Alot of people doubted me, but look at me now.

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A one-time boxing club is turning around young lives in York. As a new film by Inspired Youth documents its work, director Kev Curran talks to the people who are making a difference.

The Jack Raine Community Foundation began life as a boxing club. Today it has developed into a remarkable organisation which helps young people turn their lives around. That was what inspired our film.

We wanted to tell the story of Jack Raine, who he was and why his legacy and the foundation is so important and valuable to those it helps. Jack founded the charity in 1967 as a sports club for children. A humble man, he never wanted accolades or praise for the difference he made, and his passion to support and help society's lost and broken lives on in the foundation.
By making the film we aimed both to share their work with the wider community – and ask for their support. The foundation is financially vulnerable but York people can help by using the gym, and it is also looking for potential funders.

So what does the Jack Raine Community Foundation do? It provides alternative education for vulnerable young people who are disengaged with mainstream schooling. Jack Raine is also a community gym and a resource open to the public.

Russ Harrison Potts, foundation trustee, said: "We work in partnership with Danesgate [York's pupil support centre] and Youth Offending teams to engage young people.

"We also work with local frontline services such as the Salvation Army and North Yorkshire Police, providing opportunities for adults to break their cycle of crime and addiction by offering classes that take them off the streets and engage them in positive meaningful activities.

"Jack Raine is trying to provide as much under one roof as possible. It's open to anyone, of all ages and all backgrounds."
People who come through the doors of the JRCF are facing a range of issues, all kinds of problems, right across the board," says foundation manager Sam Shaw.

These can range from behavioral issues, drugs or alcohol dependency, homelessness to mental health issues and many others. "JRCF are working with some of the most severe cases of abuse in the city and along side often very damaged young people."

How do you turn lives around? "Jack Raine is more than a boxing club," says Russ. "Boxing is just ten per cent of what we do. We use sports as a vehicle to engage some of society's most damaged young people. It can be life changing: by rebuilding self worth and developing confidence, people grow and start to believe in themselves again."

The foundation provides alternative education, from GCSEs to Duke of Edinburgh awards right through to ASDAN qualifications. "It's proven that any sport helps develop and improve mental and physical wellbeing and we have seen this in practice in our everyday work," Russ said. "At the start of the journey young people are often apathetic, uncooperative and difficult to engage.

"It takes time to build relationships but once you gain their trust you begin to see them flourish. We believe everybody has potential. Due to their past experiences the young people we work with have low self esteem and unlocking their potential requires dedication and making them feel believed in when they feel like everybody else has given up."
Foundation user Kyle is a fantastic example of a life transformed. Written off by everyone and his life spiralling in the wrong direction, Kyle was not engaging with mainstream education. Jack Raine was his last chance.

Foundation head coach Billy talks of his first impressions: "When I met him, he was going nowhere, jail, that's where he was heading."

Withdrawn and unhappy, Kyle admits that he went along to Jack Raine "so people would get off my case". But after a few weeks his attitude mellowed. "I realised that they were the real people, trying to bring out the best in you, focusing on your good points, not your bad points."

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Things started to change. “I was stopping on my mum’s sofa, smoking weed all the time, not really making anything of my life. Now because of Jack Raine I have got a job and I have got my own flat. A lot of people doubted me, but look at me now.”

Kyle is humble about his own success, about how far he has come as an individual and what he has achieved. Since starting out as a kitchen porter at an established York hotel, he has been promoted twice and is now chef de partie.

Talking about the transformation, Billy says: “Now he’s got ambition and he’s going somewhere. Seeing the change is like winning the lottery. It’s the best feeling in the world.”

The foundation has its roots in boxing. Does the sport still play an important part? “Boxing is an Olympic sport but can often have negative connotations,” says Russ. “Boxing is still at the heart of what we do. Without the boxing club the charity wouldn’t exist and visa versa.

“Boxing is the first thing people may talk about and associate us with but there is a lot more going on in the background. Our engagement with people expands beyond the initial sports into so many other aspects of their life, from family to their education, sexual heath, relationships, almost every social angle.

“We are open, accessible and when young people are inside the foundation it’s keeping them engaged in something and off the streets.”

Liam, head youth worker at the foundation, said the young people they see often thrive in a different environment. “Nine times out of ten they’re not bad kids, just misunderstood and a classroom environment doesn’t really suit them.”
Does Russ think the number of troubled youngsters is increasing? “Yes. I think if you look at society today, social problems are definitely growing, and at a time where those working to address them are under massive pressure to stay alive.

“We are seeing children as young as ten and eleven. The issues we see today are more complex, often mental health issues. Youth unemployment and homelessness are growing, both locally and nationally. These kinds of issues facing young people, homelessness, drugs, drink, petty crime, they all go hand in hand. We see these problems face to face, we meet the real people behind the statistics, day in day out.”

Young people need more positive role models. “Jack Raine believes inspiring mentors and coaches are a key part of engaging with young people and building positive relationships with them. Our team is diverse and the staff have a range of life experiences which help them to relate to the young people who come through our doors.”

The foundation is all about giving people second chances and reengaging them. “We are too quick in society to write young people off. The media demonise young people as ‘troublemakers’ but the majority of the young people who come through our doors are just misunderstood.

“We believe that you shouldn’t judge young people on the surface and that their behaviour is more of a symptom of a much deeper issue; whether that be the experience of growing up in care or experiencing abuse growing up, anger and poor attitudes are often a mask for more serious emotional problems underneath.”

The film has had “a massive impact” on those who’ve seen it, Russ said. “It’s been awe-inspiring – it really moves people.” It has also helped Inspired Youth to be named Official Partner at the No/Gloss Film Festival 2013.

One viewer was Brendan Foley, write and film director. He wrote:
I get asked to watch a great many films and read a lot of scripts, many of which are pretty dire, so it is wonderful when something with real heart comes into view. The 20 minute mini-docu on the Jack Raine Community Foundation, turning around young lives in York has some great ingredients: real characters, honesty and some great true stories. It might make a springboard for a full documentary in the right hands. Regardless, it deserves to be seen as widely as possible, and shouted from the rooftops.
The future of the foundation

Russ says that in the current financial and social climate the pressure is on all third sector organisations at a time when we are needed more than ever.

“Keeping the Jack Raine Foundation alive is hard work. Like most charities we are fighting everyday to keep going, so we can continue to make a difference in the community.

“Raising funds and resources are a constant battle. But we hope to use the film and the inspiring stories like Kyle’s to draw in the right support, to really show people what is possible when you really engage with people. Everyone can be someone.”

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