

## **Dress for Success Sacramento**

Women's Anti-Recidivism Entrepreneurship Incubator (WAREI) Program

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### **ORGANIZATION AND TEAM CAPACITY**

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#### **Organizational Background**

The Mission of Dress for Success is to empower women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire and the development tools to help women thrive in work and in life. Although we are affiliated with the Dress for Success Worldwide organization by brand, the Sacramento affiliate is an independent 501c3 Non-Profit Corporation founded in the State of California in 2015. Our Board of Directors and Management Team (See Section 2) are all locally employed residents and business owners of Sacramento County. The programs offered by Dress for Success Sacramento are exactly suited for female ex-offenders. In fact, if one were to watch the television show "Orange is the New Black", virtually every inmate to be released on parole goes to Dress for Success as a first step toward re-entry into the community. Today, several Dress for Success affiliates offer classes and services within prisons throughout the country. And virtually all provide their services to ex-offenders who seek assistance as they re-enter their communities.

California's recidivism rate has been one of the highest in the nation for decades. About 65% of people who leave a California State Prison end up back inside in less than one year. In Sacramento County the recidivism rate was just under 60% collectively as reported in 2014. Though women are only 7 percent of the state and federal prison population, their number has jumped fourteen-fold since 1970 — from 8,000 to 110,000 — compared to a four-fold increase for men, according to the Vera Project. The Dress for Success Sacramento WAREI Pilot Program will support Sacramento County and the surrounding region. In Sacramento, there are several organizations providing a host of services to reentrants. However, there are few, if any, organizations offering entrepreneurship and business development curriculum that is targeted specifically towards ex-offender women. This proposed solution would help motivate those currently incarcerated and newly released, by providing an avenue for skills-based learning, and engage communities (that many incarcerated women are released to) that would stand to gain from investments in entrepreneurship and new business development.

#### **Core Management Team**

1. **Veronica Smith** has more than eighteen years of experience in entrepreneurship and business. Ms. Smith is the founder of Dress for Success Sacramento and is also the acting Director of the Sacramento Employment and Economic Development (SEED) Corporation. Ms. Smith has firsthand experience with the prison population and has mentored and trained formerly incarcerated women in the areas of life-skills and employment readiness.
2. **Gina Lujan** has 20 years of entrepreneurial experience and 14 years in technology and is the Founder and CEO of Hacker Lab; a business incubator and maker space located in Sacramento that fosters local startups and technology enthusiasts with community driven forums, events, education, and mentorship. Ms. Lujan has firsthand experience with the prison population and has trained formerly incarcerated women and men.
3. **Dale McKinney** is the founder of Dale McKinney Law. Mr. McKinney is a formerly incarcerated individual whose personal legal experiences led him to have empathy for people with legal issues. Mr. McKinney's law firm help clients with arrest and incarceration records to expunge records and obtain Certificates of Rehabilitations.
4. **Rick Bluford** is a serial entrepreneur and investor. Mr. Bluford has successfully run and managed 3 company exits which a great return was made. He is now focusing on the Public Safety field and actively investing as an Angel Investor. Mr. Bluford has firsthand experience with the prison population and has mentored and trained formerly incarcerated men.

### Participant Recruitment Plan

Dress for Success Sacramento and Team will coordinate with local partners and organizations that are responsible for overseeing and coordinating services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. We will target non-violent newly released individuals, and those that will be released prior to the beginning of the WAREI Pilot Program cohort delivery. Some of our partners include the following: Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC), Associated Prison Ministries, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), Sacramento County Probation Department, and Sacramento County Community Corrections Partnership.

### Classroom Instruction

1. **Cohort Delivery:** Once participants have been identified through a competitive selection process, they will officially begin the WAREI Pilot Program which is an entrepreneurship training program for formerly incarcerated women. The WAREI Pilot Program is a 20-week program that teaches entrepreneurship and business skills to aspiring women entrepreneurs and helps them build the social and technical capital to launch a business.

The Aspire Challenge funding will enable Dress for Success Sacramento and Team to deliver 2 cohorts to a maximum of 30 individuals (15 participants per cohort). The cohorts will be delivered in a classroom/group setting. The cohort instructors and facilitators will utilize approved entrepreneurship curriculum, consistent with the curriculum that is used at other local entrepreneurship incubator programs in the region. We have been closely studying the models of other programs geared towards both the re-entry population and general population. Like the Defy Venture Model, which is an entrepreneurship program model geared towards the re-entry population, before committing to the full training program, we will require our applicants to participate in a month of in-person training to experience expectations and culture, as well as to learn the basics of entrepreneurship, ideate a business concept, and prove their entrepreneurial abilities, and individual commitment. This first month will involve taking a deep dive into the background and history of participants – prior work experience both in prison and out of prison, personal interests, strengths, and weaknesses. This will enable participants to begin to cultivate an idea that will ultimately be what they build their business plan around.

The cohorts will conclude with a graduation and fast pitch competition. The fast pitch competition will offer awards that range from \$500 to \$5,000 to graduates to launch their businesses and participate in a business accelerator program. This award will not be funded with Aspire Solution funding but will instead be funded by local financial partners. In addition to the entrepreneurship and business training, our cohort's will also include life-skill's courses which will be critical to our program participants becoming successful entrepreneurs and business owners. We will deliver character development seminars, and many other personal development workshops that cultivate leadership skills from the inside out.

