

## **Speech: Ben Slade, CEO SkillForce**

*1 March 2017, Llanfoist, Abergavenny*

Bore da! Good morning Your Royal Highness, Lord Lieutenant, ladies and gentlemen, and a special good morning to the terrific young people here in front of me here at Llanfoist Fawr Primary School in Monmouthshire. I'm Ben Slade, Chief Executive of the education charity SkillForce. As a proud Welshman it is an incredible honour to be here today – especially on St David's Day (Dydd Gŵyl Dewi) – to support the launch of this brand new award programme. Thank you Jon and everyone here for such a warm Welsh welcome! Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi gyd

First and foremost I want to thank our Royal Patron, ~~—~~ The Duke of Cambridge for his incredible support of SkillForce and for announcing the launch of the UK's first character and resilience award programme for 6-14 year olds in his own name here today. It is absolutely fantastic news for young people and their families. Also, as we develop and grow over the coming years, we will be able to employ more ex-Service veterans as instructors.

The Prince William Award programme is a national first. Delivered by SkillForce's predominantly ex-Service personnel instructors, we believe it can and will help to transform the lives of thousands of children and young people across the UK. The programme aims to help children "dare to be their best selves", to develop an inner strength that will carry them through life and give them the confidence to be genuinely "comfortable in their own skin".

One of the keys the SkillForce PWA's success is genuine partnership working with schools. As a former Headteacher, I know how important it is for us to

support the valuable work that teachers do so that children thrive, make the most of their talents, and grow into well-rounded, confident and resilient people. They need to be able to navigate an exciting but challenging, constantly changing and sometimes turbulent world; to make the right decisions and be equipped with the personal skills that will help them succeed in education, employment and life beyond. Sadly, far too many bright and talented children lack these character attributes and we believe this is, quite literally, a "social disadvantage". Every teacher and Headteacher in the land will be able to identify a group of children and young people in their schools who lack these vital skills and they will know how much it affects their chances of success in their academic studies, future work prospects and lives in general. It is such a needless waste of potential and SkillForce wants to help make a difference!

Currently, SkillForce works with over 200 schools in Wales, England and Scotland each year. To date SkillForce has helped more than 60,000 children and young people to succeed. Make no mistake, this is a great achievement. However, we want to do so much more! SkillForce's mission and aspiration is to put many more "heroes" into many more schools to transform thousands more lives". We empower children and young people to make positive choices. Although we are only a medium sized charity, we have a *huge* vision and *high* aspirations.

As the 'home of the Prince William Award programme' SkillForce seeks to promote the vital importance of character and resilience as a fundamental part of the curriculum and essential to children's future success. We want the Prince William Award to become a significant part of the curriculum in UK primary and secondary schools.

So what on earth is character education? It is – as defined by Professor James Arthur at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (and here with us today) - the development of good sense or practical wisdom and the capacity to choose intelligently between alternatives. This involves knowing how to choose the right course of action in difficult situations. It grows gradually from the experience of making choices and the growth of ethical insight. The Prince William Award programme will help children and young people to explore all of this and it will also afford them valuable time to develop their confidence and self-esteem in a safe environment.

We are experts in this field. SkillForce has delivered educational programmes that develop character, self-confidence, resilience, teamwork and problem solving skills since the charity was founded by Peter Cross in 2000. These programmes typically combine classroom and outdoor activities for two or more hours a week over an extended period of time. Our work has a tremendous impact on children and young people, families and schools, including engaging some of the harder to reach. During the last academic year, SkillForce supported 5,174 children in 218 schools on 400 different programmes. Of those, 31% were in receipt of free school meals and 25% had additional educational needs. The charity's work resulted in a significant 45% decrease in the number of fixed term school exclusion days and a 46% drop in internal school exclusion days.

Our brilliant instructors are alternative role models in schools complementing the life experience of our teaching colleagues. They are not teachers. They are not trying to be teachers. Instead, they bring their military ethos, expertise, team building and problem solving skills into schools and inspire pupils and students to succeed. SkillForce therefore has a dual mission which also includes supporting veterans' transition into civilian life.

To date SkillForce has trained more than 600 ex-Services personnel, giving them the opportunity to develop new skills such as coaching and mentoring.

The Prince William Award scheme, which starts in schools this September, is the pinnacle of our work and builds on everything we have achieved to date.

The programme includes much younger children than we've worked with before, and reaches out to children as young as 6. This is based on academic research that has demonstrated a need for a national character and resilience award programme that reflects the importance of developing those vital 'soft' interpersonal skills to complement their academic studies.

The programme has been developed with education experts who include specialist writers, Jon Lloyd and Janet Morrison, our academic partners, Professor James Arthur Dr Tom Harrison and colleagues from The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, Headteachers including Susan Gwyer-Roberts, Anne Palmer and Jack Simpson our three regional PWASG Chairs and Ashley Best-White, the fabulous group of SkillForce instructors here with us today, Lucinda Foulkes-Arnold, Marie Pritchett our project manager, Ros Vahey and Liz Manning, my senior colleagues at SkillForce and all of the schools involved in the pilot programme. Thank you to all of you from the bottom of my heart for your support of SkillForce

We have been generously supported in our endeavours by investment company Standard Life. Without Sir Gerry Grimstone, their Chairman and all of the staff at Standard Life and without the support we also received from LIBOR there would have been no Award Programme to pilot and no pilot

phase. I cannot thank Standard Life and Rex Cox and his team at HMT enough for their support.

The Prince William Award will be offered at three levels to reflect the different age groups – *Pioneer* (minimum age 6), *Explorer* (minimum age 8), and *Trailblazer* (minimum age 12) and will cover five themes. They are personal development, relationships, working, community and environment. Children will complete each level of the programme for one morning or afternoon a week for the whole of the academic year.

SkillForce is currently piloting the scheme this academic year at 37 primary and secondary schools involving more than 1,000 pupils in Wales, England and Scotland. All evaluations of the programme to date are extremely encouraging and the feedback from all involved has been incredibly positive. They note that the targeting of younger primary school pupils is a unique feature of the programme and is very popular with schools. Even at this early stage, there is evidence of improvements in children and young people's confidence, communication, and ability to work with others. Participating schools have praised the instructors and their positive relationships with children.

As with any charity, we always need your support. We want to double in size over the next 3 years and we want to reach far more children and young people and ex-Service veterans. So if you are an individual and interested in finding out how you or your company can support SkillForce and contribute to our exciting plans for the future, then please get in touch. We also want primary and secondary schools regardless of location and status to engage with us and with the new PWA programmes so we can work together in partnership to develop young people's confidence, resilience, and

good character so that they all experience a measure of success in their lives.

It just remains for me to thank Jon Murphy and all the staff and children at Llanfoist Fawr Primary School, all the children and young people who have completed our programmes, the schools who have supported us, our financial supporters and of course HRH The Duke of Cambridge and his fantastic team led by Miguel Head. Your support and belief means more than we can express in words. Diolch yn fawr iawn pawb! Thank you all so much!

**Ben Slade**

**Chief Executive**

**SkillForce**

*Wales, 01 03 2017*