners girls with successful female role models outside the slum starts in Grade 6 to support their transition to high school and life beyond Kibera. In the future, Odera would like to see Kibera School for Girls offer secondary education too, so that girls could complete their schooling within the local area. •
**Case Study**

Coschool, Colombia

- Founded in 2014, Coschool blends a strong understanding of Colombian context and culture with latest research in social and emotional learning
- It has so far worked with over 15,000 young people aged 13–18 and over 3000 teachers across Colombia
- Aims to develop self-awareness, empathy, determination, decision-making and leadership skills in a post-conflict context
- Campco summer camps bring together young people from different social backgrounds
- Coled programme supports students to make changes in their communities through youth-led group projects that respond to local challenges
- Cotrain provides teacher training in socio-emotional skills via the innovative Edumoción methodology
Coschool is a B Corp – a for-profit company certified as meeting rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency – that develops the life skills of young people in Colombia, with a strong focus on social and emotional learning. Aiming to address the skills gap facing Colombian young people growing up in a post-conflict context, Coschool encourages students to see themselves as agents of change in their communities.

Coschool blends a strong understanding and experience of the Colombian context and culture with the latest research in social and emotional learning and character education. It has three strands: Colead (programmes for high school students in Colombian public schools); Cotrain (teacher training); and Campco (holiday camps that bring together students from public and private schools).

Henry May, Coschool’s CEO, first visited Colombia in 2009 while working for Teach First, and was disheartened by the country’s education system, which has consistently been ranked among the lowest achieving in Latin America and displays large inequalities between rural and urban areas.14 With experience teaching in the public and private sectors as well as training teachers, May found that social and emotional learning ‘kept coming up as the most important thing; it seemed to be the missing piece in the education of young people’. May returned in 2012 with Teach for Colombia. Together with Colombian teacher Carlos Echeverry he founded Coschool in 2014, with the aim of supporting schools, teachers and students to develop skills such as self-awareness, empathy, determination and decision-making.

Coschool’s inception came at a timely moment, as the government signed a peace accord with the country’s largest guerrilla group in 2016. For May, the skills that Coschool develops are vital in post-conflict Colombia ‘because of the real life challenges that are being faced by young people, and the violent, uncomfortable and insecure context that they live in. They need to have a wide range of tools to navigate that context – whether it’s a lack of positive role models, lack of employment opportunities, lack of good living conditions, or various levels of risk ranging from armed groups to weather conditions.

It’s not enough for young people to just have some academic qualifications. They live in uncertain times and in uncertain places and social and emotional skills help them to navigate this, help support them to achieve and to be well.’

Coschool began with a programme linking young people from public and private schools to work collaboratively on social action, entrepreneurship and community projects. The name Coschool arose from this idea of working together: the ‘co’ means ‘collaborative’. ‘You realise that when you mix kids from different backgrounds, it’s a pretty natural platform to start developing these skills of empathy, self-awareness, perseverance and creativity to overcome problems,’ says May. This model of bringing together public and private school students continues in the two week long summer camp programme Campco which focuses explicitly on developing social and emotional skills.

Since its founding, the organisation has evolved in response to the needs of its users, including the development of a scalable teacher training resource called Edumoción. The core youth programs delivered by Coschool fall under the Colead umbrella.

I would say these types of project are essential in school because they help students think of the future, to discover themselves and reveal hidden talents and skills that they can’t see in class every day.

Gladys Botero, Teacher, Coschool Rumbo Emprender project15

Colead works with teenagers aged 13–18 in public schools in Colombia and programmes can be anything from a few days to over a year in duration. Rather than identifying particular students who need extra support, Colead typically works with an entire year group. May notes that the inequality between public and private education means that any public school in Colombia is a target for the programme. Coschool staff immerse themselves within the school and its surrounding community, spending
time understanding its particular context and issues. Drawing on design theory and project-based learning, students work together in small groups to go out

My family are really surprised because they normally say I’m a bit antisocial, so I’m just so grateful for the experience, and I feel really motivated because it made a big difference to my life. My parents say, “This has been so great for you!” I’m really proud of this project.

Student, Coschool Rumbo Emprender project\textsuperscript{16}

into their communities, identify problems and test out solutions, with the support of mentors. The resulting youth-led projects might be entrepreneurial or could focus on social action or community service.

