Our Mission

DEVELOPING RESOURCES TO EMPOWER ALL MINDS

The Our D.R.E.A.M. Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which creates and supports entrepreneurship opportunities for youth in underserved communities. Through our programming, we provide youth with educational instruction, mentorship, and startup funding that develops their business acumen, and fuels their entrepreneurial ideas. We strive to combat the complex challenges and barriers that confront our communities’ access to equitable entrepreneurial resources. We believe that our communities are full of youth with the ingenuity, creativity, and determination to build impactful and innovative ventures but oftentimes are not granted the access or agency to expand their vision into scalable enterprises. We exist to shift that narrative. It is OUR DREAM to be a launchpad for a developing pipeline of Black and Brown entrepreneurs in Baltimore and beyond.
Welcome from the Chairman

Greetings,

On behalf of the Our Dream Foundation board, I am proud to present our special five year impact report. We started this organization in 2015 to provide Baltimore youth with greater access to entrepreneurship pathways. We believe that the youth in our community possess an intrinsic CREATIVITY, COURAGE, and INGENUITY which can foster innovative business thinking and ideas. But too often there are barriers which make this path of business ownership and success more difficult to obtain. So we created programming for youth to propel their GENIUS, with an intentional focus on business education and skill development, representative mentorship, and startup funding opportunities.

What started as a one week business idea incubator for high school students- our cornerstone Youth Entrepreneurship Startup (YES) Program- has developed into a multi-initiative, year-round entrepreneurship ecosystem. What started as a vision of opportunity creation has turned into a pipeline of innovators and changemakers. Through our various programs, students have developed a variety of businesses including an oral health company, a video-streaming service, a smoothie business, a landscaping business, a fashion line, a hygiene-based subscription service, and much more. Some have entered major accelerator programs across the country. Some have even gotten major investments, whether from local institutions or venture capital firms. The following report will give a further glimpse to the story of our progress, and perhaps even more exciting, express intention on how we will continue to grow.

Personally, building this organization has been one of the most enriching experiences of my life. From teaching business fundamentals during our various programs, seeing our students’ reaction when they meet the person who owns their favorite local business, witnessing program alumni give back and mentor new students, the fun-spirited competitiveness of our pitch competitions, there have been so many memories, all of them, inspiring and fulfilling to say the least.

And this journey would certainly not be possible without our many stakeholders. We would be nothing without the support, dedication, and energy of our students and their families. Our village of entrepreneurs and community leaders who have volunteered their time to speak on their expertise and experience. Our community and organizational partners who have donated funding, space, and resources to help keep our programming going. And all of the many amazing people who have been instrumental in our development. THANK YOU.

As we move forward we remain committed to our mission of being an early launchpad from Black and Brown entrepreneurs. We will continue to INSPIRE youth to believe that running a business is a tangible life outcome. We are DEDICATED to youth seeing the existence of entrepreneurs that look like them, that come from the communities they live in. We are DETERMINED to provide youth with skills and experience that not only encourage entrepreneurship, but also prepare them personally and professionally for the digital economy. We are ENTHUSIASTIC to actualize OUR DREAM to build greater entrepreneurship opportunity for young innovators.

Johnny Graham, Ph.D.
Our D.R.E.A.M. Foundation
Chairman, Co-Founder
Our DREAM Foundation Milestones

**JULY 2015**
The inaugural YES Program for Baltimore high school students is hosted with a one-week format.

**JUNE 2016**
The first one-day Youth Business Summit is hosted.

**MAY 2018**
The foundation receives its biggest corporate donation from Whirlwind Technologies, a black-owned IT firm based in Maryland.

**SEPTEMBER 2018**
Eleven (11) YES Program participants pitch their business ideas in the Baltimore Teen Biz Challenge, and collectively receive over $28,000 to fund their business ideas.