2. **Business Plan Development:** The business plan development process will begin with an overview of several topics such as process, strategy, financing, marketing, human resources, leadership, contracting and market/product development. After undergoing an ideation process, participants will then put their ideas to paper by conceptualizing, writing, and presenting full business plans (including comprehensive financial models). Dress for Success Sacramento and Team will guide the program participants through the process of conducting market research, refining operations, and generating customers. All participants who choose to participate in WAREI Program Pilot, and are deemed ready upon completion of the Program will have the opportunity to, and will be encouraged to incorporate their companies, open business bank accounts, generate promotional materials, and begin to solicit customers.

3. **The Journey:** Entrepreneurship can be a tough and long journey for most people that embark upon the path of starting their own business venture. This is especially true for the formerly incarcerated population. Our program will work in close collaboration with the other rehabilitative program partners that our participants are involved in. To be sustainable and have a higher success rate, participants must have a means to care for themselves and their families. As such, our program will aim to fill voids by offering incentives to encourage full participation and a higher success rate. We will provide such incentives and support from community partners and financial contributions from supportive partners and individual donors. Such incentives and support will not be funded with Aspire Solution funding, but will instead be a match that Dress for Success and Team will secure and/or commit upfront for the program.
4. **Online Resources:** While the WAREI Program Pilot coursework will be delivered to participants face-to-face in a classroom setting, we will connect participants to an array of online supportive services that benefit our participants in the most effective way. In addition to providing supplemental business and entrepreneurial resources, participants will also be connected to resources for the following: Housing, Family, Employment, Education, Spiritual, Healthcare and Mentorship.
5. **Life Skills Training:** There is a great degree of social capital that will be necessary for participants to successfully pitch, launch and sustain a business. Such skills apply to running a business, as well as to being successful citizens in the communities in which participants live, work, and play. Participant training will include classes on public speaking, confidence, goal setting, financial literacy, body language and handshaking, personal branding, and image/wardrobe.
6. **Mentoring and Coaching:** Participants will get access to the expertise and coaching of the Dress for Success Sacramento and Team network of business leaders, entrepreneurs, executives, investors, and venture capitalists. We will offer one-on-one mentoring, personal support and business guidance in meeting the challenges and responsibilities of entrepreneurship from individuals who have been there, done that, and successfully launch companies and secured funding for those companies. Our guest faculty will consist of business thought leaders in the region and outlying areas to include individuals such as Denise Ferre of Monetta Ventures, Monique Woodard of 500 Startups, Mariah Lichtenstern of DiverseCity Ventures, and a host of others. A critical component of our Program will also be bringing in formerly incarcerated individuals who are currently running successful businesses. The stories of mentors, coaches, and advocates who have been in similar situations as participants will always resonate more and add an extra dose of inspiration.
7. **Community Connections:** Connectivity will be a key ingredient to the success of Program participants. Starting a company is challenging and isolating, particularly for formerly incarcerated individuals. Working with other people going through the same challenges makes a huge difference. Our program will offer not only a way to earn an income, but a built-in community of support. Participants who go through our program will be connected to an entrepreneurial community that will provide extreme value, offering lifelong personal connections and business partnership opportunities. Community partners in the entrepreneurial and innovation space that WAREI Program participants will be introduced and exposed to include Start-Up Sacramento, One Million Cups Sacramento and a host of others. WAREI Program Pilot participants who complete the cohorts are eligible for continued development services through Dress for Success's Going Places Network and Professional Women's Group. Networking events, social outings, guest lectures, and career development support will keep WAREI alumni involved with the Dress for Success Sacramento community, and Sacramento Start-Up community, and moving along their path to success.

## **ACCESS TO CAPITAL**

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Program participants will be exposed to Access to Capital in a variety of formats. This will include access to online resources, match-making events with local lenders, and engagement with the innovation and entrepreneurial support community in the Sacramento region.

Dress for Success Sacramento and Team's investment in the WAREI Pilot Program will include opportunities for seed financing to launch their businesses and opportunities to tap into our extensive private sector network for guidance, contacts and other supports. Dress for Success Sacramento and Team have relationships with following organizations:

- California Capital Financial Development Corporation
- CDC Small Business Finance
- Greater Sacramento Certified Development Corporation (GSCDC)
- Greater Sacramento Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- Banking Community/Financial Institutions
- Grow Sacramento Fund
- Opening Doors Microloan Program
- Women's Business Development Center

After successful completion of the entrepreneurship training curriculum and cohort, and a determination has been made that a participant is ready to move forward in their process of launching a viable business, Dress for Success Sacramento and Team will make the proper introductions and connections to funders and/or funding opportunities. Considering that there may be barriers to formerly incarcerated individuals getting access to financial resources, our team will devise solutions to address this challenge. We have already started to explore the possibility and garner support for developing new micro loan programs and grants geared specifically towards the formerly incarcerated population. Such new program(s) will be in partnership with the local municipalities and financial institutions.