Twenty - Nineteen
Annual Report

DEFY VENTURES
 COLORADO
Dear Defy Colorado Stakeholders,

I write this, with a bit of sadness and an enormous amount of gratitude, to let you know that I am stepping down as Executive Director of Defy Ventures Colorado. Decisions like this are never easy and this one is particularly difficult. Although Defy Colorado has played a major role in my life for the past two years, I have had some recent health issues that have caused me to reevaluate my priorities and what is best for me and my family.

I am incredibly fortunate to be able to make this decision knowing that we have a strong organizational structure in place with an incredible Board of Directors and a team of committed individuals who continue to advance the mission of Defy Colorado. With that, I am proud to announce that Stacey Putka has been promoted to the Executive Director position. Stacey has been with this organization from the beginning and has worked tirelessly to advance the cause and mission of Defy Colorado. There is no doubt in my mind she is the right person to lead Defy Colorado and continue to transform the lives of the incarcerated population.

It has been an honor to lead this organization and to do it with people I like, admire and respect. I am forever grateful to Stacey and Izzy Heep for standing shoulder to shoulder with me as we built Defy Colorado and to every volunteer and donor who has put their faith and trust into me and Defy Colorado in helping us end the cycle of mass incarceration.

Best,

Bob
Hey Defy Colorado Supporters,

Writing this letter is a humbling, inspiring, and emotional undertaking. The past year has been filled with countless wins, all made possible by you - members of the Defy Colorado community. We really are an unlikely bunch: currently incarcerated individuals, founders/CEOs of tech start-ups, local government leaders, business executives, and family members of each group mentioned. I often find myself taken back by the ease in which these groups unite and the amount of passion each stakeholder has for our vision to build redemptive communities in which every life is honored and economic freedom is a right, not a privilege.

We face one of the biggest systemic challenges in the world.

- Twenty-thousand people are incarcerated in the state of Colorado alone. Two million are incarcerated across the United States. The US has 5% of the world’s population and 25% of the world’s incarcerated population.
- Approximately 9000 people are released from Colorado prisons every year. Half of those individuals will return to prison within 3 years.
- The unemployment rate of people with criminal histories is 27%. At the height of the great depression, the unemployment rate was 25%.

Individually this problem is insurmountable but together we can begin to shift the way our society views and interacts with people with criminal histories. Proof of that can be seen in Defy Colorado’s short two-year history.

- We have served over 200 currently incarcerated individuals across 3 Colorado prisons.
- We have supported our Entrepreneurs-in-Training as they have re-entered the community.
- One of Defy Colorado’s alumni has raised $100,000 in start-up capital and is launching his business, Art for Redemption.
- We have developed partnerships with incredible businesses, universities, and non-profit organizations including, but not limited to, Google, Techstars, Colorado State University, Rocky Mountain MicroFinance.

In March 2020 our entire reality changed along with the rest of the world. The impact of COVID-19 was swift and far-reaching. We are not alone in the fact that this virus completely shifted our work. As I write this, we are no longer able to go into prisons. More of our EITs are being released. We pivoted. Our team dynamically approached the situation and is constantly identifying ways we can continue to serve our incarcerated EITs. We launched an innovative COVID-19 Emergency Response Program to support our EITs being released in this environment and our partners, mentors, and EITs rallied around us.

Although this report is looking back at our 2019 fiscal year, much has happened since the start of our 2020 fiscal year on May 1st that we feel is important to address here. The nationwide conversations around policing and police brutality were re-ignited recently with the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Elijah McClain, and countless other Black people. Problems with policing are just the tip of the iceberg and initiate the chain of events that lead to the revolving door of the criminal justice system and mass incarceration. Defy Colorado is uniquely qualified to lead in issues of criminal justice reform and you will see us become more vocal and strategic in this space.

We are grateful to have such wonderful partners on this journey. Our mission to transform the lives of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals and business leaders could be an overwhelming task for our small organization. But the enthusiasm, dedication, and generosity of you, the Defy Community, energizes and inspires us. Our strength and determination come from knowing you are on our team.

This report is for you. It is essential that each and every one of our stakeholders shares in the past year’s successes, and understands our vision for the future, and the financial underpinnings of the organization.