**JUNE 2019**
YES Program enters its first curriculum licensing partnership with DENT Education in Baltimore.

**OCTOBER 2020**
The foundation enters its first DREAM LAB partnership with Green Street Academy in Baltimore, to build a full-service entrepreneurship program including curriculum implementation, certification training, and the creation of a student-run enterprise.

**OCTOBER 2015**
The YES program receives its largest grant donation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

**JULY 2016**
The second cohort of the YES Program is hosted in Baltimore.

**JUNE 2018**
The YES Program expands to a five-week format with students paid for their participation.

**MAY 2019**
The first DREAM Scholarship is awarded to Bowie State student, and YES Program Alum, Chanice Dominique.

**JULY 2020**
The inaugural EMPOWER Accelerator Program for Black college students is hosted in a virtual format.

**SEPTEMBER 2018**
Eleven (11) YES Program participants pitch their business ideas in the Baltimore Teen Biz Challenge, and collectively receive over $28,000 to fund their business ideas.
The YES Program

The Y.E.S. (Youth Entrepreneurship Startup) Program is a free summer entrepreneurship program for Baltimore high school students. Throughout the program, students receive instruction in fundamental business concepts such as target market research, minimum viable product (MVP) testing, marketing campaign development, accounting, brand design, and more in a fun, engaging learning environment. Students participate in a variety of interactive activities, workshops, and panel discussions led by local entrepreneurs, business leaders, and college professors, while developing their own business ideas into full-fledged enterprises. At the conclusion of the program, students apply the information they learn, and participate in our business pitch competition for startup funding.

Since our first cohort in 2015, YES students have started a variety of different businesses including: an oral health company, a smoothie business, a landscaping business, a fashion line, a hygiene-based subscription service and much more. In 2018, the YES Program partnered with the City of Baltimore for the Teen Biz Challenge which allowed 11 YES Program students to receive over $28,000 in business startup funding. And since 2019, the YES Program has entered partnerships with several other Baltimore-based nonprofits to expand their curriculum in entrepreneurship education.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

MAHMOUD SHALBY is a current junior at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and the founder of OmegaBrush, an innovative tooth cleaning solution. He came to us with his initial product idea as a high school junior during our 2017 YES Program. He placed second in that year’s pitch competition. He came back to participate in the 2018 Program, where he was named one of the finalists in the Baltimore City Teen Biz Challenge, and received over $5,000 in startup funding. He also was a member of our inaugural EMPOWER cohort. Since the business’ inception Mahmoud has received numerous customers and even filed for a provisional patent. In 2020, he became a part of the i-corps Program at John Hopkins University which prepares scientists and engineers to drive research projects toward commercialization. Mahmoud was such an outstanding fit for this program, that he was the only undergraduate student accepted into the cohort.
Being a part of this organization is a reflection of my belief that underrepresented communities include some of the most creative and resourceful individuals in this country and given the knowledge and opportunity the possibilities are endless and no goal is unachievable. Most importantly this organization connects the youth in our community with current business leaders that were once in their position and fully understand the unique and complex challenges and barriers that cause hesitation in our community when it comes to business development.

I believe the OUR DREAM Foundation will be one of the key drivers in the development of black wealth. Every day companies are bought and sold for billions of dollars and very few times is our community reflected in the leadership and ownership of these companies. This must change. This will change. I believe our foundation will help establish the tools and resources to give more members of our community, not just a seat at the table, but their names on the building.

JUSTIN PETERS, ESQ., VICE CHAIRMAN

WHAT STUDENTS SAY ...

The YES Program has increased my confidence in my idea immensely and they have helped me follow through with my dream of being an entrepreneur.

My experience with the Y.E.S. Program was wonderful, I absolutely loved the program. I strongly believe that this [program] is essential to all young entrepreneurs. It made me into a more confident and mature individual and that’s the most important [takeaway] of all.

The program has opened my eyes to the way I should think about money, as well as the criteria to study when marketing to an audience. The program also helped me in my journey in becoming a leader, as I found my place (role) in my group during the project. I learned that I am great at keeping people together, and working towards a task.

