dot.
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY TRUST

CASE STUDY

VIRTUAL COACHING FOR YOUTH SOCIAL INNOVATORS

Canada

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INTRODUCTION

Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) has a global network of highly engaged and community-oriented youth (#DOTYouth). In 2020, DOT launched the #DOTYouth Street Team, an initiative to support youth who are implementing COVID-19 related interventions which support their communities in an unprecedented time of local, national, and international crisis.

In 2020 and 2021, using DOT's Innojo platform, DOT piloted an entirely virtual coaching experience for members of the #DOTYouth Street Team in order to support them to strengthen their community-based initiatives, their impact, and their personal and professional resilience.

This case study is an overview of DOT's iterative and learning-based approach to coaching, which is based on the organization's commitment to collaborative, youth-led community development.

The purpose of this case study is to share some of the key learnings and methodologies that DOT has found successful when establishing a virtual coaching model for youth in Africa and the Middle East.

Youth who have participated in DOT programs are trained facilitators and community leaders with a digital-first, gender-sensitive, and innovative mindsets.

Because of the leadership roles they have taken in their communities, #DOTYouth have engendered a high degree of trust across formal and informal networks.

#DOTYouth have knowledge of what is most needed in their communities; they have the ability to adapt and respond quickly to crisis situations; they have the digital skills, gender equality and facilitation knowledge necessary to support the need for increased digital inclusion, access, and critical knowledge; and they are located in some of the most under-served and at-risk locations on the globe, operating among some of the most vulnerable populations.

As innovators on the frontlines of their communities in an unprecedented global pandemic, we were honoured to support members of the #DOTYouth Street Team through a coaching pilot initiative that sought to build their resilience, impact, and networks of support.

This case study is based on a coaching program co-designed with #DOTYouth and Coach Africa, a leading coaching firm in Africa delivering African excellence.

WHY COACHING IS IMPORTANT:

A GLOBAL GAP IN SUPPORT TO YOUNG SOCIAL INNOVATORS

In research efforts and work with youth, DOT has identified significant gaps in support to social innovators along their entrepreneurial journey – challenges that particularly impact young women social innovators.

These gaps include:

1 Young social innovators often give up when they feel alone in confronting the many challenges they face. They often face this sense of isolation when a program that has been supporting or instructing them concludes.

2 Many youth feel overwhelmed when their initiatives begin to take form. They struggle to find funding, build an effective team, create realistic plans, or design a sustainable and impactful business model. Without support in these areas, youth are likely to abandon their initiatives.

3 Young women benefit from support and guidance from other women they can relate to, but most find it challenging to find role models they can connect with in a meaningful way.

Research on the global social enterprise ecosystem reveals a critical gap in support available to emerging social innovators.

In between the Minimum Viable Product (MVP), Validation, and Implementation stages of an innovation journey, young social innovators are forced to navigate a period of time sometimes referred to as the "valley of death," "trough of sorrow," or "valley of despair" without programmatic or financial support. This leads to high dropout rates among early stage social innovators. Young women face additional barriers accessing relevant support to navigate this gap, and are disproportionately affected.

Young social innovators told us that creating connections with others at key moments in their journeys made the biggest difference between giving up or moving forward.

They shared that increased access to a network of like-minded peers and long term support offered by an individual or organization that was personally invested in their progress could help them overcome barriers in their innovation journey.

Ultimately, DOT's research demonstrated that many young social innovators participating in innovation programs lack the continuous, customized support needed to fully realize their passion for social impact and build a sustainable livelihood for themselves.

Through our research, we also discovered that youth value consistent 'check-ins' on their journey as a way to monitor their own progress, build confidence, and determine next steps. Conversational approaches which provide guidance when creating something or working through a problem proved to be a useful tool for young women in particular.

DOT worked with youth and Coach Africa to co-design a framework for successful virtual coaching. This framework is based on three key principles:

1 Coaching should focus on practical and applied aspects of a social innovator's journey.

2 Coaching is best positioned to provide support after formal training or program engagement has been completed, as a part of a transition out of a program.

3 Coaches must have an understanding of the highs and lows of the entrepreneurial journey.

COACHING METHODOLOGY

In this section we will outline some of the key methodologies that were designed by DOT and Coach Africa to ensure an impactful and inclusive virtual coaching experience for youth.