Here’s to defying the odds together.

Stacey Putka
Executive Director
Defy Brings Families Together

2019 - Present
Mentor Rich Hoops told us how volunteering with his daughter impacted him. “Volunteering with my daughter was really impactful both just personally from a parental perspective and by sharing that with her... in both sessions there were guys coming up to me kind of bewildered... [One guy] came up to me and he said, “that’s the coolest thing I’ve ever seen...that you felt safe enough to bring your daughter in here and share with her with us.” It’s just a cool thing... it was something that we could share and something that I could give back to her... I wouldn’t trade it for anything. And she couldn’t wait to go back.

COVID-19 Emergency Response Program

May 2020
In an effort to limit the spread and impact of COVID-19 inside Colorado correctional facilities, Governor Jared Polis issued an executive order leading to the early release of select incarcerated individuals. Our COVID-19 Emergency Response Program makes sure every released EIT has the critical tools needed to thrive in our changing economic climate, including a Chromebook, cell phone, and access to expanded virtual programming and support. These tools ensure we reach every EIT with one-on-one mentoring as well as critical programming to help them navigate finding jobs, healthcare, transportation, and technology.

Welcoming Home Abe Arrington

March 2020
While in prison, Abe patented a flood mitigation system and won first prize in a Defy Colorado competition for his business plan. Through the support of his friends and family, Abe is now enjoying life on the outside. “It feels great! Everything is new.” Abe said. “My brother gave me a cell phone. When I got locked up, a cell phone was the size of a suitcase. Now, I have one that fits in the palm of hand and has more power than a dozen computers in ’89. I’m enjoying it a lot. Having the time of my life.” Elected as Colorado’s 43rd governor in January 2019, Jared Polis granted executive clemency to Abe on December 20, 2019.

“Art for Redemption” Launches

May 2019
The first Defy Colorado graduate to start his business, Buck Adams, launched Art for Redemption in the summer of 2019. Adams says, “Art for Redemption isn’t just a platform. It’s also the first true vendor to legally contract with the Colorado Department of Corrections on behalf of participating artists, which in turn creates opportunities for artists to pay child support, victim restitution and other societal debts.”

Advocacy on the TEDxBoulder Stage

June 2019
Stacey Patka asked the TEDx Boulder Audience some difficult questions in the summer of 2019. “Would you hire someone who has been in prison? Would you hire someone with a murder charge? Someone who once led gangs and ran drugs? Would you work proudly beside them? Many people won’t. In fact, studies show that 27% of people with criminal histories are actively looking for a job but cannot find employment. That’s higher than the unemployment peak rate during the great depression. Unemployment is a huge risk factor to returning to prison.”

Governor Pols Supports Fair Chance Hiring

October 2019
Governor Jared Polis lead a group of 15 Denver-area executives to Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility. His mission was to introduce business leaders to Colorado’s largest untapped talent pool building on the momentum created by the recently passed “Ban the Box” legislation.

LVCF Celebrates Inaugural Graduation

November 2019
On November 14, 2019, twenty-six women pitched their businesses, put on shiny blue caps and gowns, and walked across the “stage” at LaVista Correctional Facility to receive their certificate of completion from Colorado State University. When reflecting on the day Alexis, who placed in the top 5 of the business pitch competition, said “Someone finally sees the potential in us. Somebody sees that we aren’t just this number, that we are not these cast outs. Somebody finally sees that we can make something out of our lives.”

Inspiring Entrepreneurs Everywhere

2019 - Present
Mentor Krissy Ostermiller opened up about how working with Defy EITs inspired her to start her own small business “I would say that [mentoring with Defy] inspired me to start my own business - which I did last Saturday. And I was planning to start my business long before I ever got involved with Defy but by going into the different prisons and coaching people on how they can start their own business I was like “hell, why can’t I do this myself.” So it inspired me to be a better businesswoman myself.”

Inaugural Defy Colorado Community Night

January 2020
We launched our monthly in-person Community Nights hosted at Galvanize. This was the first time our released EITs had the opportunity to join together in the community. Every facility we operate in was represented at our February Community Night, EITs from LaVista Correctional Facility, Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility, and Colorado State Penitentiary were able to meet each other for the first time. EITs were able to reconnect with mentors they met inside and mentors were able to see EITs as free members of our community.

