KORI YOUTH CHARITY

mensah foundation

HAVANA PROJECT SECONDARY SCHOOL

THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

21st Vessel UK Project
October 2025

VESSEL UK

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Project Background

KORI Youth Charity was founded in London in 2002 and our international programme **The Vessel UK** has worked in partnership with international organisations for over two decades in Tanzania, Kenya, The Gambia and Namibia.

The Vessel UK safeguards and supports young people and adults through a global learning journey, enabling them to fashion their interests and skills into a structured project that is inclusive, relevant, and sustainable.

In 2025 Islington Virtual School approached KORI to request that a small group of their Care Leavers aged 18+ take part in the Vessel UK Programme. The Islington Virtual School's core purpose is to promote education and wider life chances for young people that are Care experienced. This was the second time some of their Care Leavers would take part in the programme. While the chosen group shared a passion for sport, they were not currently engaged in education or employment.

The first task was to hold discussions with our partners in Namibia where the project would be delivered. We discussed the proposed project with our local partner, The Mensah Foundation and our key partner, Havana High School, where we found that both students and teachers were really enthusiastic about hosting a sports focused project.

Havana High School is in the informal settlement of Havana, Windhoek. Pupils are from low-income backgrounds, and the school was established in 2015 in response to a huge demand for school space in Windhoek. Most of the pupils live in the informal settlement of Havana Goreangab and Hakanha and others live in Katutura central.

'It was overwhelming…we had to deliver the project ourselves and this was a big responsibility.'

Preparation for Leadership

It was very important that this project had a sustainable and lasting impact on the futures of the young people involved, providing them with certification, learning and motivation. To get the ball rolling, Islington Virtual School engaged the company 'Access to Sports' to deliver a certified course in coaching.

Alongside the coaching training the Vessel UK team began to prepare the 9 young people, building their understanding around the areas of learning which they would be sharing with a group of selected students in Havana High School. There were four strands of training workshops:

- **Sports in business and development workshops**
- **Sports and Exercise Nutrition and Diet**
- **Sports Leadership and Documentation**
- **Coaching development**

The preparation also included learning about Namibia and its cultural, historical and current context. Some of this was delivered through interactive online presentations and talks with staff from Havana High School and the Mensah Foundation.

The group identified these goals for their journey:

- **To shed stereotypes about Africa**
- **To learn more about Namibian history and culture**
- **To build their communication skills**
- **To build their confidence and connections**
- **To gain professional experience**
- **To be accountable and grow from mistakes**

The Vessel UK team guided and supported the young people's delivery which was an essential part of making sure that they felt confident. Sports resources were also purchased by Islington Virtual School that would be left with Havana High School after the delivery of the project. Nine young people had initially taken part in the preparation workshops over a ten-week period, while the final group that were able to travel were six in number, accompanied by three staff and led by two of the Vessel UK team.

Delivery

Upon arriving the first task was to meet with the staff of Havana High School. It had already been established that the workshops would be delivered to a mix of students from a range year groups. Over six individual after school workshops the young people from Islington Virtual School shared the coaching skills and different drills they had learnt in both football and basketball with the students from Havana High School.

They also led presentations on key concepts from their learning instructing the students on:

- **How to conduct a needs analysis for sport**
- **Diet, health and nutrition**
- **Exercise science fundamentals**

They made sure the sessions were fun and interactive by using mini-games, ice breakers and group discussions where everyone freely shared thoughts and experiences. The structured preparation created a successful project shown by a consistently high attendance of over 40 Havana High School students each day. The group shared that they found the students were really attentive and excited by the project.

> ***I was more confident after the first session... there were hurdles but we were 100% delivering the project.***

'Going to another country in Africa, seeing my brothers and sisters living differently. It was like African Texas Bro!

Cultural Education

As part of their Vessel UK learning the young people had a timetabled exploration of Namibia organised by the Mensah Foundation. They travelled to different parts of the country visiting historical sites, such as the Swakopmund Concentration Camp Memorial and museums in Swakopmund and Windhoek.

They learnt about the country's experience of genocide which led to many conversations as they grappled with Namibia's complex history. They engaged with Namibian culture and its rich environment by visiting a traditional restaurant, enjoying a guided tour of the Desert, a visit to the Dead Sea and Cape Cross.

For some of these young people this was their first experience of being outside of the UK. Some did not expect an African country to be so ethnically diverse or well developed, and this challenged some of their preconceived notions. Others were surprised at the lack of a language barrier, which raised questions about the mainstream perceptions of Africa.

Impact - Overview

This project created an opportunity for six young people from the UK to engage with over 150 students from Havana High School. The joint purpose accelerated their learning and ensured commitment. They have retained their learning about sports business, nutrition, and the intersections between these fields. They gained a coaching accreditation and thrived in the delivery of an international project.

During the project delivery the students shared their thoughts about the sports facilities and equipment in their school. In the dietary sessions that shared the importance of healthy eating, students enthusiastically listed their favourite foods, like cakes or hot dogs, and then learned how to judge labels and nutritional value. Attending teachers spoke openly about their approach to fitness, nutrition, and their environment. Many students that had been reserved at the beginning of the workshop voiced their opinions confidently by the end.

