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CityStartupLabs

Creating a *New Class* of Entrepreneurs

Why I Love This Work...

Taking on the task of starting a non-profit with a focus on developing entrepreneurial talent among African American millennials has been no small feat. “It’s noble and all, but why would you want to do that?” was a refrain from friends and family — both expressed and implied. “You’ll be working with millennials for crying out loud. “And who really gives a hoot about black entrepreneurs anyway — as a matter of fact, what is a black entrepreneur? Are there any?”

Needless to say, this mission has required healthy doses of both labor and love. But this year has demonstrated to me why the work of City Startup Labs (CSL) is so rewarding.



First of all, back in March we graduated our first co-ed class, which

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because women raise the bar, and there is something to be said for that). That Class of 2017 included one of the few Charlotte NC Idea winners – Calvin Williams ([Freeman Capital](#)); a 2018 TED Fellow – DeAndrea Newman Salvador ([RETI -Renewable Energy Transition Initiative](#)); a 2017 US-China Entrepreneurship & Innovation Exchange fellow – Vanessa Vaughn ([Asfalis Consulting](#)) and the 2018 [Charlotte Veteran Showcase](#) pitch winner – John Alexander ([xChangePost](#)). We also saw our Best in Class winners, Brandi Fox ([Pamper Us Mobile Massage](#)) and Ashley Jackson ([Gift Box Shop](#)), as well as tech innovator Adrian Marable ([GroopWork](#)) shine with their ventures during the year.

With the help of an [Open Inclusion Grant](#) from the Kauffman Foundation and our collaborative partner [Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont](#), 2018 also included the launch of a new initiative in June through CSL's Center of Excellence – the ReEntry Entrepreneurship Program ([REEP](#)). With the assistance of social justice visionary, Patrice Funderburg ([Educate to Engage](#)), we were able to craft a program targeting returning citizens (formerly incarcerated), where we imagined entrepreneurship as a tool for restorative justice. The final project/enterprise will be presented during Demo Day on January 31st (**save the date** - more to come after the New Year).

REEP



ReEntry Entrepreneurship Program™

by [CityStartupLabs](#)

In September, we had a Kick-off for [newest class](#) (again co-ed), which included a reunion with prior CSL participants and a celebration of our 5th Anniversary (*see event video below*).

Working with millennials has been especially gratifying for someone in the “[encore](#)” of his life. I encourage those of you are too at that stage in your life, to consider working with young folks – they could use your insights and any wisdom you have to offer, and you will receive untold blessings in return.

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make a concerted effort to productively reabsorb our returning citizens. They have so much to offer and have demonstrated to those of us who have worked with them, an amazing level of true grit, determination, drive and willingness to go above and beyond. And we should be encouraging all employers to [Ban the Box!](#)

Lastly, I want to convey just how much I appreciate those who have volunteered with us either again or for the first time this year as mentors or coaches, and that includes our longtime partner, [Charlotte SCORE](#).

Because of this and so much more that I haven't mentioned — I absolutely love this work! And, yes there are black entrepreneurs, go to our website and check some out.

Have a *Wonder-filled* Holiday Season! ~ Henry Rock



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