Peer Facilitators Sustain Defy’s Positive Culture in our Second Cohorts

2019 - Present
With the initiation of Defy Colorado’s second cohorts the first Peer Facilitators (PFs) were chosen. Both at CSP and AVCF, PFs were picked to help guide the new cohorts alongside staff facilitators. With the support of PFs, EITs were able to get help throughout the week between class sessions. The prouverbial torch has been passed on from the first cohort to the second through the assistance of our PFs, continuing to grow the Defy Colorado spirit.

Entrepreneurs-In-Training Inside Give Back

2019 - Present
Graduate Al Williams recently started Humanity Aligned Responding Together (HART), a social give back initiative at Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility. He manages a group of peers who create and donate unique Emoji style backpacks to underprivileged school children. The backpacks were delivered to the kiddos on the first day of school. As a graduate of AVCF’s first cohort and an active alumnus, Al continues to build upon his experience with Defy Colorado and bring a positive influence to those around him.

Jason Mendelson & Stacey Putka on KGNU

November 2019
Mentor Rich Hoops told us how volunteering with his daughter impacted him. “Volunteering with my daughter was really impactful both just personally from a parental perspective and by sharing that with her... in both sessions there were guys coming up to me kind of bewildered... [One guy] came up to me and he said, “that’s the coolest thing I’ve ever seen...that you felt safe enough to bring your daughter in here and share with her with us.” It’s just a cool thing... it was something that we could share and something that I could give back to her... I wouldn’t trade it for anything. And she couldn’t wait to go back.

COVID-19 Emergency Response Program

May 2020
In an effort to limit the spread and impact of COVID-19 inside Colorado correctional facilities, Governor Jared Polis issued an executive order leading to the early release of select incarcerated individuals. Our COVID-19 Emergency Response Program makes sure every released EIT has the critical tools needed to thrive in our changing economic climate, including a Chromebook, cell phone, and access to expanded virtual programming and support. These tools ensure we reach every EIT with one-on-one mentoring as well as critical programming to help them navigate finding jobs, healthcare, transportation, and technology.

Welcoming Home Abe Arrington

March 2020
While in prison, Abe patented a flood mitigation system and won first prize in a Defy Colorado competition for his business plan. Through the support of his friends and family, Abe is now enjoying life on the outside. “It feels great! Everything is new.” Abe said. “My brother gave me a cell phone. When I got locked up, a cell phone was the size of a suitcase. Now, I have one that fits in the palm of hand and has more power than a dozen computers in ’89. I’m enjoying it a lot. Having the time of my life.” Elected as Colorado’s 43rd governor in January 2019, Jared Polis granted executive clemency to Abe on December 20, 2019.

“Art for Redemption” Launches

May 2019
The first Defy Colorado graduate to start his business, Buck Adams, launched Art for Redemption in the summer of 2019. Adams says, “Art for Redemption isn’t just a platform. It’s also the first true vendor to legally contract with the Colorado Department of Corrections on behalf of participating artists, which in turn creates opportunities for artists to pay child support, victim restitution and other societal debts.”

Advocacy on the TEDxBoulder Stage

June 2019
Stacey Patka asked the TEDx Boulder Audience some difficult questions in the summer of 2019. “Would you hire someone who has been in prison? Would you hire someone with a murder charge? Someone who once led gangs and ran drugs? Would you work proudly beside them? Many people won’t. In fact, studies show that 27% of people with criminal histories are actively looking for a job but cannot find employment. That’s higher than the unemployment peak rate during the great depression. Unemployment is a huge risk factor to returning to prison.”

Governor Pols Supports Fair Chance Hiring

October 2019
Governor Jared Polis lead a group of 15 Denver-area executives to Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility. His mission was to introduce business leaders to Colorado’s largest untapped talent pool building on the momentum created by the recently passed “Ban the Box” legislation.