While in the program, I learned more about business than school could ever teach me, all while meeting new people and building connections with business leaders and future leaders (students) in a relaxed environment.
The YES Program By the Numbers

100+ Students Served*

30+ High Schools Represented

95% Are Students of Color

26 Students in Largest Cohort**

* Since 2015

** 2018 Cohort

80% Of our students live in communities with an average household income below the city & state average

Across all years, the YES Program has received a median rating from student participants of 5 (out of 5), on the following measures:

“This program increased my overall confidence.”

“This program increased my overall knowledge of various business concepts.”

“This program made me more interested in becoming an entrepreneur.”

“This program enhanced my critical thinking skills.”

“This program was fun.”

“I wish this program was a part of my school’s curriculum.”

“This program enhanced my communication skills.”

“I would recommend this program to a friend.”

Student Spotlight

Kamri Moses joined the 2018 cohort of the YES Program as a sophomore student from Western High school. She owns KRSmoothies, a fresh fruit smoothie delivery service and since the program started her business has skyrocketed. Whether she’s delivering smoothies across the city or vending at local events such as AFRAM, Kamri is always shining as a determined entrepreneur. Her ultimate dream goal for her business is to have many stores over the United States.

The YES program helped me to grow my business by first allowing me to think about the idea of expansion. Before the program, I believed my business would be temporary but during/after the program, I learned KRSmoothies would be long term. The program has opened many doors for me via people I met along my journey in the program. It has allowed me to have more access to opportunities. I learned that Dedication is definitely key. Also, I learned that ONE event can affect your life in so many unexpected ways and for that I will always remember the YES Program for being the fuel to my fire. I was able to use funding from the YES Program to restock products, expand my menu, pay for vending fees and purchase new packaging (bottles), logo stickers and to have a promotional photo shoot.
The EMPOWER Accelerator

As our YES Program alumni continued to grow their businesses, they expressed the need for additional support on their entrepreneurship journey. In response, we expanded our programming impact to the college level, with the start of the EMPOWER Accelerator in the summer of 2020. This five-week program, conducted virtually, empowered Black college student entrepreneurs with tools to grow their entrepreneurial ventures. The program included an self-paced online curriculum which placed emphasis on preparing and restructuring business models for the digital marketplace and tech-driven economy. Program progress was supported with two live “lectures” each week in topics such as e-commerce and digital marketing, along with “office hour” mentorship from black business leaders and entrepreneurs. Twenty students participated in this inaugural cohort from 16 different institutions, with half of the students from historically black colleges and universities.

At the conclusion of the program, students applied the information they learned, and participated in a business pitch competition for startup funding. The 2020 pitch competition winner was Alana Petifer, a freshman student at North Carolina Central University. And the runner-up was Mahmoud Shalby, junior student at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, a former YES Program participant. Our hope is to extend this program to an even more robust cohort experience in the future.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY ...

It was extremely beneficial to me not only for the knowledge but the networking as well. I enjoyed being able to candidly talk to our guests about their experiences.

My EMPOWER experience was very informative. After we learned about a topic we got to hear someone speak to their experience and knowledge of what was previously discussed. In a normal class there is almost no immediate application of knowledge like there was in this program.

My experience with the Empower program has been nothing short of amazing. This program gave me a clearer direction to the benefits of being an entrepreneur and the tools necessary to grow and scale my business.

My experience within the EMPOWER program was amazing. I felt like I got a lot out of it in just a short amount of time. Truly enjoyed being around a great group of peers, and it helped me to gain confidence in shooting for my dreams.