COACH CAPACITY BUILDING

All coaches participated in capacity building activities which included training and practice sessions. This proved to be a highly valuable experience for many DOT coaches who were themselves youth alumni of DOT programs, DOT staff, or social innovators with a wealth of expertise, but without specific coaching experience or coaching skills. Coach capacity building consisted of:

COACH INDUCTION AND TRAINING
Coaches participated in an introductory coach training to build coaching capacity. The training included:

1. Coaching approaches
2. Practicing active listening
3. Powerful questioning and giving constructive feedback

PRACTICE SESSIONS WITH A COACH MENTOR
Following the training sessions, coaches were paired with a professional coach mentor for four practice and feedback sessions. The mentors were introduced to support further capacity building and training while also ensuring that coaches had the tools and knowledge needed to efficiently support youth.

The coach mentor's role was to facilitate practice coaching sessions with coaches, and to provide ongoing feedback and mentorship to coaches throughout the pilot coaching program. The practice session format was dependent on the needs and the discretion of the coach and mentor.

THE COACHING PROCESS

The role of the coach is focused on supporting youth innovators through a visioning, goal-setting, and accountability process with the aim of creating clarity around business needs and developing SMART goals while also monitoring progress towards those goals.

The process we co-designed includes four phases of engagement between a young person and their coach:

1 GOAL SETTING

2 ACTION PLANNING

3 TAKING ACTION, ADDRESSING BARRIERS, BUILDING RESILIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

4 REFLECTION, DEVELOPING A SMART GOAL, AND CREATING ACTION PLAN TO PURSUE AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF COACHING SESSIONS.

Coaching activities were implemented in phases; each round consisted of the coach conducting sessions with their coachee(s) and a debrief on progress and challenges between the coaches, the coach mentor, and a coordinator.

OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH

COACHING OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH

#DOTYouth who participated in this coaching pilot initiative had transformative experiences; the results of the coaching initiative were overwhelmingly positive. Our data showed an overall increase in competency, confidence, and clarity. Here's what youth had to share:

ON DEFINING CLEAR GOALS AND ACTION PLANS

Before coaching my project was poorly managed. We couldn't identify weaknesses and strengths of the project, set priorities, work towards a goal, or measure impact. After coaching, our planning and feedback mechanisms are stronger, we have increased the daily input of volunteers and we have successfully registered as a Community Based Organization.
(Edited for length, Olivier, Uganda)

The impact that this experience had on my project was to remind me of the importance of setting goals – especially SMART goals – and keeping track of them. This experience gave me a boost in my focus. We were able to set goals that were indeed SMART and keep track of them.
(Emmanuel, Malawi)

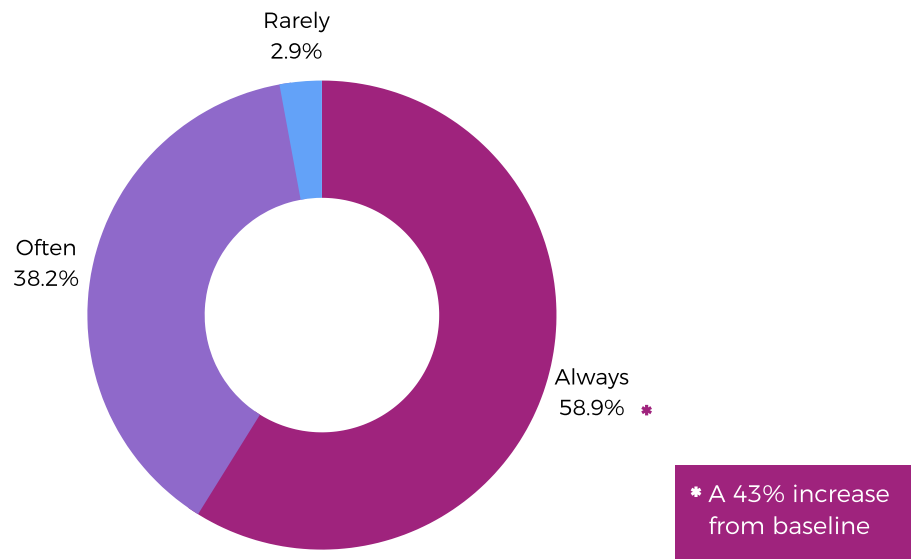Coaching really helped me to manage and invest in a pilot project in a measurable and time-bounded way.
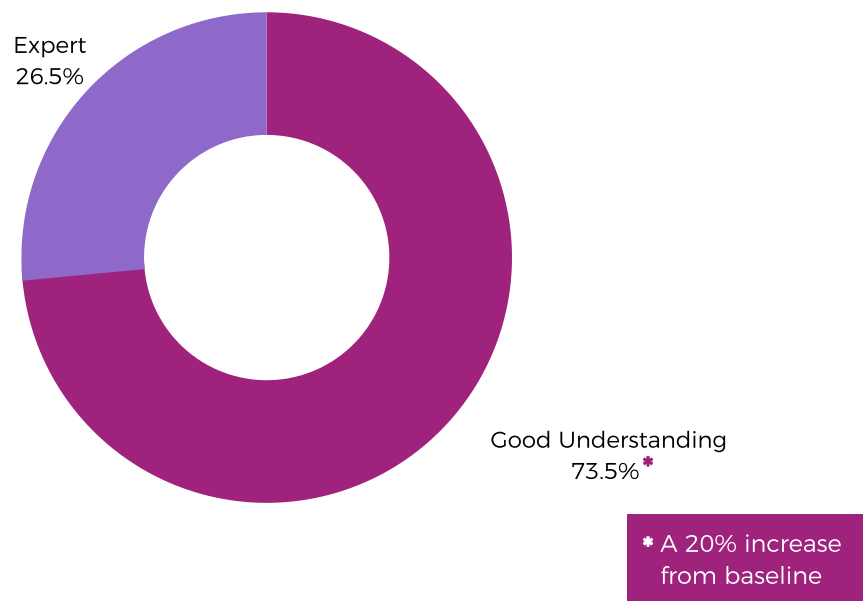*(Selam, Ethiopia)*

