

Aspire Challenge Submission
McClendon Recovery Initiatives, Inc.
Contact Person: Jennifer McClendon LPC, LCADC, NCC, ACS
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Changing the Narrative of The Formerly Incarcerated Through Business Planning & Ownership

Organizational Background

[McClendon Recovery Initiatives, Inc.](#) is a 501 c (3) nonprofit organization established in New Jersey on March 24, 2016. Our vision is to address the impact of incarceration, substance use, and mental health stigma on individuals and families through the provision of evidenced-based supportive counseling, case management, training, and referral services. The goal of our services is reducing recidivism and aiding in recovery maintenance. Achieving these goals will result in stronger, healthier families and individuals. We abide by three principles: wellness, autonomy, and fidelity to carry out our mission statement. MRI is located at 200 Centennial Avenue, Suite 200 in Piscataway, NJ 08854. We are located in Middlesex County, which has the [5th highest commitment rate in the state](#). Our services are available to everyone in need. However, we focus locally on the surrounding towns and communities with regards to training, supportive counseling, and referrals.

Background of Management Team:

Jennifer McClendon serves as Executive Director & President. She is formerly incarcerated and has first-hand experience with reentering society from incarceration. Jennifer has been in recovery for 16 years and has worked as a counselor, clinical supervisor, and clinical director of substance use disorder programs. She specializes in working with formerly incarcerated/incarcerated persons, substance use disorders, and mental health. Jennifer's experience also includes providing technical assistance to substance use disorder agencies throughout the state of New Jersey for Medicaid and fee for service initiatives that pay for treatment services. She presents educational seminars at local and international conferences on effective ways of helping formerly incarcerated individuals acclimate to society and solution-focused counseling approaches.

Meliss Ashley serves as board Secretary. She is a wife, mother of three girls, and is a case worker for the Gloucester County Department of Child Protection and Permanency. She has worked with the formerly incarcerated providing case management services and supportive counseling for employment. Meliss received her Bachelor Degree in Social Work from Rowan University.

George Walker serves as a board member. George has over 20 years of experience working in substance use disorder and mental health treatment. His experiences include counseling, supervising, and research. George also specialized in restorative justice as way to reduce recidivism in our country and communities and giving a voice to victims. George also presents at state and international conferences on effective counseling approaches for working with the formerly incarcerated and persons affected by mental health disorders. He is a doctoral candidate at Barry University in Counselor Education and Supervision.

Entrepreneurial Education Delivery Solution

Participant Recruitment Plan

MRI will hold a local community event in Piscataway, NJ for formerly incarcerated residents of Piscataway Township and New Brunswick. The event will be advertised on the local radio stations, press, Facebook, and twitter. Participants will be administered a brief confidential survey that will help us identify formerly incarcerated eligibility.

Classroom Instruction

Participants who qualify and are willing to participate in the full program will be grouped into two cohorts. Each cohort will include residents from Piscataway and New Brunswick to provide opportunity for interaction and exchange of resources which would be limited if the cohorts were singularly placed in a group based on their geographic location. Food and beverages will be provided for each classroom meeting. Meetings will take place at the Access Business Center located at 15 Corporate Place South, Suite 496, Piscataway, NJ 08854. The facility provides access to internet through wi-fi connection, projectors for classroom instruction, spacious comfortable seating, and a warm supportive environment that is conducive to learning.

Participants will meet each week for classroom instruction on the [Small Business Administration Build Your Business Plan](#) portal. The tool walks through each step of creating a business plan from start to finish. The portal provides a business plan with projections of 3-5 years ahead and outlines the path a business plans to take to reach its goals, including financial projections. Participants will complete each section of the business plan on a weekly basis after each classroom instruction. Classroom instruction will be provided by Access Center staff. MRI will also solicit two intern instructors from Rutgers University Business School of Business. Instructors will also provide guidance and feedback to participants during each phase of their business plan to completion.

Mentoring

Each participant will be assigned a mentor. Mentoring will be provided by the Access Center staff who are entrepreneurs and have over 30 years of experience in business planning and development. MRI staff will provide supportive counseling to any participant who may experience barriers such as (hopelessness, setbacks, fear). Although we plan for all participants to be motivated to start and complete their work, we believe that making this service available will enhance participants experience and aid in their success.

Community Connections

MRI will utilize the following community organizations and businesses to help increase participant's financial literacy and access to transitional services:

TD Bank 1060-1068 Stelton Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854

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Access Business Center, LLC 15 Corporate Place South Suite 496

McClendon Recovery Initiatives Inc. 200 Centennial Avenue, Suite 200 Piscataway, NJ 08854

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Access to Capital

MRI will use the [New Jersey SBA Cumulative Loan Report](#) to identify New Jersey local lenders interested in assisting participants with financing their business plan and further increasing their financial literacy.

MRI will host a series of networking and matchmaking events at our Piscataway location for each participant to pitch their business plan to a lender. Each participant will complete a mock Mock pitch with their peers and staff to help prepare for the matchmaking event.