> ***'Working hard and learning together was the highlight for me.'***

VESSEL UK

In the numbers

9

UK Participants Trained

72

Hours of Project Delivery

> *As days went by my confidence improved dramatically and has been ever since we left Namibia*

> *Being able to give something to someone that is actual sustenance showed me that helping other gives you a type of joy you cannot buy or look for*

100%

Reported increase in Cultural Capital and Sense of Direction

150

Havana High School Students reached Aged 7-19

Further Participant Feedback

Islington Virtual School Participants

"I'm impressed with myself, I feel more confident after being commended for my skills.

"I learnt that when you share knowledge and you see people take it in, it gives you special feeling

"I improved in delivery and got the whole class engaged. It was difficult but great!

"I never expected to be out here doing extrovert stuff... If we did it without these guys, we'd be lost. Thank you to the Vessel UK team!

Havana High School Participants

I learnt about the diet needed for our bodies to be fit and healthy."

The challenge was I could not pass or dribble, but I learnt to."

They were always on time, and they had rewards for us, I enjoyed the process"

Everything about the young UK people was great, they were loving and caring coaches and they improved our skills."

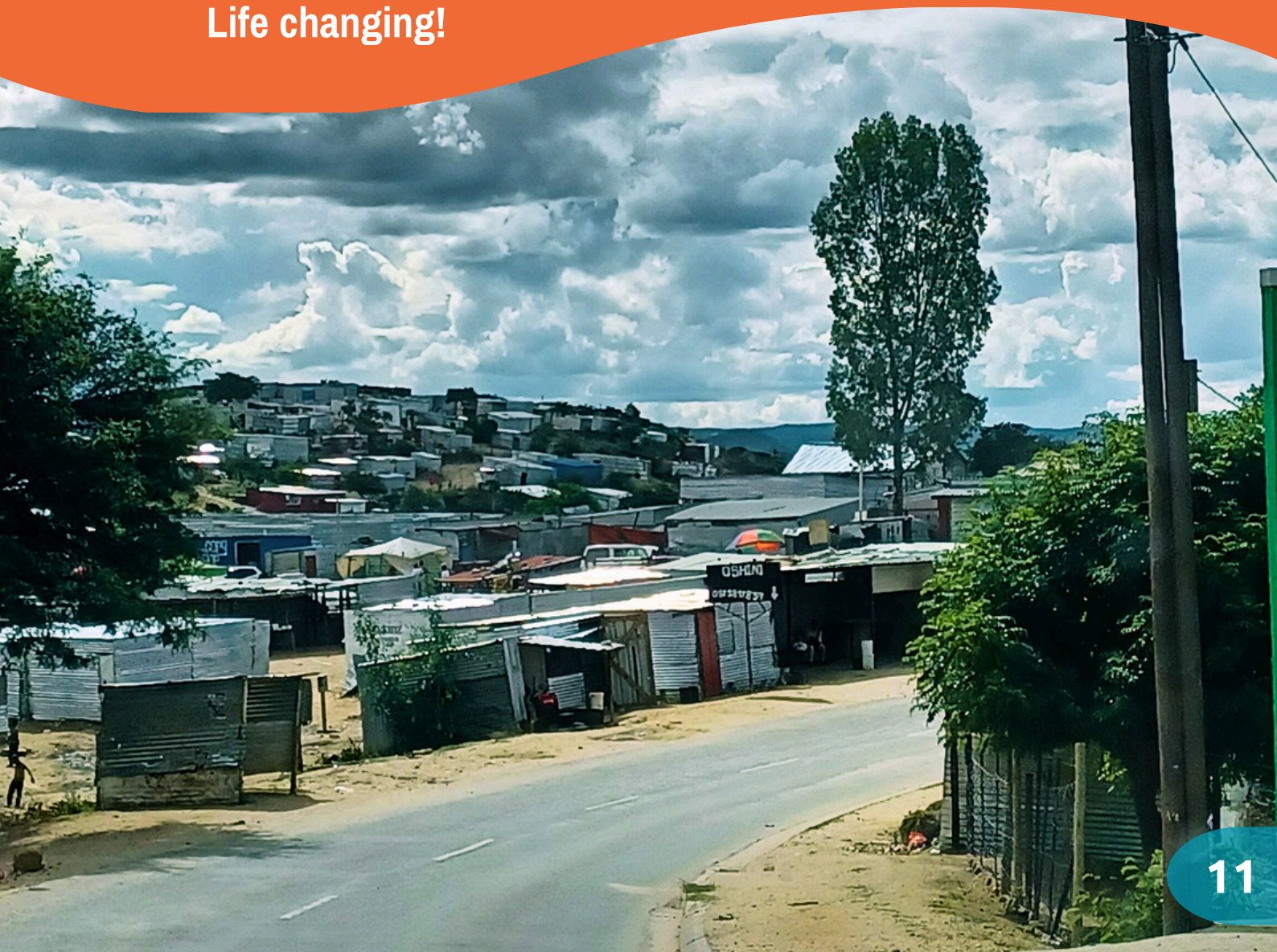
Moving Forwards

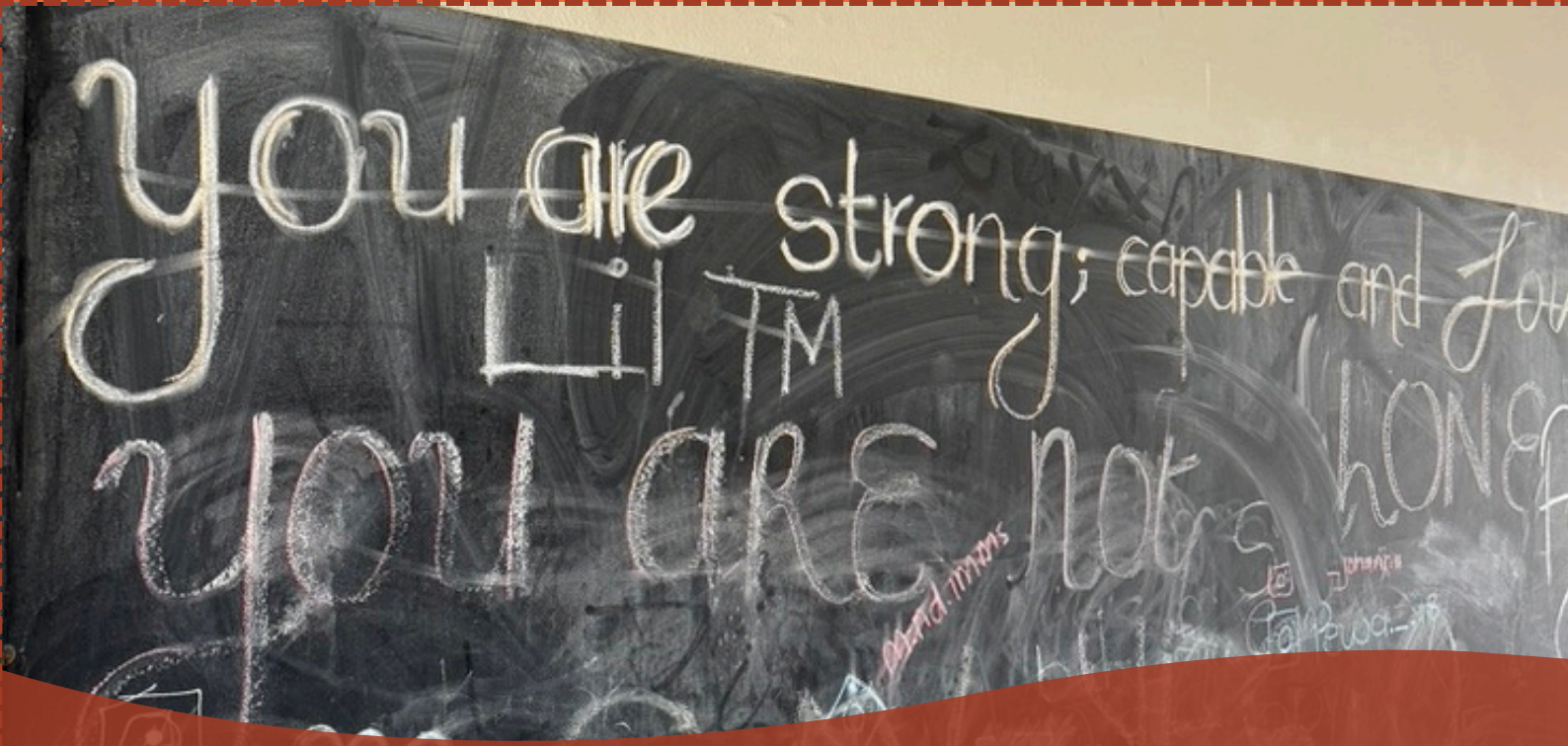