Our evaluation data showed an increased ability to define clear goals and plan actions, and an increased understanding of SMART goals. Out of 29 coachee responses, the endline survey results reported:

Do you see yourself defining clear goals and creating action plans for accomplishing them?

Rarely
2.9%

Often
38.2%

Always
58.9% *

* A 43% increase
from baseline

How well do you feel you understand goal setting strategies like SMART (Specific; Measureable; Attainable; Realistic; Time-bound) and the benefits of using them?

Expert
26.5%

Good Understanding
73.5% *

* A 20% increase
from baseline

ON CONFIDENCE TO CREATE SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES

Our endline results showed that youth had increased levels of confidence in creating solutions to challenges, with the majority shifting to 'Very Confident' (65%).

In between my first session a critical member of my initiative dropped out. I was very frustrated. It felt like taking ten steps back and one step forward. My coach helped by asking me to identify the gap [that existed due to the lost member]. I was then able to identify the gaps clearly and start solving.
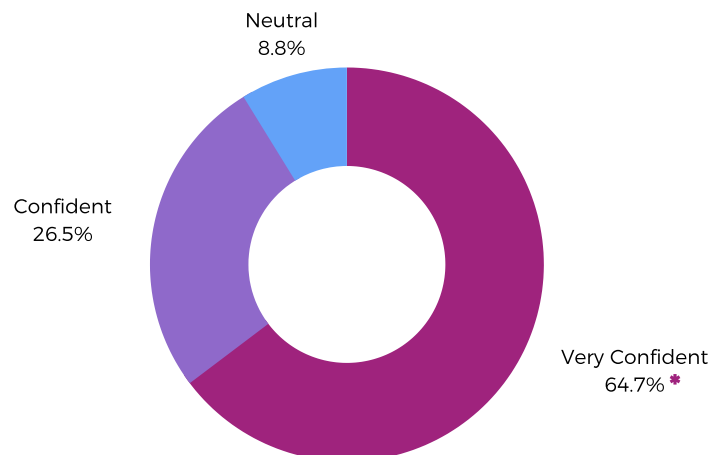
Anonymous

Instead of the coach talking the whole time, you are the one doing all the talking. You will surprise yourself. You've identified the problem, now what next? You thought you wouldn't be able to find the way forward - and here you are actually defining those steps. Coaching was helpful for personal direction and giving me a clear direction for both my project and personal life.

Shila, Kenya

If not for DOT coaching, I was ready to give up on my project and had already started working on plan b but now I'm so ready to continue implementing my project and I'm 90% confident that I'm going to support funding to support the activity implementation. I have already started discussions with the investor.

Anonymous

How confident are you in your ability to create solutions to the challenges you face?