One example is the Rumbo Emprender programme which ran for a year between 2018 and 2019 in Urubá, Antioquia, in the north west of the country.\textsuperscript{17} Rumbo Emprender worked with 300 young people to design social innovation projects aimed at solving problems in their communities, including pollution, road safety, school conflicts, drug addiction and gangs. Six of the 53 projects presented by young people received seed capital to turn their projects into a reality. As part of the programme, students painted a large mural in their community as an innovative way of evaluating their learning, which also worked to showcase their newfound leadership skills to the wider community.\textsuperscript{18} Ipsos, who partnered with Coschool and Fundación Bancolombia to deliver the project, measured the impact on participants via surveys and focus groups, and found the students became more aware of social and environmental issues and were more optimistic about their ability to make changes within their communities.\textsuperscript{19}

‘While we’re taking them through that process of building these projects, our goal is very explicit in
that we want them to be developing their social and emotional skills, empathy, self-awareness, creativity and resilience,’ says May. The programme also draws on storytelling techniques, and has created a series of profiles – collaborator, dreamer, explorer, activator – which ‘gives the students some language to start exploring these skills and understanding how they’re doing on each one’. Through this process, students learn not only about themselves, but how they can be leaders and create real change in their communities.

With funding largely drawn from business foundations and international grant makers, Coschool has so far worked with over 15,000 young people and over 3,000 teachers across Colombia. In 2019, Coschool’s programmes involved 3000 young people and 1,000 teachers, with similar numbers predicted for 2020. May notes that it can be tricky to measure the impacts of social and emotional learning, but data collected using pre and post intervention surveys, interviews and focus groups over the last five years indicates the approach has been working. In the coming years, Coschool will focus on how its work is monitored and evaluated, using validated tools and collecting data more frequently via tablets. May would also like to extend Coschool to other countries in Latin America, particularly Peru and Mexico. •
Key themes and recommendations for Rekindle

The case studies outlined in this report highlight schools and educational initiatives spanning four continents and diverse contexts. The profiled organisations – IMC Weekendschool, Netherlands; Green Bronx Machine, New York; Kibera School for Girls, Kenya; and Coschool, Colombia – respond to the particular challenges of the neighbourhoods and countries in which they operate, adding to and extending mainstream educational provision in their given context. All successfully support young people, raise academic achievement and attendance, and develop leadership and vocational skills. The four schools diverge in their approaches, from offering supplementary and project-based programs that take place outside of usual school hours to holistic primary education and whole school curriculums.

This concluding discussion identifies five key themes that are shared by some or all of the profiled cases, highlighting the factors that interviewees suggest have been most important to their success. What are these four schools doing differently that has enabled them to support young people in pressurised neighbourhoods, to improve academic performance and, crucially, to create educational spaces which young people are excited about attending? Which elements does Rekindle already have in its DNA, and what more can it learn from these innovative cases from around the world?

Key themes across the case study schools

1. Safe, healthy spaces that look beyond academic results

Students’ mental, emotional and physical health is prioritised through free, healthy food, specialist counselling and support where it is needed, and a commitment to social and emotional learning. All the organisations profiled here look beyond a narrow focus on academic results and emphasise the health and wellbeing of students, their immediate communities and environments. Students develop social and emotional skills such as empathy, self-awareness, creativity and perseverance in safe environments where they are free to experiment and make mistakes. This in turn has positively impacted test results, attendance levels and students’ enjoyment of mainstream school. The removal of financial and logistical barriers that would otherwise prevent the participation of young people from low income backgrounds is critical.

2. Positive interactions with supportive adults

Students have the chance to work alongside and interact with caring, enthusiastic adults, whether as guest teachers sharing what they love about their jobs, or as mentors offering one-to-one support or guidance on community projects. Adults and young people come together to share their passions and celebrate achievements in a non-judgemental, supportive environment. Young people who may be struggling in mainstream academic lessons are given the opportunity to succeed at something: learning the skills needed for a chosen career path, improving
their local neighbourhood or preparing healthy, delicious food. Their successes are recognised by adults in the programme and the wider community.

3. Learning through doing

Practical, immersive and project-based work, often in small groups and alongside supportive adults, makes learning fun and engaging. Students are given real responsibilities for making positive changes in their communities, caring for plants and providing food for one another, or learning hands-on the practical tasks required in journalism, nursing or starting a business. They begin to see the impact of their efforts on themselves and on others in the community. Involvement in real-world projects motivates students to attend supplementary and mainstream education, and develops confidence, teamwork, self-awareness, determination and decision-making skills.

