



## NEWS RELEASE

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## Hack & Hustle Tech + Social Entrepreneurship Academy concludes Two-Week Pilot Run (July 10 - 21) at the UNC Charlotte PORTAL Building

The Hack & Hustle Social Entrepreneurship Academy concluded its two-week pilot run of the STEM workforce development & mentorship program targeting 16-24 year olds. Through an equal partnership between Jecha Networks, Informative Technologies, and Hip Hop University, underserved youth were exposed to hands-on technology training, entrepreneurship, soft skills, and mental wellness practices. The pilot was hosted at UNC Charlotte in the PORTAL Building (9319 Robert D Snyder Rd.) on the scenic, start-up focused side of campus.

Informative Technologies' interns opted to join the workforce development program from July 10th - 21st and become Hack & Hustle Academy scholars. The six academy participants filtered in from the Charlotte Works supported programs, MeckEd and Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) Pathways to Careers. There was also a participant from the YMCA supported Y Achievers program. These scholars took on a curriculum and tasks focused on eWaste refurbishment, software programming, solar energy technology, and social entrepreneurial business plan development.

Week one of Hack & Hustle Academy focused on helping scholars find their technology career *Hack*. Week two helped scholars hone in on their entrepreneurial skills *Hustle*. "The Hack & Hustle Social Entrepreneurship Academy was created to enhance traditional mentoring by

integrating technology and entrepreneurial skills development, life lessons from Hip Hop culture, and mental wellness through meditation, into a single program. Although traditional mentoring is very important, scholars should be able to learn in-demand skills they can continue to pursue. As our scholars progressed through the program, their eyes were open to new potential alternatives such as e-waste recycling, software programming, solar energy, and how they can start their own businesses. The scholars participated in an entrepreneurial challenge, where they formed two “startup teams” and developed innovative product ideas which they pitched to the audience,” said Mahdi Chambers, founder and president of Jecha Networks.

During week one, our Hack Facilitators exposed H&H Scholars to daily tasks and projects expected of professionals in hardware repair, IT support, and software programming. “Like all of Informative’s interns, their first two days ensured that everyone was able to rebuild donated laptops into modern workstations, and ultimately gain the skills to use open source software to explore their creative potential throughout the rest of the program.” said James Walker, CEO of Informative Technologies.

Gurtej Singh, Technology Director of Hip Hop University, brought scholars into the world of software development with customized, Hip Hop-influenced programming projects. “While creating the software programming curriculum, I had decided early on that I wanted the lessons to be both as attention-grabbing and as accessible as possible to our audience of young scholars, so that they could more easily retain the skills taught to them. This couldn’t be just another dry lecture on programming language syntax or a walkthrough of a PowerPoint slide deck on data structures. We wanted to inspire our scholars, ignite the passion in their minds to take these tools given to them in the form of programming skills and build something fun, interesting, and useful with it. And so with this in mind, we started off by walking through the basics of the ever-versatile Python programming language and then together we built technical projects using examples born out of Hip Hop culture. We used prominent rappers and producers like Kendrick Lamar and Metro Boomin as variables and inputs into functions that did string manipulation. We built a basic rhyme dictionary using text input that scholars provided from the command line. And finally, utilizing the prominent legacy of the Roland TR-808 Drum Machine and its use in Hip Hop music for over 30 years, we built our own 808 sampler from the ground-up by coding a program in which users would tap keys on their computer keyboards that triggered associated 808 drum sounds to play from their speakers. I personally saw the light bulb going off in each scholar’s mind when they first heard and felt their own programs working in real time. It was an important step in empowering the scholars to realize they could build something real using technology, determination, and their own skills.”

Week two was led by Chambers and was all about the entrepreneurial *Hustle*. Chambers took H&H scholars through the steps of developing a sound mission-driven business plan based on specific customer needs. Scholars learned about the science behind solar technology by building a solar kit. Chambers then took the scholars through a real-world case study of the Kenya-based solar power startup company, M-KOPA Solar.