LVCF Celebrates Inaugural Graduation

November 2019
On November 14, 2019, twenty-six women pitched their businesses, put on shiny blue caps and gowns, and walked across the “stage” at LaVista Correctional Facility to receive their certificate of completion from Colorado State University. When reflecting on the day Alexis, who placed in the top 5 of the business pitch competition, said “Someone finally sees the potential in us. Somebody sees that we aren’t just this number, that we are not these cast outs. Somebody finally sees that we can make something out of our lives.”

Inspiring Entrepreneurs Everywhere

2019 - Present
Mentor Krissy Ostermiller opened up about how working with Defy EITs inspired her to start her own small business “I would say that [mentoring with Defy] inspired me to start my own business - which I did last Saturday. And I was planning to start my business long before I ever got involved with Defy but by going into the different prisons and coaching people on how they can start their own business I was like “hell, why can’t I do this myself.” So it inspired me to be a better businesswoman myself.”

Inaugural Defy Colorado Community Night

January 2020
We launched our monthly in-person Community Nights hosted at Galvanize. This was the first time our released EITs had the opportunity to join together in the community. Every facility we operate in was represented at our February Community Night, EITs from LaVista Correctional Facility, Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility, and Colorado State Penitentiary were able to meet each other for the first time. EITs were able to reconnect with mentors they met inside and mentors were able to see EITs as free members of our community.

Peer Facilitators Sustain Defy’s Positive Culture in our Second Cohorts

2019 - Present
With the initiation of Defy Colorado’s second cohorts the first Peer Facilitators (PFs) were chosen. Both at CSP and AVCF, PFs were picked to help guide the new cohorts alongside staff facilitators. With the support of PFs, EITs were able to get help throughout the week between class sessions. The prouverbial torch has been passed on from the first cohort to the second through the assistance of our PFs, continuing to grow the Defy Colorado spirit.

Entrepreneurs-In-Training Inside Give Back

2019 - Present
Graduate Al Williams recently started Humanity Aligned Responding Together (HART), a social give back initiative at Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility. He manages a group of peers who create and donate unique Emoji style backpacks to underprivileged school children. The backpacks were delivered to the kiddos on the first day of school. As a graduate of AVCF’s first cohort and an active alumnus, Al continues to build upon his experience with Defy Colorado and bring a positive influence to those around him.

2019 in Review

Jason Mendelson & Stacey Putka on KGNU

January 2020
KGNU’s “Positive People” hosted an intimate interview with Jason and Stacey diving deep into topics ranging from how growing up in subsidised housing in Detroit fuels Jason’s passion for supporting entrepreneurs inside prisons to inspirational stories about our currently incarcerated Entrepreneurs-in-Training. “Positive People” shared deep insight into the organization with the Boulder, CO community. For the full interview visit our website!
Impact
Defy Ventures Colorado’s mission is to transform the lives of people with criminal histories and community members through collaboration along the entrepreneurial and employment journey. From inception, we have believed that Defy CO should be more than an entrepreneurial education program. It should be a catalyst to create redemptive communities. So we have designed all of our programs, from in-prison to the community, to ensure the maximum connection between mentors, EITs, alumni, family members, and the Department of Corrections.

In-prison Programming
Through our 8-month CEO of Your New Life Program our mentors made over 600 trips to prison dedicating over 2,000 direct service hours. Not only did our EITs get valuable feedback on key program deliverables such as resumes, cover letters, and business plans they received a valuable sense of community and connection. Our EITs aren’t the only beneficiaries of this redemptive community, our mentors feel the impact of learning our EITs’ stories and their decision to turn their lives around.

In-community Programming
We believe that our program graduates deserve to feel that they belong in our communities. In order to welcome our EITs back to the community, upon release they meet one-on-one with a Defy Staff member they worked with inside the prison to activate their re-entry plan. First step? Get a job. We work with them to translate their written resumes to typed resumes. Their resumes are then sent to our community partners based on their employment interests. This is just the beginning.

