Entrepreneurship: Catalyst for Successful Re-entry for Ex-Offenders and Success Pathway for At-Risk Youth

United States

Bobby Clark

Organization type: nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector
Budget: $50,000 - $100,000
Website: http://www.kystudentventures.org

- At risk youth
- Adult education
- Crime prevention
- Employment
- Green business
- Youth development
- Waste

Project Summary

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The Pew Center says "One in every 31 adults" (approx. 2.1 million) is under some form of correctional control and 50% or more will be rearrested within 3 yrs. Sustainable Business Ventures (SBV) will scale their Green Entrepreneur Program to serve difficult-to-employ individuals (including ex-offenders) through entrepreneurship with a triple bottom-line focus – people, planet, and profit. Entrepreneurship, a good choice for successful re-entry to the community with positive outcomes for individuals and families. Reducing recidivism and empowering ex-offenders to start their own businesses is a sustainable and productive strategy. Entrepreneurship creates jobs; small business ownership provides a living wage more than capable of supporting a family.

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

State corrections costs top $50 billion. The incarcerated population has reached 2.3 million: reports indicate one in 100 adults was in prison or jail. The number of people on probation or parole has skyrocketed to more than 5 million, up from 1.6 million just 25 years ago. This means that 1 in 45 adults in the United States is now under criminal justice supervision in the community, and that combined with those in prison and jail, a stunning 1 in every 31 adults, or 3.2 percent, is under some form of correctional control. Rates are drastically elevated for men (1 in 18) and blacks (1 in 11) and even higher in some high-crime inner-city neighborhoods. On any given day, there are an estimated 2 million children in America with at least one parent in prison or jail. One of SBV key partners has extensive experience serving ex-offenders that have many barriers and extensive felony records.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

This is a unique business model, which combines "green" entrepreneur & "green" job skills training, along with Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). Participants explore the concept of “triple bottom-line” and the economic, environmental and social impact of the business concept. When you have a criminal record, or have other barriers, it is difficult to find a job; it makes entrepreneurship and self-employment an effective new strategy. A 2007 report by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice concluded that the empowerment potential of self-employment reveals itself in a variety of ways, some of which do not necessarily lead to small business ownership. For example, since the concept of empowerment is inherent to entrepreneurial thinking, “exposure to entrepreneurial training will reshape their perspective on their role in society. These individuals may never become entrepreneurs themselves, but can use their entrepreneurship training to improve their performance as employees and to proactively engage with their families and communities.” According to a 2009 report by the Pew Charitable Trusts, jobs classified in the clean energy economy grew by slightly more than 9 percent between 1998 & 2007. The Urban Institute’s prediction for growth in green jobs ranges from 4.2 million by 2038 to 16.3 million by 2030. Green job skills training provides unique opportunities to ex-offenders. IDAs are Savings Programs for low-income individuals & families, which results in savings for education, deposit on a home, and starting a small business.
SBV’s core Green Entrepreneur Program is 10-days or 60 hours of training, which includes the definitions of an entrepreneur, exploration of common traits; stories of success and learning; discussions to dispel myths and common mistakes of what it takes to own and run a business. In order to be a successful entrepreneur most of our target group must learn basic life skills, personal and business finances, personal success strategies, time management, goal setting and networking. This program teaches basic environmental literacy and green practices, with an introduction to sustainable practices at home, work, and play -- incorporating organizational (and societal) success: economic, ecological and social (triple bottom-line). Participants will engage in the develop low cost/low risk ideas for “green or green focused” companies, preparing elevator pitches, and developing business plans, which incorporate elements with a ‘green’ focus. The team is lead by Booby Clark, President of SBV who has been an entrepreneur for over 25 years. Vicki Widerkehr is an entrepreneur, author and college instructor and key SBV trainer. The SBV team includes other experienced entrepreneurs, human resource professionals, attorneys, accountants, and speakers from other relevant disciplines. There are more than 650 Workforce Investment Boards in the U.S. that provide training and support services for the unemployed and ex-offenders. Community-based organizations and other local and regional strategic partners will scale and replicate this program. Based upon prior successful projects in Kentucky, SBV has the experience to help local partners launch the program, train-the-trainers, and provide support and consulting services as needed. The Green Entrepreneur Program has been successfully piloted with low-income youth and is being adapted for difficult-to-employ individuals including inmates and ex-offenders.