It has really lit a fire in me to follow through with my business idea and it has helped me gain my confidence.
Our DREAM Foundation

DREAM Scholars Program

The DREAM Scholarship was established in 2019 to help aspiring youth entrepreneurs pursue their ambitions in their college years. Higher education can provide many resources to support students in growing their business ideas. This can include classroom instruction, accelerator programs, technology access, mentorship opportunities, and numerous business development and pitch competitions. But while higher education can be very beneficial to an aspiring entrepreneur, gaining access to these resources can be a burden for some. This scholarship aims to alleviate some of that financial hardship. The Dream Scholarship provides a $1000 award to current high school seniors or college freshmen and sophomores from traditionally underrepresented communities who are attending or attended Baltimore City or County Public Schools.

2019 WINNER:
Chanice Dominique, Bowie State, (alum of Western Senior High School)

2020 WINNER:
Ciera Smith, McDaniel College, (alum of City Neighbors High School)

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

CIERA SMITH, a junior student at McDaniel college is the 2020 winner of our DREAM Scholarship. But her connection to our foundation started in 2018 as a participant in the YES Program. She also was a participant in our inaugural EMPOWER Program cohort. Her business, ItsNaturallyUs, provides a subscription based delivery of menstrual products.

Both the YES and EMPOWER programs were amazing experiences. Both programs pushed me to grow in my business and as a person. It was comforting to surround myself with other entrepreneurs who are working hard to be successful and understand how hard that can become The Yes Program helped with creating my ideas into a reality. Through lectures, competitions, and group work I was able to create the foundation for ItsNaturallyUs. The YES program was more than a summer program; it was a community of positive young people who wanted to be successful entrepreneurs. I created life long relationships with my peers and my mentors. One of my favorite YES Program memories was going to the African American museum in DC. I also really enjoyed hearing from the guest speakers and one of my favorite speakers was the owner of Mess In A Bottle. It was inspiring to see a black woman based in Baltimore accomplish so much. And the EMPOWER program helped further the growth of ItsNaturallyUs it expanded on the things that I learned in the YES Program.
Additional Programs

THE YOUTH BUSINESS SUMMIT
The Youth Business Summit is a one-day intensive of workshops, panels, and interactive activities focused on introducing high school students to the world of entrepreneurship. Students receive an overview of basic business concepts, while listening and learning from the journey of local entrepreneurs. This unique opportunity allows students to collaborate with like-minded entrepreneurial peers, learn from experienced business leaders, and kindle relationships necessary to build a network of various resources. In the past, this program has been hosted in both Baltimore City and Prince George's County, MD.

THE YOUTH BUSINESS MARKETPLACE
In November 2018, we hosted our inaugural Youth Business Marketplace on Small Business Saturday. This program is a place for the young creators, innovators, and business leaders of Baltimore to showcase and sell their original products, and a chance for the surrounding community to show support for their ambition and ingenuity.

“I initially became a part of Our DREAM Foundation as a business coach for the 2017 cohort, then as a program assistant then moved into a board member position in the year of 2019. Being a part of Our DREAM Foundation board and organization has given me great satisfaction that I am not only helping young entrepreneurs understand business but gain everyday life skills. I believe in Our DREAM Foundation because of our track record of being a driving force behind the creation of young entrepreneurs.”

MIKKYO MCDANIEL, BOARD MEMBER
A Community of Support

Key to the impact of our organization is the support and volunteerism of our local community. Whether entrepreneurs who share the stories of their journey with our students, companies and institutions that provide both financial and in-kind assistance, professionals who coach and mentor our students, investors who judge our pitch competitions, or parents who assist with handing out lunch, the growth of our programming is the product of a village.

A COMMUNITY OF ENTREPRENEURS:
OVER 80 BLACK ENTREPRENEURS HAVE VOLUNTEERED AT OUR PROGRAMMING

ENTREPRENEUR BREAKDOWN BY INDUSTRY

Also, keeping our engine moving has been the generous financial donations of many organizations, companies, and individuals, including those listed to below.