Week two concluded with H&H Scholars creating pitches for their own social entrepreneurship ventures. Two “startup” teams were formed between the scholars. “Team Future Innovations” focused on using advanced technology to reduce handbag and luggage theft while taking on a benefit corporation business model. Each secure bag sold would donate 10% of its proceeds to the Future Innovation Foundation. The foundation would be focused on providing scholarships and grants to low-income students and Title 1 schools in the Charlotte community. “Team Hustlenomics” took on the challenge of creating access to banking and financial literacy for the unbanked through a money card concept without a minimum age limit, all paired with online

financial literacy learning. The competition was stiff between the two teams, but all the scholars walked away with a prize thanks to Charlotte Works. Sincere thanks to Charlotte Works for making sure that the H&H Scholars had everything they required to fully participate in the program. Beyond the Social Entrepreneurship Pitch Challenge prize money, Charlotte Works also covered other expenses for MeckEd and CPCC students facing specific financial obstacles, such as parking and transportation to and from the UNCC Portal Building. Charlotte Works and the Hack & Hustle Leadership team have developed an excellent partnership.

Throughout week one and week two, the intersect of *the Hack*, *the Hustle*, and *the Social Entrepreneurship Mindset* was showcased during each morning session and at the very end of the Hack & Hustle Academy work day. To help Hack & Hustle scholars move into a more socially-focused business mindset, the daily morning session was devoted to mentorship through Hip Hop Culture and 10 minutes of mindful meditation. The day concluded with the presentation of under-celebrated innovators of color that contributed much to society and the technology industry with their innovations.

Kia O. Moore, Creative Director of Hip Hop University, headed the Hip Hop Mentorship portion of the curriculum while Chambers took on the guided meditation and *Inventor of the Day* responsibilities. “The goal was to find interesting ways to help scholars relate their hands-on technology training and entrepreneurship coursework to Hip Hop culture,” said Moore. By pulling in Hip Hop culture and celebrating the innovative accomplishments of people that looked like the scholars, Moore and Chambers were able to introduce necessary dialogues related to the tech startup industry. Moore explained, “Hip Hop is a culture built on resourceful innovation and entrepreneurial drive. Using the icons and language connected to Hip Hop culture allowed me to introduce concepts like the triple bottom line, corporate social responsibility, work-life balance, fiat currency and more to H&H scholars.” She continued, “The Hip Hop topics allowed the leadership team to transition into deeper conversations about technology, society, and the importance of keeping social responsibility in focus in all their future tech developments and future business decisions.”