About You

Organization:
Sustainable Business Ventures

About You
First Name
Bobby

Last Name
Clark

Twitter
bobbyclarklex

Facebook Profile

About Your Organization

Organization Name
Sustainable Business Ventures

Organization Country
, KY, Fayette County

Country where this project is creating social impact
, KY

How long has your organization been operating?
1-5 years

Is the project that you are entering related to this organization?
Yes

The information you provide here will be used to fill in any parts of your profile that have been left blank, such as interests, organization information, and website. No contact information will be made public. Please uncheck here if you do not want this to happen.

Innovation

What stage is your project in?
Operating for 1-5 years

Share the story of the founder and what inspired the founder to start this project

The founder is Bobby Clark, an entrepreneur & publisher for 25 years. He is president of Sustainable Business Ventures (SBV), a 501 (c)(3) non-profit, who has developed and implemented one-of-a-kind Green Entrepreneur Programs. Summer Youth funding opportunities in 2009 led Bobby to design and implement programs to assist low-income 16 to 24 year-old participants in developing “go green” community plans and “green” business plans. Many participants had been involved in the criminal justice system or had an incarcerated family member. A visit/tour to the successful Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) in Houston, Tex. was instrumental. PEP trained inmates in prison & supported them after release. Recidivism for graduates is less than 10 percent. Approx 700 inmates have graduated from the five-month, life-transforming program. The experience was transformative, and has strongly influenced the program design of Green Entrepreneur programs. In fact, workforce and corrections officials from Kentucky served as judges in PEP’s 2-day Business Plan Competition & Graduation.

In collaboration, Bluegrass WIB, KY Dept of Corrections, Sustainable Business Ventures, and other community-based groups have developed a plan and are seeking funding to pilot an additional entrepreneur program at the minimum security Blackburn Correction Complex in Lexington, Ky. Anecdotal reports indicate that those inmates/ex-offenders are ready to change their lives, and they can be empowered through entrepreneurship training.
In the spring of 2010, the Green Entrepreneur Program graduated 23 participants that were 18-24 years old. Ten of the 23 graduates got full-time jobs after completing the program. Here is one of the success stories: “The biggest impact of my ‘green’ training is it made me realize that especially as a mom, that I have to make this an ok world for my son,” said Green Entrepreneur participant Kim Baker. Kim was 19 years old at the time of the training with a three-year-old child. She has just completed her freshman at Berea College living in its Ecovillage and is planning a minor in environmental studies. The Center reports that more than 700,000 inmates are released from state and federal prisons each year, 1.3 million are released from local jails and more than 5 million are under corrections supervision or control. Success of SBV’s program targeting ex-offenders will be measured by a reduction of recidivism over time. The Texas PEP program graduates have a recidivism rate of less than 10% which is substantially below the national average of more than 50% recidivism within 3 years of release. More than 225 low-income 16-24 year olds have participated in SBV’s training programs and it is hard to quantify the impact on these lives and their families in terms changing behavior towards the environment and society. Corrections Today the national magazine of the American Correction Assn published an article about the Green Entrepreneur Program in May 2011 http://www.kystudentventures.org/Corrections_Today_Eco-Friendly_Corrections_Published_Green
Entrepreneur.pdf

How many people have been impacted by your project?

101-1,000

How many people could be impacted by your project in the next three years?

1,001-10,000

How will your project evolve over the next three years?

SBV will develop a train-the-trainer & certification program for experienced facilitators. A computer/web-based tool will be developed to deliver high quality, interactive training focused on entrepreneurs. Videos, discussion items, FAQs and learning checks to measure comprehension will be an important part of this tool. Recruitment of community-based partners will help replicate this program across the U.S. Pre/Post assessment, post release employment/business start-up and recidivism will be tracked to develop evidenced-based research on program effectiveness is key to funding and scalability. The evolution of this business model will include support of starting and/or acquiring small businesses that will be managed by, and employ, ex-offenders (the key to self-sustaining local programs).
per week for six weeks by the Lincoln Trail WIB. Many entrepreneurs volunteered their time to share their stories & help with training in these programs. A fundraising plan that will target individuals, foundations & businesses will be soon been developed to raise funds to sustain this program. There are a number of foundations that are beginning to support re-entry programs and the investment in new & innovative programs for at-risk youth has a long-term return on investment will be appealing.