To the six young people that participated fully, the Vessel UK project was more than just professional development, it also boosted their confidence, communication skills, and impacted their cultural depth and understanding. Since returning all of them have confirmed that it was a life changing experience and three of them have now enrolled at universities, whilst working part-time. One has begun a paid apprenticeship, another is in full employment, and one has been motivated to deal with debt challenges. The three young people who attended the training but were unable to travel have shared that they were also positively impacted.

This is the twenty-first successfully delivered Vessel UK project! The preparation and delivery is always challenging, and the real value is that participants are able to experience the very best version of themselves.

> *If you were telling an old friend about the experience in just a few words, what would they be?*

Life changing!





Special Thanks

'Seeing them both outside on the sports ground and in a classroom delivering a project with all the students watching them, supporting each other, was so wonderful to see.

Deputy Head - Islington Virtual School

'Hosting British students focused on sports and nutrition significantly accelerated the students' development. The cross-cultural engagement built immense confidence and expanded their perspectives.'

Ricardo Mensah – The Mensah Foundation

We thank the Islington Virtual School for commissioning this project. Special thanks also to our support partner the Mensah Foundation and 'Arsenal in the Community' for access to their facilities and support, and to Access to Sports for delivering the coaching training and accreditation .

But most of all we thank Havana High School for their welcome and the high student engagement, we do hope to work with them again in the future.