4. Exposure to real careers

Students gain a fuller picture of the career options that exist, the skills that are required in different professions, and the steps they need to take in order to realise their ambitions. Role models, both from within and beyond the local community play an important part, along with practical experience of a range of different jobs. Students make clearer connections between the subjects they are studying at school and potential careers. Entrepreneurial and leadership skills are developed through project work, which helps students begin to see opportunities and challenges within their communities which they can act upon.

5. Whole community involvement

Parents, families, local businesses and community leaders are involved in a variety of ways to ensure the community as a whole has a stake in the organisation or school. These include involvement in the decision-making and running of organisations, public celebrations of students’ successes and opportunities to volunteer – whether helping with practical tasks like cooking, looking after a community garden, or acting as a guest teacher or professional mentor. Parents are encouraged and supported to assist with their children’s learning, and are able to access vocational training, adult learning and literacy courses and other essential services, with schools and organisations acting as a hub that brings the community together.

What can Rekindle learn from these findings?

Rekindle targets young people aged 13–16 in South Manchester in working class communities who are at risk of poor educational, health and wellbeing outcomes. In particular, it aims to support young people in care, those who are struggling academically or emotionally, young carers and those with chaotic domestic lives. As such, Rekindle shares many of the aims of the case study organisations. It recognises that young people from working class communities often struggle to achieve academically and can fall short of fulfilling their own potential in formal structures, leading to poor attainment and demotivation. It therefore plans to work with young people in the evenings via small, local educational centres, designed to stimulate learners and equip parents, local stakeholders and positive role models drawn from the local community and beyond to more effectively support young people. Rekindle is designed to Support, Nourish, Achieve and Protect – the four strands of the SNAPback model which underpins its approach:
Support: Weekly homework support, opportunities to learn about Higher and Further Education and mentoring from local university students are aimed at increasing students’ academic confidence, and respect and self-discipline for research and study. This will lead to improved academic outcomes and more students proceeding to Higher and Further Education.

Nourish: Free home-cooked meals will be eaten together every evening with teachers and youth workers, and students will learn about food preparation and nutrition. This is aimed at developing students’ understandings of the connection between food and health, both physical and mental, and will increase students’ life skills and confidence, leading to improved health and wellbeing and a smoother transition to adult life.

Achieve: Students will be supported by a network of positive, supportive adults, will work with inspirational speakers and local entrepreneurs, and will have their achievements recognised both privately and publicly. This will encourage a culture of cooperation, attainment and shared success within the community, raising young people’s self-confidence and aspirations, and leading to increased pride in extra-curricular achievement, improved social capital and better educational outcomes.

Protect: Young people will receive individual mentoring and coaching focused on physical and mental health. Free, safe transport home from school will be provided. Exposure to positive role models will give young people a broader perspective on life, raising self-esteem and increasing their understanding of physical and mental wellbeing. Longer term, this will support students to proceed to their desired career or Further/Higher Education post-18, will help address mental health issues and develop emotional intelligence.

Clear parallels can be seen between Rekindle’s planned approach and the themes identified across the case study schools, particularly in terms of the opportunities it provides for young people to interact with supportive adults in the form of teachers, university students, youth workers and mentors (Support and Achieve). Like the four case study schools, Rekindle prioritises students’ health, wellbeing and nutrition (Nourish and Protect), providing students with safe and healthy spaces to learn, in which their mental health and social and emotional learning is a priority. Opportunities also exist for developing students’ exposure to potential career pathways and vocational skills and to engage the whole community, through interactions and events involving mentors and role models drawn from the local area and beyond (Support, Achieve, Protect). Rekindle’s focus on food and nutrition (Nourish) could also be further developed via community and entrepreneurial projects that strengthen vocational skills, as well as linking food preparation (and perhaps also cultivation) to academic subjects.

With the four case studies in mind, there are several questions and suggestions that Rekindle could consider:

- What are the mechanisms that will bring parents on board, and how will they be supported to assist their children in developing academic, vocational and entrepreneurial skills? Are there training courses or resources that could be offered to parents and the wider community? What volunteering opportunities would best enable parents and other community members to get involved with Rekindle and develop their own skills?
- How can Rekindle build in opportunities for young people, including those from different backgrounds, to work together on shared goals? Aside from supporting students to improve their individual academic outcomes, could team projects focused on meeting real challenges within the local community help further develop social and emotional skills and give young people a sense of purpose and motivation?
- Rekindle has clear plans for providing healthy meals and guidance on nutrition, but can food be brought more to the fore? Perhaps as the focus of group/community projects, as a route to introducing students to different careers in the food industry and beyond, or as a way of consolidating academic skills through practical, hands-on learning?
- As well as eating fresh, healthy food each day, what role will young people play in preparing
that food, designing menus and sourcing ingredients? Could young people grow some of their own food as well as cooking it? A small community garden, either outside or in the classroom could further strengthen Rekindle’s links with the local community by creating a beautiful and productive green space, involving garden volunteers and providing fresh food for Rekindle students and others in the community.

