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D.R.E.A.M.

DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE ECONOMICALLY ADVANCED MODEL-CITIZENS

TEAM



right to left:
RAYVON DORSETT, ELIAS ROSADO, ALBIN ORTIZ and JALENI THOMPSON

As the co-founder of the non profit D.R.E.A.M., Jaleni Thompson, BSBA '08, has impressive aspirations — he aims to close our country's wealth gap. By providing much-needed financial education, Thompson is determined to empower the underserved youth of New York City through the strength of knowledge.

Jaleni Thompson operates in two seemingly polar opposite worlds: As an associate analyst in the large corporate environment of Moody's Investors Service, Thompson researches and provides credit ratings and analysis for the U.S. healthcare industry. And, as the co-founder of D.R.E.A.M., (Developing Responsible Economically Advanced Model-Citizens), he's the visionary who is leading a growing nonprofit dedicated to providing financial knowledge to at-risk, underserved youth living in urban, often troubled, communities.

D.R.E.A.M., founded just a year after Thompson's graduation from Carnegie Mellon, equips high-school students who live in the five boroughs

of New York City — the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island — with the fundamentals of money management before they're faced with the more difficult financial challenges of adulthood. Thompson came to Carnegie Mellon from a single-parent home in the South Bronx, and many of the skills he gained as a Tepper School undergraduate have allowed him to give back to that community as D.R.E.A.M.'s chief strategy officer. His mission — ultimately to close the wealth gap between low-income, urban residents and the broader population — is admittedly “daunting,” but a reality that also increases his desire and commitment to make a difference.

understanding R.O.I.
FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT: 101



ELIAS ROSADO, 16
ALL HALLOWS HIGH SCHOOL
BRONX, NY

“Being a member of D.R.E.A.M. has opened up my base of knowledge because now, when I read, I notice things that are relevant to economics and finance,” says high school student Elias Rosato. “And, I understand what I’m reading. How many kids my age know this information or that it’s important?”

The curriculum progresses from the basics of checking and savings accounts to analyzing investment opportunities to funding a college education with an understanding of its return on investment. In addition to classroom learning, students are exposed to the networking and real-world experience of community speakers, paired with mentors, and they are also required to fulfill community service activities.

“Scholars, parents, mentors and staff participated in the AIDS Walk NYC last year, which served as a great way to help a cause that affects our community via fundraising and awareness,” said Thompson. In 2013, the organization planned financial literacy workshops, co-taught by student scholars, for elementary school students during April’s Financial Literacy Month.

It’s clear that Thompson was strongly influenced by a mother who instilled in him the values of hard work, education and giving back. He remains grateful to those who helped and mentored him, as well as for the support he received from Carnegie Mellon and the Tepper School.

“Most unattractive economic indicators, such as high unemployment and the growing cost of education, trickle down and impact poor communities most strongly,” asserts Thompson. “Bad financial decisions can cripple your financial foundation in numerous ways — from being too highly leveraged on student loan debt, to taking out a payday loan without understanding its horrid interest rates, or to spending all discretionary income instead of saving or investing. We firmly believe that the smarter you are about your personal finances and the better you understand how the economy and businesses work, the more likely you are to be a savvy consumer, business owner and economically contributing citizen.”

The organization strives to accomplish its mission primarily through two programs, as well as a blog covering relevant and timely issues. “Financial Empowerment: 101” consists of a series of customized workshops given in the greater community on topics ranging from “The Credit Monster” to “The Basics of Online Banking.” Another program, “Invest-in-Success,” is a three-year, Saturday course of study housed in the state-of-the-art Capital One 360 Café in midtown Manhattan.



“I don’t think you can truly be successful if you do not help others become successful, instead of being left behind.”

ALBIN ORTIZ, 16
ALL HALLOWS HIGH SCHOOL
BRONX, NY



“I wouldn’t be where I am today if people and institutions alike didn’t take chances on me,” Thompson said. “It was never a matter of whether or not to give back, but instead, how can I contribute to the inner-city community with great and unique impact. I don’t think you can be truly successful if you do not help others become successful, instead of being left behind.”

As college graduation neared in 2008, both Thompson and his co-founder, Femi Faoye, were struck by the financial crisis swirling around them. It inspired and crystallized their purpose.

“The financial crisis brought to light some ugly truths about our society — namely the lack of basic financial information and discipline of both people and institutions,” Thompson observed. “Those who were impacted the most by the economic downturn were those who made poor decisions. To us, the elephant in the room was the lack of information about the basics of finance. Knowledge is power, and we knew that this particular knowledge was scarce in our communities.”

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

business and oral communication



RAYVON DORSETT, 16
ALL HALLOWS HIGH SCHOOL
BRONX, NY

lives — D.R.E.A.M. parents increasingly characterize the program as “crucial” for their children’s financial future success.

“Finance is essential to life,” according to 16-year-old D.R.E.A.M. scholar Rayvon Dorsett. “I bring the knowledge into my family, and because of D.R.E.A.M., I’m deciding what to major in when I’m in college, like accounting.”

