

Eighteen-year-old Louis Russell is uniquely confident for his age. While most high school seniors are still navigating their post secondary college and career goals, Russell is emerging out of high school with a burgeoning business.

As a high school sophomore, Russell began looking at after school programs to fill his Saturdays. Although athletically inclined as a football player, Russell wanted to explore other interests. Upon discovering the newly developed Futures Fund program, Russell chose to pursue a career he had yet to discover: programming.

With programming, Russell, then fifteen, was able to unlock a completely new skill that challenged him in a new way. The educators Russell came into contact with were unlike any teachers he had ever met before. These industry-professionals were not much different from the students they interacted with, creating a community of driven and motivated individuals.

With students learning quickly, teachers were able to introduce high performing students to real-life opportunities, such as programming for the city government of Baton Rouge. Because Russell was determined to utilize the skills he learned in class and not deterred by the new coding language required by the job opportunity, he successfully landed the job with the city.

“Going every Saturday for a couple of weeks, messing around with a computer, has landed me my first job programming.” Russell chuckles, “I’m not even old enough to have a full-

time job, so I am a part-time intern.”

The Futures Fund provides students with access to explore fields that they are passionate about now, rather than making them wait until college. The program also allows students to achieve a vision greater than the classes themselves; it allows students to learn skills which lead directly into entrepreneurship.

Now Russell sees job opportunities around every corner. “If I see a friend, and they need a website, I can tell them that I can do that. If it’s a [coding] language I’m not used to, I know I can figure it out.”

Although technology has become more ingrained into the world’s economy, over a third of public teachers in the Capital Region confess that STEM isn’t being provided to students, especially in areas with the most opportunity for growth. Seeing this gap, the Futures Fund provides the opportunity for students looking to learn the skills required to be successful in both college and career, but also to be mentored as they develop into entrepreneurs themselves.

By cultivating the area’s youth into future business owners or critically-thinking employees, The Futures Fund is able to expand the economic impact locally. Especially in technology sector jobs, the future workforce can literally be anywhere, providing an opportunity to work in the community in which they were raised. Additionally, the wage increase by working in a STEM-related field is \$26,000 greater than the average salary - equaling 76 percent higher wages.

In 2013, the Capital Region experienced the creation of approximately 3,420 new STEM jobs, while the area’s colleges and universities produced only 2,140 STEM graduates and certificate holders.

The Futures Fund provides a pathway for middle and high school students to discover STEM fields, while also tapping into their creativity and entrepreneurial mindsets, ultimately ushering more students into area colleges and universities for STEM-focused programs.

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**Louis Russell
Coding III
Graduate,
Programmer
with
city of Baton
Rouge**

