

# A portrait of success for ex-prisoner's art business

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**A** Birmingham man who turned his back on gang culture to launch his own business is serving as a role model for young people striving to escape unemployment.

In a bid to do its bit to reduce youth unemployment the Prince's Trust is encouraging unemployed young people to consider self-employment through its recently launched A-Z of Young Businesses, which celebrates young people from across the UK who have successfully set up on their own.

The initiative, supported by RBS, showcases 26 young people who have been supported into business by the Prince's Trust's Enterprise Programme.

One of those featured is Birmingham's Arnold Sebutinde, who successfully set up Spontaneous Portraits.

Just a few years ago the 28-year-old was unemployed but with the help of the Prince's Trust managed to turn his life around and now runs his own flourishing portrait business.

And Mr Sebutinde revealed his life could have gone in a very different direction, admitting that while growing up he was influenced by gangs in his community and in a bid to "fit in" found himself falling in with the wrong crowd.

"Looking back I was so desperate to fit in and be accepted," he said. "It was a desperately unhappy time of my life."

After becoming embroiled in gang culture he was sent to prison for conspiracy to rob in 2007.

He served two-and-a-half years in jail but said his time there gave him the chance to reflect on life and focus on what he wanted for his future.

A lifelong passion for art led to him drawing portraits of fellow prisoners to send home to friends and family.

After being released in 2009 he was shocked at the lack of job opportunities because of the recession.

He said: "A lot of my friends were being made redundant and I witnessed a few of them turn to crime to help pay the bills - a route I definitely didn't want to go down."

"I knew that I'd find it even more difficult to find work because of my criminal record and I started to realise I could potentially turn my talent into a business."

After hearing about the Prince's Trust Enterprise Programme he seized the opportunity to take part and learn about business planning.

Mr Sebutinde went on to present his business idea to the Prince's Trust and was delighted when he received a £2,000 loan and the support of a business mentor to help achieve his dream.

The continuing recession has strengthened Mr Sebutinde's determination to turn Spontaneous Portraits into a high-end business.

Originally his portraits were sold at a modest price but after realising how popular they were proving and he moved from selling lots

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at a low price to successfully targeting a higher-end client base.

The firm has gone from strength to strength and Mr Sebutinde has expanded from human portraits into pets, horses, wildlife and architecture.

He added: "Without the Prince's Trust I really don't know where I'd be. They gave me the help and support I needed to set up my business and I can't thank them enough for giving me the chance to have a happy future."

To mark the launch of the A-Z of Young Businesses the Prince's Trust undertook research into young people's attitudes to unemployment.

With the soaring level of youth unemploy-



Arnold Sebutinde, who successfully set up Spontaneous Portraits with the help of the Prince's Trust

ment a continuing cause for concern the research revealed young people in Birmingham firmly believe entrepreneurial flair offers one of the best means of advancing on the career ladder and succeeding in life.

The research also found almost half of young people in the city (46 per cent) thought finding a job was harder than 12 months ago, while 48 per cent were worried about finding their next job. The findings also revealed 60 per cent of young people in the city feel life is harder than ever for unemployed young people.

But three in four believe setting up in business would give them a sense of achievement and purpose while more than half (59 per cent) believe it represents a viable route out of unemployment.

The research, based on interviews with 2,000 16 to 30 year-olds across the UK, revealed one in five unemployed young people (22 per cent) think finding a job in the next year is "unachievable", while more than a third (36 per cent) claimed they had not received any responses to job applications in the past year.

Paul Beesley, Prince's Trust acting regional director for the West Midlands, said: "It is clear that it's a difficult time for young people in Birmingham as they're becoming increasingly disillusioned with their lives. We need to ensure they are receiving the right support to help them find work."

"Setting up in business can be an escape route out of the dole queue for these young people - and a route to success. Many of the disadvantaged young people we have helped through our Enterprise Programme have gone from joblessness to being their own boss and employing others too."

The Prince's Trust & RBS A-Z of Young Businesses can be accessed on the Prince's Trust Facebook page ([facebook.com/princes-trust](http://facebook.com/princes-trust)) or at [princes-trust.org.uk](http://princes-trust.org.uk).

## IT firm secures a foothold in the States

A Warwickshire IT company has boosted its export credentials after securing £176,000 worth of business from North America.

Technology Associates, based in Stratford-upon-Avon, secured the new business to provide cloud-based software to several international companies based in the US and Canada after a visit to a major Microsoft conference and exhibition in Canada.

The company, which was established 22

years ago, already supplies the likes of BP, Lloyds Banking Group and Vodafone, became a Microsoft Gold Partner as a result of visiting Canada after securing UK Trade & Investment funding.

Founder Kelvin Kirby was appointed as worldwide president for the International Association of Microsoft Channel partners (IAMCP) - the official voice of Microsoft - in December, selected by Microsoft from 640,000

partners worldwide. Technology Associates has also entered into discussions with Microsoft about being an exclusive UK partner and reseller for the new Perceptive Pixel large format touch screen devices.

Bineet Desai, of UK Trade and Investment said: "It's important businesses make the most of the opportunities available for trading overseas, particularly in IT solutions and software where location is largely irrelevant."

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