

# 'A gift beyond gifts': Prince and Princess of Wales spotlight grassroots community outreach at visit to Roca

By **Ivy Scott** Globe Staff, Updated December 1, 2022, 4:22 p.m.



Sofia, 16-month-old, took center stage during the visit of Britain's Prince William and Princess Catherine at Roca on Thursday in Chelsea. NANCY LANE/POOL

CHELSEA — Halfway through their three-day visit to Boston, the Prince and Princess of Wales had greeted the mayor, the governor and governor-elect, and cozied up courtside at a Celtics game. Then on Thursday, the British royals met Matthew Quinton, a young man who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and has worked for months to overcome trauma and challenges with anger.

“It was awesome, they’re people just like us but so sweet and respectful,” Quinton said of his meeting with William and Kate at Roca, a community organization founded in 1988 to interrupt generational cycles of incarceration and poverty through intensive mentorship of at-risk young adults.

“I told them about how I started producing music and [William] asked me if I was thinking about becoming the next Eminem,” Quinton, 24, added with a laugh. “I told him I don’t know if I’d go that far.”



Britain's Prince William greeted people after a visit to Roca in Chelsea. NANCY LANE/POOL

Amid the buzz and bustle of a whirlwind visit to greater Boston centered on the question of how the world can address climate change, William and Kate’s low-profile, hour-long

tour of Roca was an effort to spotlight the organization's innovative approach to rehabilitation and combatting urban gun violence, grounded in the brain science behind trauma and its impact on the developing mind. To help young people heal from trauma, the organization practices cognitive behavioral therapy, allowing participants to become more attuned to how their emotions influence their thoughts, which in turn fuel their actions.

As they entered the building, William and Kate were greeted by a splash of Roca's signature green accenting the walls and ceiling, as Roca founder Molly Baldwin welcomed the prince and princess to the center. The royals did not make a public statement upon their arrival, but William thanked the staff and participants gathered in the building's entrance hall.

"Thank you everybody for having us here," he said. William called Roca's work "incredible," with special praise for the "inspirational team you've got around you."

Most days, the young men and women spend their time at Roca as part of the organization's transitional employment program, which trains participants to get and keep a steady job. Thursday, however, was development day, and the building was full of young adults in classes ranging from cooking to cognitive behavioral theory young adults in classes ranging from cooking to cognitive behavioral theory.

Baldwin and Chelsea Police Captain Dave Batchelor gave the royals a brief history of the organization, including an evolving relationship with law enforcement that shifted from police perceiving Roca as a "gang house" for young people with criminal records, to collaborating directly with outreach workers to connect those in need to social services.





Britain's Prince William played with children during a visit to Roca, an organization working to reduce urban violence through community engagement efforts. NANCY LANE/POOL

William and Kate then met with Quinton and his mentor, Robert Foxworth, who joined Roca as a youth worker following [his release from prison in 2020](#) after being [wrongfully convicted of murder and incarcerated for nearly 30 years](#). Quinton and Foxworth shared the story of Quinton's transformation since he joined the program close to a year ago, and how cognitive behavioral therapy has helped him mature and make better choices in his life.

"Man it's been a journey," Quinton told the Globe in an interview. "I went from avoiding my problems and drifting off to facing them all at once... and everyone here will go out of their way to help you as long as you show you're willing to put in the work."

Foxworth began mentoring Quinton roughly eight months ago and said the young man is “like a son” to him.



Britain's Prince William listened to Jonathan Williams, a participant of Roca's Young Men's Program. REBA SALDANHA/POOL

“He knows he can call me anytime, ask for my help at any time, and thus far, I don’t think I’ve failed him once,” said Foxworth, 55, who lost his own son while wrongfully imprisoned. “I just want to be that spare tire, so when he falls flat, I can get him back on the road.”

Foxworth described the turning point Quinton faced at the end of the summer, when he was able to apply cognitive behavioral therapy to overcome his anger and communicate calmly with an ex-girlfriend, and celebrated Quinton’s most recent milestone of getting a job at Amazon last month.

“He called me that day, asking if I could help him look for a job, and later that night before I could even open my computer to start looking, he called me back and said he got one,” Foxworth said. “Steps he was asking for help in before, he’s now doing all on his own.”

Toward the end of their visit, the royals made their way to the young mothers’ program on the other side of the building, marked by a telltale pink stripe running along the walls of the classrooms, offices, and nursery. William and Kate stopped briefly to play with the children before meeting with two young mothers and program director Sunindiya Bhalla.

“So much of what we work on aligns with what [William and Kate] care about, so it’s an incredible honor, especially for our young people who get to meet them,” Bhalla told the Globe. “They don’t get seen very often, so to be seen by someone so important is exciting.”

The royal visit closed with many “thank you’s” and a warm goodbye, young mothers lining up with babies on their hips to wave at William and Kate, who stopped to tousle the hair of a few giggling boys and shake the hand of every parent and child they saw.

“We’ve really enjoyed making this connection,” William said. “Hoping it all goes well for the future.”

The royals exited the center to still more fanfare from the adoring crowd, who waved flags, phones, and posters reading, “Welcome to Chelsea the Future King and Queen of England,” and “Welcome to Boston Your Highnesses!” But nowhere was admiration stronger than inside Roca’s bright green walls.

“Everyone on our staff has made it their goal to find these young people, hold onto them, and love them, and that is an extraordinary privilege and responsibility,” Baldwin said. “So to have that work recognized by two of the most famous people on the planet, and to have this kind of attention drawn to it, is a gift beyond gifts.”