

Strengthening the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem to Enhance Community Vitality

The Situation

K-State Research & Extension is partnering with NetWork Kansas to strengthen local entrepreneurial ecosystems. Because 65% of all new jobs come from small business, working with NetWork Kansas helps Extension have significant impact. The partnership furthers NetWork Kansas' mission to connect entrepreneurs with expertise, education and economic resources and accomplish Extension's mission to enhance community vitality.

What We Did

Extension educators are involved in youth efforts like the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge (YEC) and 4-H Projects to Profits. Others are active in local E-Communities (entrepreneurial) providing loans for business purchases, startups and expansions. Funding to E-Communities can be used to offer educational programs such as Ice House, send business owners to marketing training and fund regional YEC competitions.

Outcomes

For Riley County youth Bridget Stanton, participating in the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge has helped her establish a promising business, Bridge Digital Marketing. She uses social media and graphic design services to create cost-effective marketing strategies for small businesses. Stanton earned a second consecutive win in the county competition of the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge and placed twice in the state competition. She used last year's winnings of \$4,000 to buy a laptop with graphic design software. In her first year, she took on 11 clients and had \$7,100 in gross earnings. "I think it's important for everyone to know if you have a dream, you can work for it and you can make it come true," says Stanton.



In addition to learning business and strategic planning skills, the youth involved in the YEC are gaining problem solving, public speaking and other interpersonal skills that will serve them well throughout life. As Stanton heads to college this fall, she is taking her business with her and will have an excellent source of income while in college.

E-Communities in Douglas and Shawnee Counties have extension representation on the Leadership Teams. The Douglas County E-Community to date has loaned \$229,109.47 to 10 startup or expanding entrepreneurs.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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Douglas County sponsored their first YEC competition this year and had 9 teams of high school youth compete for four cash prizes totaling \$3,500. Fifteen businesses/agencies partnered to make the YEC effort a success.

Shawnee County became an E-Community in 2017. In their first year they made three loans, all to minority business owners. Essentia Salon created 8 full-time and 2 part-time jobs; Pizzeria Via created 3 full-time and 15 part-time jobs; and North Topeka Apartments created 2 full-time and 4 part-time jobs.

Success Story

Shawnee StartUps partnered with local lenders and Y'Sondra Dixon to make her dream of opening her own salon come true. Essentia Salon opened their doors to nearly 550 clients in their first three months of operation. Dixon reports she enjoys the freedom of making her own business decisions and providing her customers with quality service.

Shawnee StartUps sent six businesses to Destination Bootcamp, an intensive marketing workshop with expert Jon Schallert. One participant already reports a 30% increase in sales and attributes much of that to what was learned and implemented because of that opportunity.

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