Final thoughts: advice for Rekindle from the interviewees

Simon Tesfahuney, IMC Weekendschool alumnus:

‘Connect the thing that students are learning with the real world. When you do that, they’ll see right away the reason for learning it.’

Henry May, CEO, Coschool:

‘Don’t worry too much about measuring the right thing, but make sure you measure something and use data from the start of the project. Adjust your programming to different contexts, let users and beneficiaries co-design your programmes. Stay up to date with the latest research in the field and blend that with your own approach. Finally, most importantly: be coherent! Live the skills yourself in your organisation. That’s hard but it’s very important.’

Stephen Ritz, CEO, Green Bronx Machine:

‘Don’t reinvent the wheel. Everyone thinks that they have a new and better way; that’s not necessarily the case, so I say look to partner and collaborate. Start small, and celebrate often. Building small, concentric circles of success is absolutely critical. And never forget the mandate of your day job. Of course you want children eating healthy in school, but schools have to have high performing data to be receptive to you. So if you understand how to marry your ambitions to the mandate of your day job, you’re going to do well.’

Heleen Terwijn, CEO, IMC Weekendschool:

‘Don’t forget that kids love to learn. And our task is to make that possible. […] One thing that has worked really well for us is that we’re financially independent. There’s a lot of fundraising, but when you’re independent from the government you don’t have to swing with governmental changes. I always say, the government is there to give kids basic education, and that’s difficult enough, especially in some neighbourhoods. If you want to enrich education, do it with civil society, because people will help you. Our sponsors, our guest teachers, everybody supports us. Without that, there wouldn’t be a Weekendschool.’

Hecky Odera, Director of Education, Kibera School for Girls:

‘A lot of our funding comes from donors, and often we’ll have a donor who has a very interesting idea that they feel they can implement that through us if they give their money. But sometimes you realise their idea or their vision really doesn’t support our vision; there is a disconnect or they are not aligned. Sometimes the greatest challenge is how to say no. What has really given us structure is that we have our vision, we have our mission, and we really know the type of education that we want to offer. So my advice would be to be very clear about what you want to do, and stick to that no matter the challenges that come along. Because then you know exactly what you want to achieve.’

Marwa Mohammed, IMC Weekendschool alumnus:

‘Listen to the people who will benefit from your project! If there’s anything you need to do, anything that’s missing, they can tell you. Let them be honest, get their feedback.’ •
Afterword

**Jaiden Corfield**  
*Student, activist and Rekindle trustee*

Education can be the greatest opportunity in one’s life.

Unfortunately, access to an education worth loving is what tends to make the difference. This report shows us that education is not about passing an exam, it’s about the knowledge and nourishment you provide. It identifies the wealth in opportunity and the power that can be given to young people who often fail to access an education that is worthy of their engagement.

From the IMS Weekendschool, which emphasises the importance of a practical education and professional mentors for children from low income neighborhoods, to the Green Bronx Machine, which teaches young people from communities where they are often forgotten the importance of an education that nurtures. An incredible supplementary School has the ability to truly change lives, and this report demonstrates how important it is to bring education into the hearts of disadvantaged young people.

As we read this report, we are energised and reassured that we are on the right track to bring education into the hearts of young people and place young people at the heart of education. There is evidence that this is no easy task, but there is also tangible proof that a supplementary school can significantly change the lives of the young people it works with. Rekindle and these other schools exist to facilitate that change and provide that opportunity; this report highlights why we need to exist.

If there is one thing that we take from each school, it is the importance of placing young people at the heart of everything that we do. A soulful education has provided the girls of Kibera School for Girls with the tools to escape poverty and oppression and gain access to opportunities they are often locked out of. The best educational institution is not the one that pushes students through the most exams, it’s the one that Supports, Nourishes, Achieves and Protects. When that happens, we will see an education that allows true attainment for young people.
Endnotes

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