Neutral
8.8%

Confident
26.5%

Very Confident
64.7% *

* A 20% increase from baseline

ON CLARITY OF FUTURE GOALS

Our data showed that the majority of #DOTYouth participants had an increase in clarity around future goals, with the majority shifting to 'Very Clear' (30% increase) by the end of the coaching initiative.

Coaching helped me focus on the growth of the organization that I am building. I have come to realize my purpose again. I have reached a point of deciding what I will be working on for most of my life [...] I have realised the value of having a team for growth and success of running Shetechtive Uganda. Having someone I am accountable to has helped in ensuring our set goals are reached.
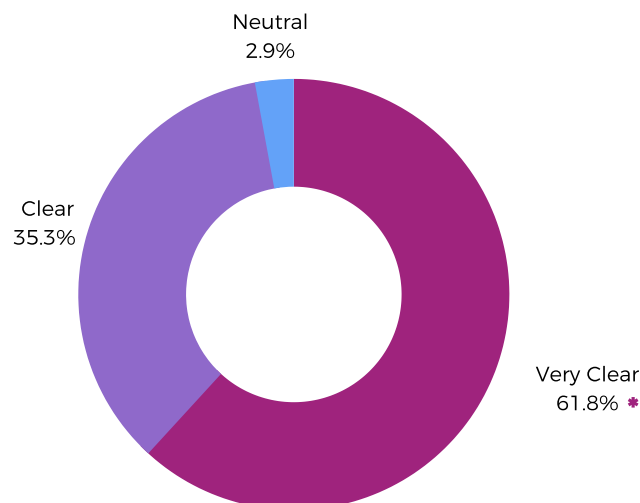*(Rebecca, Uganda)*

After attending the sessions - I realized there were things I was not doing right. I went back to the drawing board to restructure my goals, vision, mission and the objectives of my project and my personal development goals. My mission and vision are now very clear because of coaching.
(Caroline, Uganda)

How clear is your vision for your future goals?

Neutral
2.9%

Clear
35.3%

Very Clear
61.8% *

* A 30% increase from baseline

ON CONFIDENCE TO ACHIEVE FUTURE GOALS

#DOTYouth reported increased confidence in ability to achieve future goals, with 97% indicating they were either Very Confident (56%) or Confident (41%) by the end of the coaching engagement. Moreover, none reported to be feeling doubtful.

> Coaching sessions helped me to define a clear vision and set goals for my project. I am sure before the end of the year I will be able to launch great social enterprise.
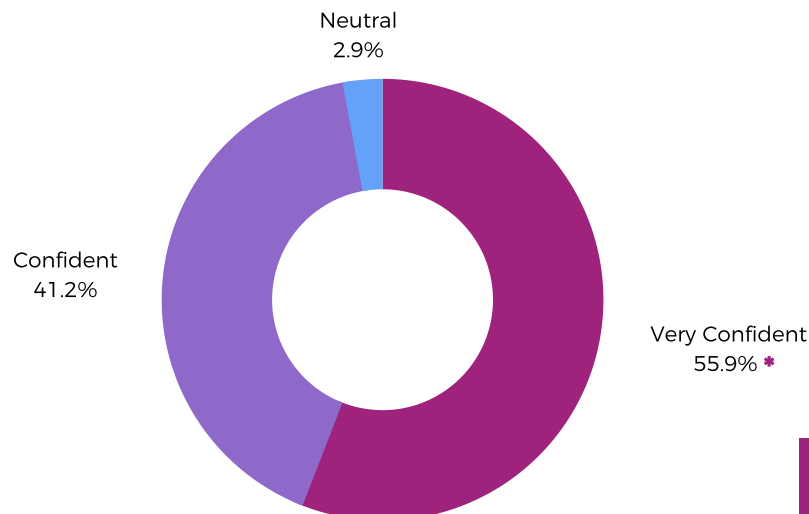> *(Jeremiah, Tanzania)*

> Personally, coaching helped me to change my attitude to become a better social entrepreneur that is useful to our global community. I didn't have that confidence before but coaching helped me gain it [which resulted in me] joining a Social Entrepreneurs Movement called Catalyst 2030.
> *(Edited for length, Olivier, Uganda)*

How confident are you in your ability to achieve future goals?