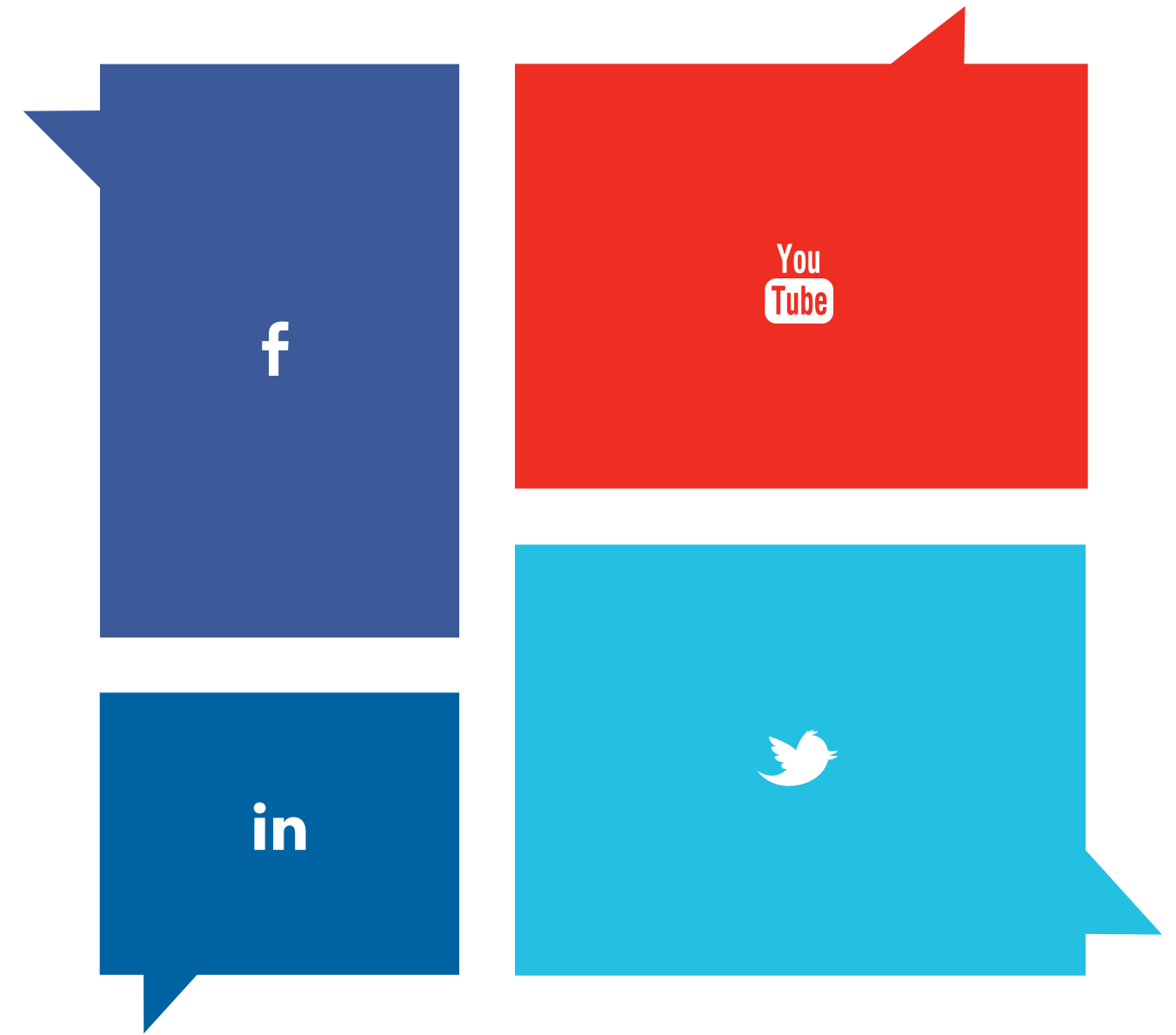
Today, Thompson finds himself relying on his Tepper School skills while, as with any growing startup, he works to keep the management team “on the same page and motivated to execute the mission with fervor, creativity and consistency.” And he maintains strong and positive views on both how and when Tepper School graduates can use the abilities they’ve honed at school.

“The essence of Carnegie Mellon and the Tepper School is effectively and creatively solving problems with your learned and God given skill-sets and talents,” notes Thompson. “Doling it out solely for profit is a disservice when there are too many people in the world in need. You do not have to be a billionaire to give back in profound ways. Tomorrow isn’t promised, so why not start today?”

To learn more about D.R.E.A.M visit: www.dream-nyc.org

Thompson marshaled the abilities he’d gained while at Tepper and created what he likens to a “mini-B-school.” He points out the lessons he learned from his entrepreneurship class and from Luke Skurman, BSBA '02, HNZ '04, founder of College Prowler and CMU trustee, who was involved as a special teaching assistant. “It opened my eyes as to what goes into creating a business from soup to nuts. To have successful entrepreneurs available throughout my academic experience was icing on the cake.” Other memorable skills were those he gained through the school’s Business and Oral Communications class that “continue to prove invaluable in my professional endeavors.” In fact, Thompson says he found his Tepper skills so useful, he’s been certain to include a number of components in the D.R.E.A.M. curriculum.

Both statistically and anecdotally, Thompson has been gratified by D.R.E.A.M.’s success. Not only does each and every one of D.R.E.A.M.’s Invest-in-Success scholars actively use checking and savings accounts, but the impact of the “Financial Empowerment: 101” program is impacting



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