How do you plan to strengthen your project in the next three years?

Bobby has presented 90-minute workshops at three national conferences: Corporation For Enterprise Development, Washington DC, September 2010; American Correctional Association, San Antonio, TX, February 2011; and Defendant Offender Workforce Development, San Francisco, CA, April 2011. He will present at the National Symposium on Sustainable Corrections – Costs, Practices & Re-Entry, Indianapolis, IN, June 2011. SBV’s program was published in Corrections Today, the national magazine of the American Correctional Association. This outreach provides visibility and generates interest across the U.S. The proposed pilot program at Blackburn Correctional Complex will be the foundation for the replicable program nationwide. The business model can be replicated across the globe because the barriers and challenges facing ex-offenders in the U.S. are similar in other countries and for some entrepreneurship provides a new strategy for successful re-entry. SBV has been collaborating with a team at the university of Kentucky that has proposed using inmates to assisting in the weatherization and retrofitting prisons to become more energy efficient. Correctional facilities save money and inmates get valuable green job skills training. Energy services companies (ESCOs) are providing capital to government, academic and correctional facilities to pay for these costs and energy savings are used to pay the ESCOs. Discussions ongoing on the use of inmates on work crews with one of the leading ESCOs in the U.S.

Challenges

Which barriers to employment does your innovation address?
Please select up to three in order of relevancy to your project.

PRIMARY
Other (Specify Below)

SECONDARY
Lack of skills/training

TERTIARY
Lack of access to information and networks

Please describe how your innovation specifically tackles the barriers listed above.

One of the biggest barriers is very few employers are willing to hire a felon. SBV's Green Entrepreneur Program can serve inmates and ex-offenders and teach them how to start their own business. Entrepreneurship training teaches problem-solving, critical thinking, presentation skills and marketing. These skills are valuable employment skills even if ex-offenders never start their own business. A small business can also augment income of ex-offenders that often can only find minimum wage jobs that make it difficult to support themselves much less a family. The Green Entrepreneur Program model will recruit community-based partners that can help ex-offenders with mentoring support and access to needed job information and community networks. Some WIBs fund skills training for ex-offenders.

Are you trying to scale your organization or initiative?
If yes, please check up to three potential pathways in order of relevancy to you.

PRIMARY
SECONDARY
Grown geographic reach: Multi-country

TERTIARY
Grown geographic reach: Global

Please describe which of your growth activities are current or planned for the immediate future.

SBV will develop an Online Learning Portal which would include the class presentations, notes, lesson plans, entrepreneur videos, learning activities and a facilitator guide for the 60-hour Green Entrepreneur Program. The portal will enhance the scalability of the green entrepreneur program participants and assist others pursuing entrepreneurship through a self-paced interface. SBV will provide training and certification of facilitators across the U.S. or the world. The record for that learner could include information regarding the learner’s demographics, learning style, knowledge, skills, and test scores. This portal will be helpful to the graduates of the program and will help us provide follow-up technical assistance in business development and be a repository of business plans.

Do you collaborate with any of the following: (Check all that apply)
Technology providers, NGOs/Nonprofits, For profit companies, Academia/universities.

If yes, how have these collaborations helped your innovation to succeed?
Collaboration is the key to success. One of our key relationships has been the National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS). NPJS has significant experience that will help Sustainable Business Ventures (SBV) replicate our Green Entrepreneur Program and serve juvenile offenders across the U.S. At-risk youth are often board at school, do not have good role models at home and have other challenges. The low-income youth that were involved in our Green Entrepreneur Program learned about teamwork, how to develop “green” business ideas, develop a plan and present their plans to judges. For many, they shined and began to feel that might be able to control their future through self-employment. Local community-based partnership and train-the-trainer is our model for scalability.