

Meet ... Ivan Kayima

founder of Spiela

“Growing up I always wanted a role model... now I help young people be their own heroes”

IVAN KAYIMA vividly remembers the point his life came crashing down around him. The death of his father and brother in quick succession turned him from a happy eight-year-old child to an intensely angry one. The bereavements left him without a male role model and marked the start of a downward spiral Ivan felt he couldn't stop.

“I was in self-destruction mode and stopped caring about school, my family, myself,” says Ivan, who grew up on a South London estate where crime was prevalent. “My mum worked tirelessly to raise us on her own but I was missing a male influence in my life so when the older guys from my estate started showing me respect I quickly got mixed up with people who weren't good for me. My story isn't unique though, which is what makes me all the more determined to help young people choose a different path.”

That different path inspired Ivan to launch Spiela.co.uk, a social enterprise which offers young people an online platform where they can seek support and expand their horizons. A programme of learning workshops and motivational talks are already planned for this year and the network is hoping to connect with up to 10,000 users by 2017.

Ivan's transition from troubled teen to inspired entrepreneur has not been an easy one but by surrounding himself with those who believed in him – including our founder Anita – his life has changed immeasurably. “Having that person in your corner, telling you that you can turn things round is so powerful,” said Ivan. “From our first conversation Anita saw my potential and implored me to recognise my strengths and act on them.”

As a young boy Ivan had showed great promise at school but after losing his father and brother his focus waned and he began mixing with an older crowd who were intent on causing trouble. Things came to a head on his 16th birthday when he was arrested for robbery despite only being a by-stander. “It was two so-called friends who actually robbed these young guys. I was just there watching but the victims identified me and nobody came to my defence so I was charged with a crime I didn't commit.”

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Current role?

CEO of a social enterprise called Spiela

Previous role?

Customer analyst at Shopitize, a cashback app company

Biggest challenge to date?

Overcoming my rough teen years, being arrested and changing my mentality for the better.

Best advice you've received?

You're only as good as your last hustle

Why try SWDYD?

It inspires and exposes the talent of people and gives them belief that their contribution matters

Anita in three words?

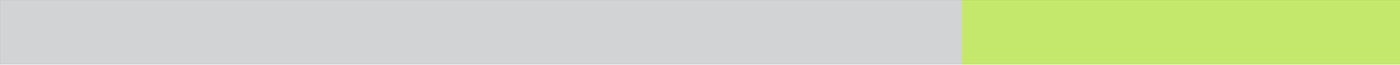
Truly a blessing

Hidden talent?

I am a lot more confident than I originally thought. Anita showed me that it's all a state of mind

And finally...

Anita's fiancée is a very lucky man!



The event was a rude awakening for Ivan who recalls the pain of seeing his mother cry for the first time. He appeared in court but was found not guilty, yet the repercussion meant he became the talk of his school and neighbourhood. Despite the unwanted attention Ivan was determined to right his wrongs and make his mother – the woman he now describes as his hero – proud again.

Refocused he applied for college and emerged two years later with results good enough to take him to university in Portsmouth to study Digital Media. He excelled during his time there and three years later graduated with honours – and a goal to help others avoid making the mistakes he had. “I looked at my friends who I grew up with; some of them were dead, some in jail, some on drugs and it broke my heart,” he said. “I knew if I could help just one young person avoid that path I had to, I just didn’t think somebody like me could make that difference.”

His lack of confidence did not detract from his obvious talent and he was quickly accepted onto the New Entrepreneurs Foundation, a 12-month development programme for young people. It was there his path would first cross with Anita’s, who was providing coaching and mentoring to the budding entrepreneurs on the scheme. “Meeting Anita was like a light bulb going off in my head. I had all these ideas but didn’t think people would listen because of my background,” said Ivan. “She was so quick to tell me to be proud of who I am and to take it in my stride.”

It was the confidence boost he needed and from there the ideas started flowing. Quickly the blueprint for Spiela was born and its founder prepared for the hard work to really begin. A determined Ivan juggled several part-time jobs to fund his ambitious plans, yet throughout it all one constant remained: Anita.

“From that first meeting something clicked and now barely two weeks go by without us talking,” he said. “She’s become both a mentor and friend. She’s this brilliant blend of straight-talking and nurturing, which is why she’s so gifted at what she does.”

As for Ivan, the sky is the limit for the ambitious 24-year-old. Plans are well underway to establish apprenticeships and training opportunities for those in his local area and beyond. His boundless enthusiasm has also attracted the attention of other professionals who have championed his methods and want to join him in giving back. The Spiela sphere is rapidly growing much to the delight of its mastermind. “It’s a very exciting time but this isn’t about profits and power, it’s something much more significant than that,” he said. “I genuinely believe the purpose of life is to share your gift. Helping somebody recognise what they have to offer is all the job satisfaction I need.”