This program is truly dynamic and I am a huge fan. The CEO of one of our top performing companies came through the Y.E.S. program. This is a young black man from Baltimore who is now 20 years old and has raised over 3 million dollars and will probably raise 10M this year. For me, I am always ready to help and support... because I have seen how this program has been transformative for students. Not to mention how passionate and driven Dr. Graham is by the mission.

MCKEEVER CONWELL, FOUNDER, RAREBREED VENTURES
INTRODUCING DREAM LABS

In October 2020, we are extremely excited to be launching our first DREAM LAB. This initiative integrates our entrepreneurship programming with high school curriculum and career education pathways to create student run enterprises.

Our first DREAM LAB partnership is with Green Street Academy, a public charter school in Baltimore. As an extension of the school’s agricultural learning program, we will be helping students in the development of Green Street Academy (GSA) Farms, which will market and sell produce from the school’s greenhouse to the greater Baltimore community. As a part of this project-based learning, our organization will provide weekly instruction in essential business skills, such as marketing campaign development, accounting, pricing, and inventory management. Students will be paid a stipend for participation, while also being able to eventually share in profits from the business. It is our aim that this experience will enhance the overall entrepreneurial spirit of students, improve their data literacy and communication skills, enhance their professional and personal development, while complementing their experience in sustainability and food production.

“I am extremely excited to partner with Dr. Johnny Graham [and The Our DREAM Foundation] as we collaborate in building a new paradigm for high school entrepreneurship education, connecting practicing entrepreneurs with students from Green Street Academy. After twenty years of advocating for and building high school entrepreneurship education programs in Baltimore City, I am convinced that students need to learn the "perspiration" of business (accounting, finance, operations, marketing, HR, etc.), taught by Our Dream Foundation, in conjunction finding the "inspiration" of business, typically targeted in alternative programs. By helping our students start and operate GSA Farms, Our Dream Foundation will function uniquely as our "Entrepreneurs-in-Residence," teaching, guiding, and coaching our students in building the skills they'll need to take products from our new, on-campus 4,000SF hydroponic greenhouse, build a sustainable business, earn while they're learning, and ultimately prepare for their futures as entrepreneurs or colleagues in on-going businesses.”

LARRY-RIVITZ, CO-FOUNDER GREEN STREET ACADEMY
FUTURE OUTLOOK

Building An Ecosystem of Entrepreneurs

We are just getting started with OUR Dream. Since 2015, we’ve created a number of programs to increase access to entrepreneurship education, mentorship, and funding for youth in underserved communities. While our journey so far has been productive, we have plans to exponentially grow our impact moving forward. Over the next five years we aim to extend the reach of our current initiatives, while also promoting a few new programs to encourage youth entrepreneurship. Here’s just a glimpse for what’s in store:

• A more robust YEAR round support programming for high school entrepreneurs in Baltimore City, while also expanding our summer YES program to other communities throughout the country

• Targeted partnerships with local colleges and universities for our DREAM Scholars program to funnel our youth entrepreneurs to institutions that can even further support their entrepreneurial dreams

• The inception of DREAM Labs, a new initiative to transform career and technical education pathways into student-run businesses at the high school level.

• Additional curriculum implementation partnerships with high schools and youth-serving nonprofits in Baltimore and beyond

• Entrepreneurship exploration programming at the middle school level to introduce youth to entrepreneurs in their community

• Further development of the EMPOWER Program with more dedicated startup funding resources

Ultimately our goal by 2025 is to provide entrepreneurship-based education and opportunities to at least 5,000 Black and Brown youth. We are dedicated and entrenched in our mission to bridge the gap of opportunity and access in entrepreneurship.

“With an intentional focus on culturally competent content and rigorous expectations, we are working with the exceptional gifts present in young people and pushing them closer to their goals ... and I believe that this organization will be a key thought leader and sector change-agent by remaining grounded in community need and seeking to transform with the talent we know our communities possess.”

BRITTANY BRADY, Ed.M., BOARD MEMBER