Alumni Programming
To ensure our program graduates who are still incarcerated continue to have opportunities for education and personal transformation we partner with community members to provide new content. Mentors from organizations such as The University of Colorado, the Young Presidents’ Organization, One Last Talk and Checkr have joined us in prison to help our graduates continue to refine their business ideas and their interviewing skills.
2019 Operating Revenue

- Foundations $151,050.00 46.98%
- Corporate Gifts $123,931.09 38.55%
- Individual Donors $29,160.00 9.07%
- Special Events $17,250.00 5.37%
- Earned Income $104.79 0.03%
Total $321,495.88 100%

2019 Total Expenses

- Programs & Services $267,604.24 73%
- Administrative $50,249.38 14%
- Fundraising $48,875.31 13%
Total $366,728.92 100%

Statistics

Donors
- Individual Donors 84
- Donating Foundations 17
- Business Donors 4

Entrepreneurs-in-Training (EITs)
- Graduates
  - AVCF: 33
  - CSP: 17
  - LVCF: 26
- Retention
  - AVCF: 97% (C2)
  - CSP: 94% (C2)
  - LVCF: 90% (C1)
- Alumni
  - AVCF: 97
  - CSP: 33
  - LVCF: 26

Peer Facilitators (PFs)
- Peer Facilitators
  - AVCF: 9
  - CSP: 8
  - LVCF: -
- Facilitator Applications
  - AVCF: 17
  - CSP: 13
  - LVCF: 7

Mentors
-Individual Mentors 314
-Classroom Hours 458
-Mentor Visits 513
-Event Hours 3,960
-Most Visits
  - Sherri Law
-Mentors Visiting All Three Facilities
  - Jason Berv
  - Danielle Dehelter-Buckley
  - Tyrone Glover
  - Kayla Golay
  - Jeff Kinsey
  - Jenn Mendelson
  - Kelli Myrick
  - Jeremy Putka
  - Matt Tinucci
  - Jenna Romano
  - Mary Wolf
  - Tom Wyman
-Most Visits
  - Kelsey Nowakowski
-Longest Trip
  - Tyrone Glover
  - Kayla Golay
  - Matt Tinucci
  - Jeff Kinsey
  - Jenn Mendelson
  - Kelli Myrick
  - Jeremy Putka
  - Jenna Romano
  - Mary Wolf
  - Tom Wyman
-Most Visits
  - Kelsey Nowakowski
-Longest Trip
  - Tyrone Glover
  - Kayla Golay
  - Matt Tinucci
  - Jeff Kinsey
  - Jenn Mendelson
  - Kelli Myrick
  - Jeremy Putka
  - Jenna Romano
  - Mary Wolf
  - Tom Wyman
In light of COVID-19, we have had to drastically pivot our program delivery. These changes have allowed us to make large strides in the post-release program with our re-entry backpacks. We don’t plan to stop there. This year will be filled with growth for Defy Colorado. Our goals for 2020 are audacious. Every year, we make our organization better than the year before. This year we have four major goals: support, advocate, create, and build.

**Support.**
We have always welcomed home our EITs with an individually created re-entry plan and support services. As we rapidly approach welcoming home a total of 30 EITs, this is where we will grow our organization next in order to provide high-quality support to our expanding community of returning EITs.

**Advocate.**
We are going to focus much of our energy in 2020 on being a leader in criminal justice reform. Our incredible EITs put us in a position to be very good at this. Having taken responsibility for their mistakes, they are ready to share their experiences of injustice and ideas for reform. Their thought leadership will be shared and we will link arm in arm with them as we work to dismantle the systemic problems that have oppressed them and 2.2 million currently incarcerated individuals.

**Create.**
We are already very good at equipping our EITs with the skills and tools to succeed and to strive toward economic independence. This year we plan to create opportunities for them in the community by educating more businesses on the practices of Fair Opportunity Employment. In 2020 we will create a program that will teach businesses best practices of Fair Opportunity Employers. We expect to launch this program in the fall.

**Build.**
We are building high quality programming in conjunction with our community partners. Our Program Director, Izzy Heep, is working with several partners to build post-release programming focusing on re-entry and entrepreneurship. We will also continue to build our community. No one person or organization can create the kind of systemic change our state needs in order to break our cycle of mass incarceration. But our community can. Will you join us?
Connect with Defy Colorado.
Help Us Defy the Odds.

facebook.com/DefyColorado/

instagram.com/defycolorado/

@DefyColorado

linkedin.com/company/defy-ventures-colorado/

YouTube search: “Defy Ventures Colorado”

For more information, email us at info@defycolorado.org or visit us at: defycolorado.org