



Photo: Rob Logan

ABDI AND DJIBRIL
 YEAR 3 & YEAR 4
 AGENTS
 UNIVERSAL
 LANGUAGE



Photo: Onix

Universal Language is a football and learning group for young people who have English as their second language. It was first developed by Agent Abdi in 2016 and joined by Djibril. Abdi came to the UK when he was ten from Somalia and Djibril arrived in the UK aged 17 from Ivory Coast.

Abdi wanted to play football when he arrived but was excluded from local projects as he was struggling with English. His desire for change came from feeling isolated as a young person learning English in a new environment and wanting other young kids to have a better experience than he had. The following year, Djibril had a similar idea, using football to connect young people, promote confidence in language and reduce isolation for migrants, refugees and newly-arrived young people, so Djibril joined Abdi so they could deliver the project together.

Since the project's start, the two have established links with South London Refugee Association, Football Beyond Borders, Katherine Lowe Settlement, and Amnesty International, and now have a partnership with Chelsea Football Club Foundation. As Djibril says: 'I never thought that would happen. The best thing is that it means we can help more people'.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Long-term partnership with Chelsea Football Club Foundation

Led on Battersea Arts Centre's refugee week in 2017

Took part in Football Welcomes weekend, travelling to Leicester to enter a tournament with other refugee teams

Developed an AQA accreditation for participants on the project

£14,472 raised in additional funding

When I got to London it was tough at first, but Football made me feel home again. It helped me to feel more at home, and I wanted to help others in a similar situation. It doesn't matter where you come from, or what language you speak, when people say 'come, play!' you feel like you belong. It only takes a few sessions before you can say 'pass the ball' and talk about your favourite players.

DJIBRIL

Through The Agency I've improved my communication skills, through talking to people older than me and gaining new skills from them, and also learning from them. I've learnt how to manage a project including recruiting participants, working with teachers to create fun sessions, supporting young people in sessions and managing the budget. It is great to see young people (at Universal Language) being more encouraged and determined on a Saturday morning, taking part in something they are passionate about and making new friends.

ABDI