Neutral
2.9%

Confident
41.2%

Very Confident
55.9% ✳

✳ A 23% increase from baseline

ON CONFIDENCE IN THE BENEFITS OF COACHING

There were many stories of how participants benefited personally from the coaching experience beyond just making progress with their community initiatives. Key observations showed us that #DOTYouth furthered their self-leadership skills such as developing emotional intelligence, achieving balance and adaptability, and developing more confidence and autonomy.

At that time I was having a lot of problems trying to balance between work and life. I was overwhelmed, had a burnout, I couldn't balance. Things were too much for me and I needed to speak to someone.

Anonymous

I thought that my coach would come up with a list and give me things to do but to my surprise it turned out to be the other way around. I did most of the talking, and she did a lot of listening. What we were discussing each day was up to me.

Anonymous

By the end of it all I realized it was more effective than what I had expected. Helped me dig deep inside and look at my life from different dimensions, helped me look at my biz from different angles. This allowed me to get more help.

Betty, Kenya

Coaching is part of personal development, not just our projects. I am a young mother - during the COVID-19 pandemic I was single parenting and also running my community initiative. Having a coach helped me to achieve a balance and prioritize what I needed to do and how I was going to go about it.

Shila, Kenya

In every situation my first reaction was complaining but I became a problem-solver because of DOT coaching.

Anonymous

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this coaching pilot initiative for members of the #DOTYouth Street Team in partnership with Coach Africa, DOT has developed the following recommendations for coaching initiatives that are focused on virtually supporting youth.

The goal of these recommendations is to provide the ecosystem of youth-serving organizations in Africa and the Middle East with a set of good practices for coaching success, based on DOT's research, piloting, and co-design with youth.

There is a significant gap in the innovation ecosystem. Few organizations support youth social innovators beyond the ideation and MVP-stages of developing community initiatives. Our hope is that these recommendations will be adopted by ecosystem partners in order to better serve youth, and young women in particular, in order to achieve youth-led community transformation.

1 EVERY COACH NEEDS A COACH

This ensures continuous improvement through feedback. The coach mentoring process was invaluable for setting DOT coaches up for successful support and relationship-building with youth. It also helps to ensure positive outcomes for youth.

2 ENSURE THE COACHING PROCESS IS CLEAR, SIMPLE, AND CLEARLY COMMUNICATED

To avoid misalignment of expectations from coaches, coachees, and mentors, it is critical to ensure that the process and purpose of coaching is clearly and simply articulated, and that all parties have indicated that they understand the purpose of the engagement. This clarity builds an important level of trust that becomes the foundation of the coach-coachee relationship.

3 INVEST IN THE WELLBEING AND SAFETY OF YOUNG WOMEN

An important contribution to positive outcomes for young women is the creation of safe and inclusive spaces where they can build one-on-one relationships with their coaches.

Young women should be paired with female coaches, and/or provided with the option to choose the gender of their coach. Group sessions should be hosted in safe and controlled digital spaces (for example, Zoom versus Facebook Live). Coach training must include gender sensitivity and empathy-building, vocabulary and pronoun awareness, and a shared understanding of sociocultural norms and boundaries.

4 BUILD AN ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG SOCIAL INNOVATORS

Both coaches and youth consistently identify a need for resources in the areas of business and technical advice, financing, skills development, and mentorship.

A critical part of establishing a continuum of support for youth social innovators and supporting them to bridge the "valley of despair" is positioning them within an ecosystem of supportive organizations and resources. While coaches are well-placed to help youth identify their goals and objectives in navigating such an ecosystem, there is a tangible lack of services and support readily available to youth. A successful coaching program should be able to connect youth to critical business support through partnerships and community engagement.

CONCLUSION

DOT recognizes the need for on-going support in a young social innovator's entrepreneurial journey.

Coaching has proven itself to be a critical component in our work supporting youth through their entrepreneurial and innovation journeys.

Making coaching available to young social innovators helps to build resilience, supports the development of self-leadership skills, and allows young people to navigate "the valley of despair." As a result, youth are able to realize their visions for their initiatives and grow as individuals in the process.

DOT's research and programs have highlighted the transformative power of coaching - not only for youth-led business, but also for life. Effective coaching has proven to tangibly empower youth and position them as leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and changemakers in their communities.

DOT will continue to invest in coaching as a critical programmatic component and bridge to success which builds the capacity of youth to lead community change.

For more information about DOT programs and #DOTYouth, please visit http://dotrust.org.