Final Action Plan Progress Report

As a participant in Brown University’s Social Entrepreneurship Leadership Program, I created an action plan to help alleviate homelessness. My plan involved buying $1 homes in Chicago and hiring the homeless to help renovate the structures, creating an environment that reduces poverty and restores neighborhoods.

As a high school student with limited resources and time, I learned that executing my original plan successfully would be too challenging. I was accepted to participate in the Rhodes Fellowship Course in Social Entrepreneurship at Northfield Mount Hermon School. The experience afforded me the opportunity to start a social operation with support from the school. As part of the course, I spent time visiting social enterprises and studying areas of need. It was my exposure to a Food Bank that triggered my decision to shift my energy to a different concern and interest – food insecurity. I am troubled that a country as rich as the United States, has a need for Food Banks. Rather than creating policies that address the root of poverty such as low minimum wage and income, Food Banks exist as a band aid to feed the hungry. Food insecurity is not a result of lack of food, rather, its distribution.

Northfield Mount Hermon School classmates, Tayhee Lee and Sebastian Shin, and I decided to tackle this issue by creating Fresh Connect, an enterprise that uses the food from my school’s farm and delivers it to low-income families at a reduced rate than they would find at their local grocers. Fresh Connect subsidizes the cost of the lower income families by selling and delivering food to higher income families.

Fresh Connect will run a pilot phase in mid-September 2018, with five customers from the two sides. There is an agreement with the school that allows my team to use their vans in order to deliver to the customers at no cost for the length of the pilot phase. Produce pricing was
established by reaching out to a local farm, Piccadilly Farm, to compare their wholesale pricing to that of an organic upscale grocery store. Our targeted demographic for the higher local families are those who are already used to shopping at a grocery store that sells organic food at a higher price. Fresh Connect is still in the process of finalizing our customer base for the pilot phase. Fortunately, a leader in the local community has volunteered to help connect our program to low-income customers.

Going forward, following the pilot phase, we hope to grow our customer base and eventually broaden the reach beyond working with the school, allowing the enterprise to support local farms. Fresh Connect’s main goal is to create a cycle where all parties benefit. Fresh Connect allows low-income families to have organic produce delivered straight to their door at a lower cost than found at most organic grocery stores. In addition, the families can pay for their groceries on a weekly or biweekly basis, which would give them more financial security and ability (compared to other programs that uses large upfront payments or subscription-based billing). In addition, local families do not have to leave their homes for fresh fruits and vegetables, with the added benefit of supporting local farms and alleviating food insecurity in the community. Local farmers have guaranteed business from Fresh Connect and they are also helping make fresh food more accessible to the local community. Fresh Connect creates a system that fosters economic accessibility and equality.

Collaborating with classmates on the project has been beneficial as the workload has been split, allowing each of us to have our designated focus. Each of us bring different aspects to the table. Tayhee is creative and is able to come up with solutions to problems that are posed and contacts the people needed. Sebastian does well with the math portion of the business, and I write most of the documents and map everything out.
The main issue that we face with this enterprise is creating the client base. It has taken us over five months to get a handful of people to say they may participate in the pilot phase. We have found that people are reluctant to invest in an idea that is new with young inexperienced people spearheading the business. Despite the challenges, we have been persistently publicizing our venture, which has gained us a few customers. My determination to make the project a success, stems from the fact that I am passionate about this issue, especially since I go to school in Franklin County, an area that includes Springfield, the poorest city in MA, and Greenfield, a city rapidly declining due to a rise in opioid consumption.

Through creating this Action Plan, I have discovered my purpose and learned how to live up to it. The setbacks have made me more determined and creative. Working with a team has given me a chance to be a leader. As a relatively introverted person, I have gained the confidence to connect with an audience as I help pitch Fresh Connect and I have found my voice working with my peers as I implement the enterprise. My participation in Northfield Mount Hermon School’s Fellowship Course in Social Entrepreneurship and Brown University’s Leadership Institute has allowed me to develop leadership skills. The Leadership Institute sparked my interest in targeting a disadvantaged population and identifying an opportunity to level the equilibrium. Through classroom presentations and workshops, the Institute allowed me to gain greater confidence in public speaking and gave me the tools to write an Action Plan, which inspired and helped me create Fresh Connect.

My advice to new Leadership Institute students as they think about developing and working on their own action plans is to center their focus on an issue that they are passionate about, rather than the feasibility of the project. While my own Action Plan proved to be too challenging to execute at the time, the process of tapping into what matters most to me socially,
developing an idea from the ground up to create change, and constructing a blueprint for implementation, was an immeasurable experience. I would not be part of Fresh Connect had it not been for the Brown Leadership Institute.