Mentoring excellence praised by grassroots charity

Monday 30 September, 2024

A Message from our CEO & Founder, Leila Thomas

How do you begin to say thank you to a company and the individuals inside of it - who live and breathe its values - when they've changed 11 young lives, helped communities, and invested some two to three years of their time?

It's not easy. Across many months, the professionals at WTW, the British-American multinational insurer, worked tirelessly with our charity to prepare young people for the world of work through the DreamBig@WTW programme.

There are no words to describe the appreciation, gratitude and thanks we extend to Cheree Psalms, Nikki Hall-Jones (USA), Deena Patel (UK) and Dorothy Wilkes (USA), Chiedu Hing (UK) and sponsors: Garrett Gaughan, and Alastair Swift (UK) - and all the colleagues at WTW who shared their time and expertise to change the world for the better.

At our end, Urban Synergy's Dianne Johnson & Safiya Chiappa-Forrester saw WTW's passion and 'leaned into it' to co-create this groundbreaking DreamBig@WTW programme.

It all started in 2022, when WTW wanted to bring more diversity into their workforce at entry level.

Cheree, Dorothy and Nikki were passionate about the programme as they recalled being given opportunities as teenagers in their background to help them to succeed for the future.

What is DreamBig@WTW?

DreamBig@WTW is a two-year programme designed to nurture the talents of young individuals facing socio economic challenges.

Through focused mentorship, hands-on experience, and a spirit of giving back, WTW's programme is specially crafted for young people aged 15-18, supporting them through crucial life transition stages.

The programme offers skills-based training in WTW's key business segments: People, Risk, and Capital.

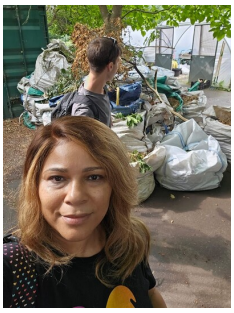
The initiative supports individuals from marginalised communities to develop business and life skills. They go into the WTW offices in London, but also get out in nature to volunteer.

Mentoring excellence: How does it work?

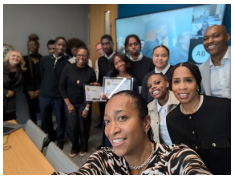
Before signing up parents/guardians and the young people are invited to an online call to learn more about the 2 year programme which includes:

- **An accelerated mentoring programme** with Urban Synergy where a corporate mentor works with them on their CV, Mock interview and presentation skills.
- **Joining the WTW mentoring programme** with a WTW mentor (senior executives) and attending a monthly personal development workshop onsite at WTW's city office.
    - Together the young people work on: communication, organisation, time management and presentation skills, team-building, work etiquette and learn about different business functions at WTW.
    - Parents/guardians of the selected students are invited to the launch of the DreamBig@WTW programme at the WTW city office.
- **A paid four-week internship** at WTW's London office each year of the programme.
- **Giving back** - take part in a volunteering activity each quarter in the first year and once in the second year.
    - Volunteering took place in food banks in London's Lewisham and Southwark with environmental park activities in Dulwich Park, Lewisham and Burgess Park in Southwark.

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Why is it different?

It's all about unlocking potential in problem-solving, data analytics, and communication. The focus is squarely on mentorship, experience and giving back.

"In addition to nurturing future entrepreneurs and leaders, our goal is to strengthen community wellbeing and foster a diverse, local workforce," say WTW's Co-Heads of DreamBig@WTW, Cheree Psalms and Dorothy Wilkes.

As well as providing mentoring excellence, it's also a lot of fun for the DreamBig@WTW participants and WTW colleagues.

How were young people selected for the programme?

The participants mainly came through schools with higher-than-average rates of free school meals in South and East London, including Addey & Stanhope School, Harris Academy Bermondsey, and Prendergast Girls' School. One young person was home schooled.

Conclusion

The programme culminated this month in a presentation to WTW where the young people had worked in teams to research the best ways for the company to deploy AI.

They say that the DreamBig@WTW programme had helped them become less shy, more confident, able to work anywhere with no limitations "It literally changed my life" says one participant.

Cheree Psalms who leads DreamBig@WTW with Dorothy Wilkes agreed and added "You know they say, "it takes a village", well it also takes a lot of hard work. Urban Synergy, the young people and especially my colleagues across WTW worked tirelessly on top of the demands of their day-to-day roles to make this programme a resounding success."
I am struggling to find a way for Urban Synergy to say thank you to WTW for creating this opportunity and investing in diversity.

The footprint you leave on the world and the hearts and minds of these young people and those who participate in future DreamBig@WTW programmes will stay with them always. Thank you.

Leila Thomas, CEO & Founder, Urban Synergy

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