## Effectiveness of the Program

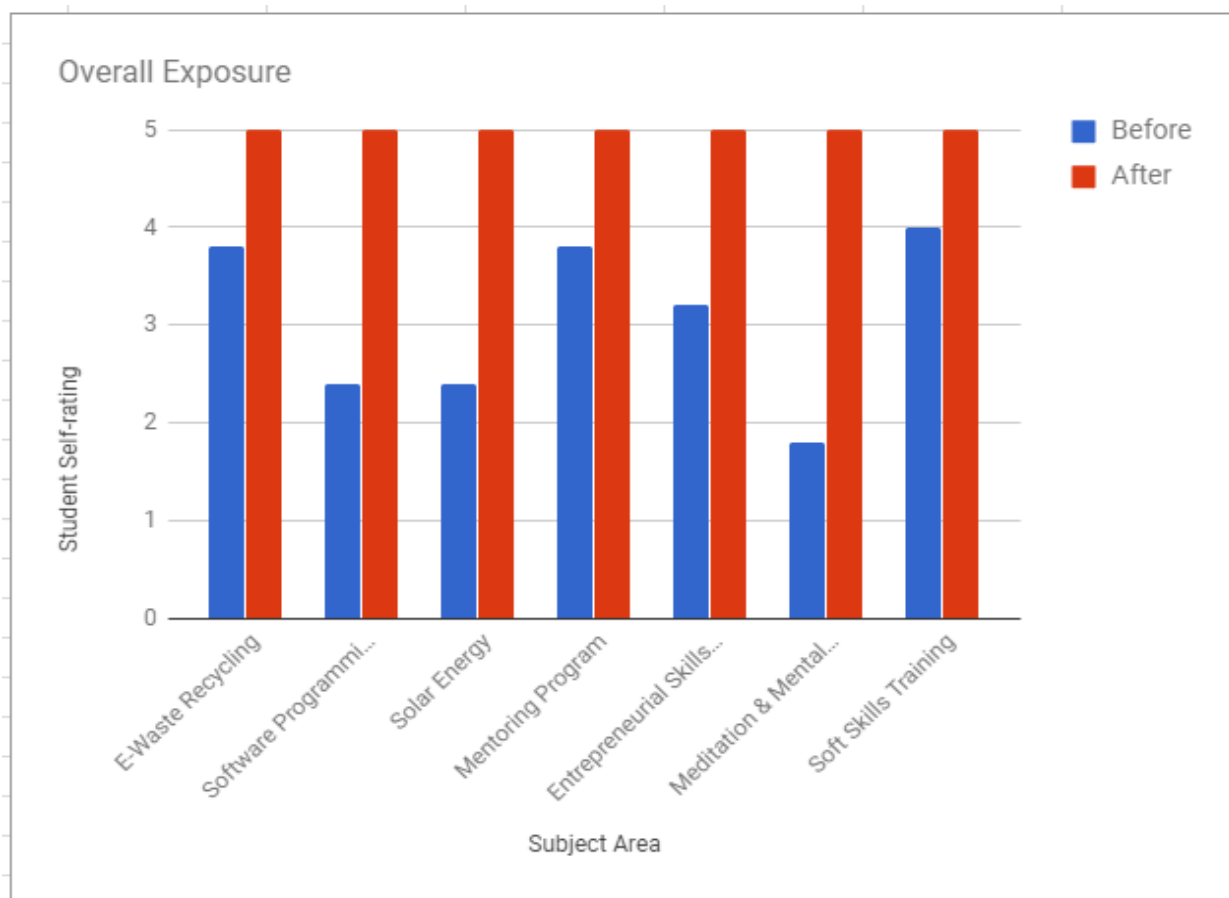
In order to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the H&H Pilot program, a survey was provided to the scholars on the first day of the session. The objective of the survey was to understand how many scholars had some prior exposure to the various topics that would be covered during the program.

The following areas were included:

1. I have a good understanding of how to refurbish older computers (**E-waste recycling**) to make them work like new.
2. I have done **software programming** before. If so, please indicate programming language(s) used.
3. I have learned about **solar energy** before.
4. I have been involved with **mentoring programs** (currently or in the past). If so, which program(s).
5. I have been exposed to **entrepreneurial skills** training before.
6. I have done **meditation and mental wellness** training before.
7. I have had **soft skills** training previously (presentation skills, communication skills, etc.)

The same survey was completed at the end of the program. In addition, video interviews were recorded to capture the perspective of the scholars on how they viewed the program and how much they learned. The comparison of “before and after” reveal that the scholars gained a significant amount of exposure in most of the areas. We realize that the results are based on a small sample size, but the enthusiastic response to the program by the H&H scholars is very important to note. Some of the scholars were already working with Informative Technologies, Inc. refurbishing computers while some were new to the H&H program. Those scholars that were already working with Informative Technologies had already developed some expertise with recycling e-waste.

The chart illustrates the overall average increase in exposure of the scholars.



Every area revealed an increase in exposure and important skills learned. The most significant gains were experienced in software programming, solar energy, entrepreneurship, and meditation/mental wellness.

#### Conclusion

The Hack & Hustle Social Entrepreneurship Academy pilot program was a major success based on direct feedback from each scholar, information collected on the level of exposure to new technologies and entrepreneurial skills, video testimonials, and overall growth of the scholars observed by the Hack & Hustle leadership team.

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